A close-up, black and white photograph of a young girl with dark, curly hair, smiling warmly at the camera. She is wearing a light-colored, textured top with a lace collar and a small floral embroidery on the chest. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light color.

**Assets, Gaps,
and a Way Forward:
A Report on Early
Childhood Care
and Education
in Joliet**





This report was completed by IFF's Building Blocks program. IFF created Building Blocks with support from the Grand Victoria Foundation (GVF) to build the capacity of high-need communities throughout Illinois to meet their child care and early education needs. Working with community stakeholders, Building Blocks helps communities plan to address underlying gaps in the child care and early education service delivery system. Projects underway are building community networks, adding bricks and mortar capacity, and helping bring needed state-funded programs, including Preschool for All, to the areas where they are needed most.

About IFF

IFF is a nonprofit community development financial institution that assists nonprofits serving disadvantaged communities with real estate planning, development, and finance. Real estate consulting and project management services help nonprofits evaluate their space needs as well as plan and implement facility projects. IFF provides below-market-rate financing for real estate acquisition, facility construction or renovation, equipment, vehicles, and facility repairs. Additionally, IFF conducts research and evaluation for and about the nonprofit sector.

Introduction

Throughout the state and nation, community leaders increasingly recognize the importance of early care and education to both individual and community growth and development. Many states, among which Illinois is considered a leader, have enacted legislation to promote early education and ensure that young children are prepared for success in Kindergarten and beyond. In order to keep pace with the rest of the state, local communities need to establish a strong infrastructure of community providers that deliver and support early education programs and a plan to accommodate future growth. The purpose of this report is to outline a set of strategies for improving and growing local early care and education capacity developed by local leaders in Joliet.

Overview of Joliet

The City of Joliet was settled in the 1830s and emerged as an important industrial and commercial center in the latter half of the 19th Century. Located along the Des Plaines River, the city was home to quarries, steel mills, and many other industries that thrived through the first half of the 20th century. In the late 1970s, Joliet entered a period of economic decline as manufacturing plants closed across the Midwest. The economy rebounded in the 1990s and today Joliet is a robust city with a revitalized downtown and a diverse employment base.

Since the late 1990s, Joliet has been growing rapidly, increasing its total population by nearly one-third from approximately 139,000 in 2000 to over 183,000 in 2007. Much of this growth occurred on the western edge of the Joliet area, although central Joliet's population grew by more than eight percent over this period. The population of children under age six increased at a faster rate than the population as a whole, growing by 41 percent. In 2007, children under age six represented more than 11 percent of total population in Joliet. Both total population and the population of children under age six are projected to increase through 2012, with the growth in children under age six outpacing growth in the total population throughout Joliet.

As with most communities in northern Illinois, Joliet has experienced significant growth in its Latino population. By 2007, the Latino population represented more than 19 percent of the Joliet area's total population and more than 28 percent of the population of central Joliet. African-Americans comprise nearly 17 percent of the area's total population and 26 percent of the population of central Joliet.

The estimated median family income in the Joliet area in 2007 was \$52,765, which is about 16 percent lower than the statewide median. In central Joliet, the estimated median family income was only \$44,960. At least one-third of children under age six in central Joliet are in low-income families.¹ The Joliet Public Schools District 86, which serves this area, reports that over 70 percent of its students are low-income.

¹ Census 2000, 2007 ESRI Population Estimates, 2012 ESRI Population Projections.

Importance of Early Education and Care for the Area's Economy

In the City of Joliet, 63 percent of children under age six are in families where either their single parent or both parents are in the labor force.² Quality, affordable child care is essential to maintaining workforce participation and it is an important need for these families. Without access to dependable child care, many parents drop out of the workforce. Indeed, research shows that child care problems are a significant cause of employee turnover and absenteeism, with as many as one-quarter of all unscheduled absences by employees resulting from family issues such as child care problems.³ Child care is also an important support for parents who want to pursue further education to advance their careers. College students with children who have convenient access to child care have higher graduation rates and grade point averages than those without such services.⁴

As will be discussed later in this report, most working families in the Joliet area are not able to access quality, stable, and affordable care for their children. This is potentially problematic not only for the strength of the current workforce, but also for the long-term development of the local economy and workforce that will rely on the children currently being raised in Joliet. Decades of research have shown that high quality early care and education prepares children to succeed in school, and can help prevent such longer term negative outcomes as juvenile delinquency, early school drop out, and teen pregnancy.⁵ Economic analyses have shown that investments in early childhood care and education are among the best human capital investments a community can make, producing an annual rate of return of as high as 12 percent.⁶

Joliet, like most communities in Illinois, is working hard to attract new industries and high-paying jobs. The quality and reliability of the workforce are key factors in companies' decisions about where to locate their facilities. High quality early childhood care and education pays off immediately by ensuring parents are able to work, and in the long term by preparing children to succeed in school and ultimately in the workplace.

² 2006 American Community Survey.

³ Harris Interactive. *The 2002 CCH Unscheduled Absence Survey*. Riverwoods, IL: CCH, 2003 as cited in Action for Children, Chicago Metropolitan 2020 and the Illinois Facilities Fund, *The Economic Impact of the Early Care and Education Industry in Illinois*, 2005.

⁴ *Impact of Campus-based Child Care on Academic Success: Student Parents at SUNY Community Colleges*, 1994, as cited in Action for Children, Chicago Metropolitan 2020 and the Illinois

Facilities Fund, *The Economic Impact of the Early Care and Education Industry in Illinois*, 2005.

⁵ National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (2000). From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development. Committee on Integrating the Science of Early Childhood Development. Jack P. Shonkoff and Deborah A. Phillips, eds. Board on Children, Youth, Families, Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.

⁶ Art Rolnick and Rob Grunewald, "Early Childhood Development: Economic Development with a High Public Return," *fedgazette* (March 2003), pp 6-12, cited in Committee for Economic Development (2006), *The Economic Promise of Investing in High-Quality Preschool: Using Early Education to Improve Economic Growth and the Fiscal Sustainability of States and the Nation*, Washington, D.C.: Committee for Economic Development.

Joliet Building Blocks Initiative

Through its statewide needs assessment, IFF identified Joliet as an area in which additional early learning services are needed. In early 2008, IFF began a collaboration with The Spanish Center and Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) to bring the Early Learning Planning Initiative to Joliet.

In April 2008, a community Task Force formed, including representatives from the local school districts, Head Start, local child care and preschool providers, social service providers, and CCR&R.

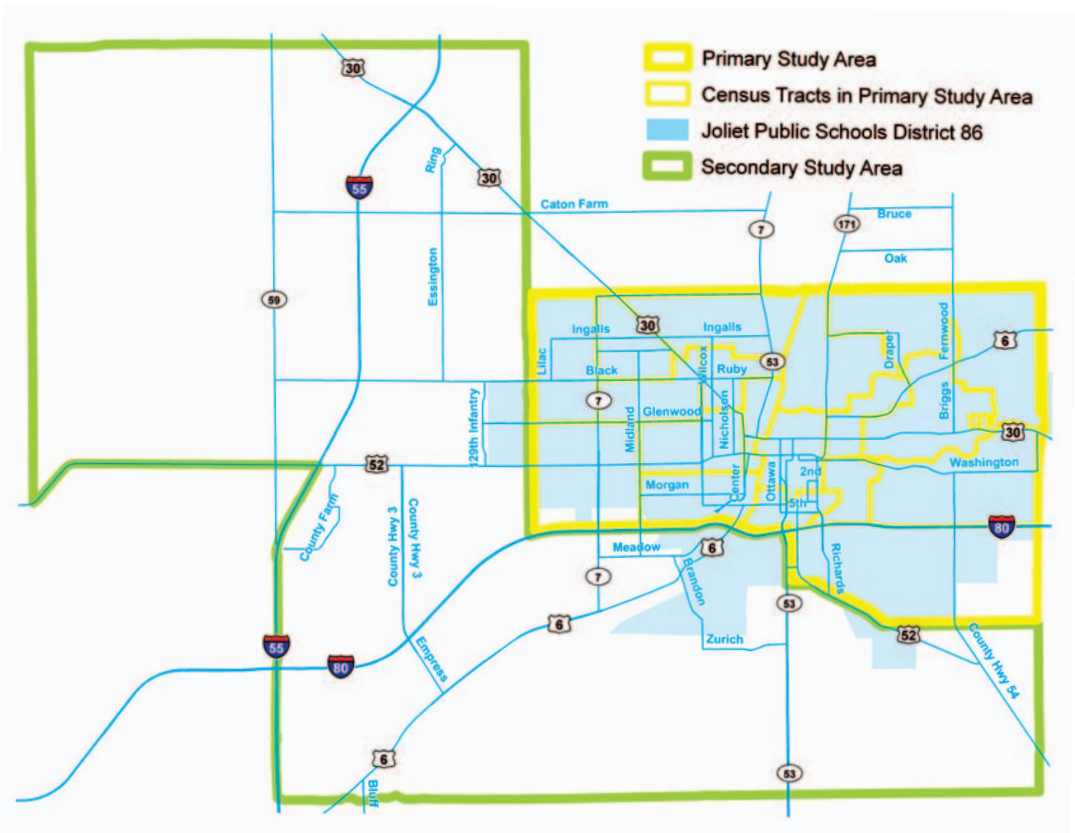
IFF provided the Task Force with demographic data regarding the children in the community, including estimates of the number of children who need full-day, full-year child care and other early learning services. The Task Force analyzed these data and verified that they confirmed their knowledge and experience. Using information provided by CCR&R, IFF identified and surveyed early care and education providers to confirm the total number of children they can accommodate and the number of children currently enrolled in their programs. This information was mapped to provide the graphic presentation of the current need for and supply of early childhood care and education in the community.

The Task Force identified key community needs and developed a set of possible strategies for addressing them. This report represents the recommendations of the Task Force for continued capacity-building for early childhood services in Joliet.

Early Childhood Care and Education Assets and Gaps in Joliet

While the rapid growth in population means that there are important early childhood care and education needs throughout Joliet, the Task Force members agreed that Central Joliet remains the area with the most critical need. For the purposes of this report, central Joliet is designated as the primary study area and defined by the 18 census tracts that roughly approximate the Joliet Public Schools District 86 (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Joliet Study Areas



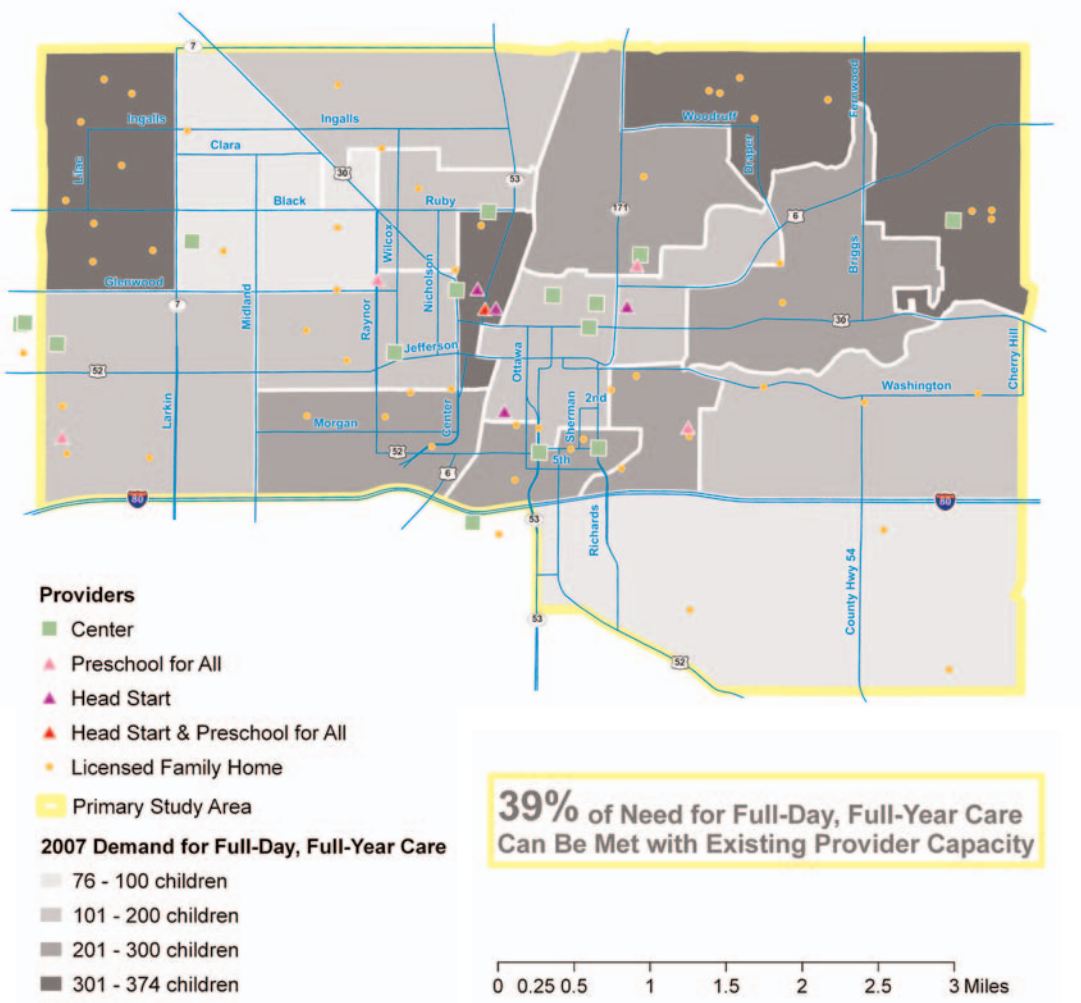
Child Care Needs and Services

Approximately 20,340 children ages birth through five live in the Joliet area, including 10,410 children under three and 9,930 children ages three through five. Just over one-third of these children need full-day, full-year child care because their parents work or attend school and do not have a relative or friend available to provide care. Approximately 8,890 children ages birth through five live in the primary study area of central Joliet, including 4,630 children under three and 4,260 children ages three through five. Compared to the city as a whole, a higher percentage of children in central Joliet (38.5 percent) need full-day, full-year child care.⁷

⁷ Census 2000, 2007 ESRI Population Estimates.

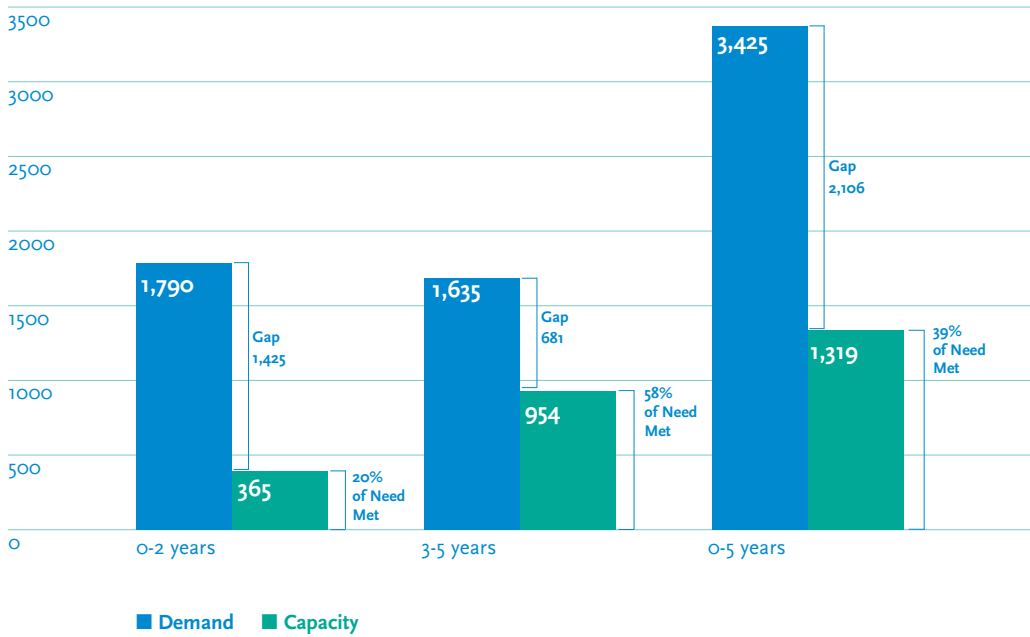
There are 12 child care centers and 56 licensed family child care homes in the central Joliet area. Together, these providers can serve approximately 365 children under age three and 954 children ages three to five. This represents only 39 percent of the total estimated need for full-day, full-year child care in central Joliet (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Child Care Supply and Demand in Central Joliet



Though the majority of children ages birth through five cannot be served with existing capacity, the shortage of services is particularly acute for children under age three. Existing providers can meet only 20 percent of the need for full-day, full-year care for children ages birth through two, while they can meet 58 percent of the need for children ages three through five (Figure 3). There is a need for substantially more child care services that are affordable and accessible for families in the community.

Figure 3: Estimated 2007 Demand and Current Capacity for Full-Day Care in Central Joliet



Despite this severe shortage of services, most child care providers in central Joliet report having openings in their programs, particularly for children ages three through five. While there are many families who need care, cost remains a significant barrier.

Approximately 2,180 children from birth through five in the Joliet area need full-day, full-year care that can be obtained using the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), Illinois’s subsidy program for low-income families.⁸ Children in central Joliet are more likely to be in low-income families, with an estimated 49 percent of the children who need full-day child care eligible for subsidy.⁹

CCAP requires parents to pay a co-payment that can exceed 10 percent of the family’s income. Centers frequently charge parents an additional \$20 per week or more because the state reimbursement rates are significantly lower than market rates for care. Providers note that families are eager to enroll in no-cost services, but are more reluctant to enroll in programs with significant co-payments or fees.

Members of the Task Force confirmed that families in Joliet often have difficulty finding affordable full-day, full-year care, and that many parents rely on “patchwork care”—an ever-changing arrangement based on parents finding whoever is able to care for their children on a given day. This type of unstable care is far from ideal for very young children and leads to high stress and absenteeism for working parents. Part-day preschool programs report that they serve many families who struggle to patch together before- and after-preschool care, leading to children being dropped off and picked up by many different family members and friends. This kind of “patchwork care” creates a logistical burden for teachers who must ensure children’s safety by confirming that written parental permission has been provided for each person who picks up a child.

⁸ Ibid.
⁹ 2006 American Community Survey.

Other Early Learning Needs and Services

There are approximately 2,916 children in central Joliet who are age-eligible for Preschool for All, the Illinois free preschool program. More than half of these preschoolers—1,530 children—are from low-income families (those with incomes below 185 percent of the Federal Poverty Level) and considered at-risk for educational failure.¹⁰ State-funded preschool programs (including those operated by school districts and those integrated with full-day child care) can currently serve 560 children. Head Start, the federally-funded preschool program targeting families in poverty, can serve 574 children in the area. This leaves many young, at-risk children without the early learning services that could prepare them for success in school. Furthermore, the need for full-day care is often a barrier that keeps many at-risk families from enrolling their children in existing part-day, no-cost preschool programs, such as Head Start and Preschool for All.

Table 1: Joliet Early Childhood Snapshot

Gaps in Joliet's Child Care Supply:	Primary Study Area	Secondary Study Area	Joliet Area
Estimated Number of Children Needing Full-Time Care	3,425	3,469	6,894
Number of Children that can be Served by Existing Supply	1,319	1,525	2,844
Gap:	2,106	1,944	4,050
Service Level:	39%	44%	41%

¹⁰ 2007 ESRI Population Estimates, 2006 American Community Survey.

Key Issue:

Too Many Children Do Not Receive the High Quality Early Learning Services They Need

There is a significant shortage of early care and education services in central Joliet. The existing Head Start and Preschool for All programs in the community cannot serve all of the children who are at risk of school failure. Indeed, a large number of children entering Kindergarten have not had the kinds of early learning experiences that will prepare them to succeed in elementary school.

Barriers for Families

- **Need for full-day services:** Part-day providers noted that many families are unable to enroll their children because they need full-day care. Working families who do enroll their children in part-day programs often struggle to patch together before- and after-preschool care.
- **Cost:** Although all of the child care centers within the primary study area accept CCAP, the state child care subsidy program, many families struggle to afford the required co-payments for care. A Head Start provider reports that it is difficult to maintain full enrollment in its full-day program because of the required co-payment. In addition, many families earn just over the income limit for CCAP eligibility and are unable to afford the full cost of care, which can exceed \$20,000 per year for a family with two young children.
- **Awareness:** Many families do not understand the importance of stable, high-quality early childhood care and education, and are not aware of available services.
- **Lack of outreach and supportive services:** Providers other than Head Start do not have funding and staff for outreach and family support to engage families and keep them in the program.
- **Language and cultural issues:** Very few early childhood providers in central Joliet have enough bilingual staff to effectively serve the large and growing Latino population. Providers need help reaching out to the Latino community and developing models that serve Latino children and families effectively.
- **Transportation:** Most buses in Joliet stop running at 6 p.m., which is too early for parents to pick up their children from child care and get home in the evening.

Critical Infant-Toddler Needs

The Task Force noted that the need for expanded early learning opportunities is most critical for the youngest children in Joliet. There are very few child care services available for infants and toddlers and even fewer opportunities for parents to receive the kind of research-based coaching and support that leads to long-term positive outcomes for at-risk children.

Provider Challenges

- **Lack of qualified staff:** Providers report great difficulty in recruiting and retaining qualified staff for their programs. The shortage of qualified bilingual staff is particularly acute.
- **Budget constraints:** Providers report that they are unable to cover their costs with the reimbursement rate that the CCAP system pays. Few programs have multiple funding streams, such as combining CCAP reimbursement and Preschool for All funding, and most receive little or no philanthropic support.
- **Balancing family and program needs:** Child care providers, and in particular child care centers, find it difficult to meet families' needs for flexible schedules, part-week care, and school-year only care because their staff and other expenses are full-day, full-year.

Importance of Quality

The Task Force members agreed that ensuring high quality in all child care settings needs to be an important focus for the Joliet community. Regardless of whether children are cared for in centers, in licensed family child care homes, or by relatives and friends, it is important that they are in a safe, nurturing environment that promotes early learning.

Key Community Assets

The early childhood care and education community in Joliet has many strengths. These include:

- **Child Care Resource & Referral:** CCR&R is committed to working with providers and community members to strengthen early childhood care and education in Joliet. They have developed a number of innovative programs to raise home child care quality and to link home care to Preschool for All services.
- **School Districts:** Joliet Public Schools District 86 is committed to early education, and has a large Pre-K program. Joliet Township High School also recognizes the importance of early learning, and provides services for children of teen parents. The surrounding school districts also provide extensive preschool programming.
- **Head Start:** Catholic Charities-Diocese of Joliet has a large, high quality Head Start program that serves more than 75 percent of eligible children.
- **Family Child Care:** There are 148 licensed and approximately 450 legally license-exempt child care providers in Joliet that participate in the CCR&R and/or CCAP systems and there fore can be identified and targeted for training and enrichment opportunities.

Goals and Strategies

The Joliet Early Learning Planning Initiative Task Force identified three primary goals for strengthening the early education and care system in the community, as well as specific strategies for accomplishing each goal:

Increase the availability of full-day, quality early care and education, especially for infants and toddlers and for recent immigrant families

- “Get the word out” about the need for more early childhood care and education in Joliet by issuing a press release and distributing the Task Force Report.
- Talk with all child care providers in central Joliet (i.e., within Joliet Public Schools District 86) to determine whether they have available slots and whether they have room to expand their services or convert space to serve infants and toddlers.
- Identify organizations that may have space to develop child care programs, including school districts, YMCA, Salvation Army, hospitals, and churches.
- Develop models and partnerships to provide wrap-around care in school districts with Preschool for All. For example, explore the possibility of extending the day in the preschool room following the afternoon session using CCAP funding, or partner with a child care provider to provide wrap-around care in the school.
- Recruit additional family child care homes and encourage existing providers to become licensed. Expand family child care networks and link these with Preschool for All services for preschool-aged children.
- Ensure that any new programs created are culturally appropriate for those families most in need of services. This requires hiring bilingual staff, and working with the entire family when grandparents and other relatives are involved in caring for the child.

Ensure programs are adequately staffed

- Develop a coordinated system of teacher recruitment with centers working together to advertise their job openings, recruit at colleges, etc.
 - Hold a semi-annual job fair for child care providers.
 - Develop a web site (perhaps attached to CCR&R website) to list job openings for child care programs or centers.
- Establish a process for school districts to pass along the resumes of qualified Type 04-certified teachers whom they have not hired for community-based programs.
- Develop a proposal to create a cohort program for Type 04 certification and seek grant funding to implement.
- Work with local universities, including Governor’s State University, to establish a Type 04 certification program in Joliet.
- Collect and/or create a set of materials that providers can use to attract qualified applicants to Joliet.

Ensure that children in all types of care receive quality early learning experiences

- Expand outreach to license-exempt “Family, Friend and Neighbor” child care providers building upon the models developed by the CCR&R.
- Link family child care programs with Preschool for All and Head Start part-day programs.
- Help child care centers bring Preschool for All into their program. Explore non-traditional models, such as:
 - Expanding model where CCR&R acts as intermediary
 - School district subcontracting with child care centers
- Distribute information about early learning programs and the importance of quality early care and education. This should be coordinated with existing Back-to-School Fairs and Park District events.

Future Direction in Joliet

The community of Joliet has a strong group of committed early childhood professionals who are ready to work together to expand children's access to high quality early childhood education and care. The Task Force meetings marked the first time many of the providers had collaborated to specifically plan around early education and care. The severe shortage of early care and education services, especially full-day services and services for infants and toddlers, necessitates not only the continuing collaboration of existing providers but also coordination and planning with other community stakeholders to dramatically increase the early care and education capacity of Joliet.

The majority of children in Joliet that need full-day, full-year care cannot be served with the capacity of existing providers. Addressing this severe shortage, especially for infants and toddlers, will mean both working to reduce the barriers parents face and increasing the amount full-day capacity in Joliet.

The continued leadership of CCR&R and the Spanish Center will be crucial in sustaining and building upon the momentum developed in these Task Force meetings.

Methodology

This report analyzes the supply and demand for and geographical distribution of early childhood care and education resources in Joliet. Providing this picture requires the assessment of the overall need for full-day, full-year child care for all children regardless of income, as well as the need for publicly-funded early childhood care and education programs, including the subsidized child care program (CCAP) (both licensed and license-exempt), Head Start/Early Head Start, the Preschool for All programs, and state Pre-K programs.

IFF determined demand by combining updated 2007 population data and household income data acquired from ESRI with Census 2000 data on the work status of parents and other program-specific eligibility requirements.

- Full-day, full-year child care demand includes all children from birth through five in working families after removing a fraction to reflect families that work split shifts or have other family members care for their children based on estimates adapted from the Urban Institute's *National Child Care Survey*.
- Subsidized child care demand includes all children ages birth through five in working families with incomes at or below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) after removing a fraction to reflect families that work split shifts or have other family members care for their children.
- Head Start and Early Head Start demand include children ages birth through two and three through five, respectively, whose family income is at or below 100 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL).
- Preschool for All "at-risk" demand includes three- and four-year-olds living in families with incomes below 185 percent of the FPL. This estimate produces a quantifiable number of at-risk children based solely on income, but does not account for other determinants of eligibility. This income threshold is used because it is a familiar benchmark in other school aid programs such as Title I and school lunch; however, IFF recognizes that school districts may set other admissions guidelines at their discretion.
- Preschool for All demand includes all three- and four-year-olds, reflecting the broad goal of the program to provide preschool programming to all preschoolers.

"Supply," for the purposes of this report, means the number of spaces or slots in the different types of care or education settings available to the target population of children, including licensed child care centers, licensed family child care homes, and license-exempt child care centers (schools, colleges and governmental facilities).

Supply data were provided by Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) in February 2008. IFF surveyed area providers in April 2008 to update and expand upon the data provided.

Glossary

Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP)	Illinois Department of Human Services program that subsidizes child care for low-income working families. To be eligible, both (or the single) parent(s) must be working or attending school and the families' income must be below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level.
Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R)	Illinois Department of Human Services-funded system for providing child care referrals to parents and training to child care providers. Also the name of the agency that provides these services in the Joliet area.
DCFS	Illinois Department of Children and Family Services; state agency with primary mission of protecting children from abuse and neglect; responsible for licensing child care centers and family day care homes.
Early Childhood Block Grant	Mechanism for funding Preschool for All, Parental Training, and Prevention Initiative programs.
Early childhood care and education	For this report, early childhood care and education refers to the system of programs that support children's early learning needs and includes full-day, full-year child care programs, preschool programs, and Head Start.
Full-day, full-year child care	Child care that is available throughout normal business hours and is open all year long.
FPL	Federal Poverty Level
Head Start	US Department of Health and Human Services-funded program for children in poverty; provides education, health, nutrition and social services to eligible children ages three through kindergarten entry and their families. Early Head Start similarly provides services to children in poverty ages birth through three.
ISBE	Illinois State Board of Education
Licensed child care	Care provided by a center or home that has been licensed by DCFS.
License-exempt care	Care provided by a center or home that is legally exempt from DCFS licensure. License-exempt home providers are typically relatives or close family friends who care for no more than three children. License-exempt centers include those in schools.
Home child care provider	A child care provider who cares for children in a private home; licensed home child care providers follow the regulations of DCFS and may care for only a limited number of children.
Preschool for All	A state-funded program that provides free preschool to children ages three and four with priority given to children who are at-risk for educational challenges; administered through the Illinois State Board of Education Early Childhood Block Grant. For this report, "Preschool for All" includes the State Pre-Kindergarten At-Risk program.
Slots	Number of spaces available, or, the number of children a program or center can accommodate at full capacity.
Subsidy	Child care assistance for low-income working families.
Task Force	The group of individuals in the community who met regularly and contributed to the development of this report.

Task Force Members

Child Care Resource and Referral, Lead Agency

Spanish Community Center, Lead Agency

Catholic Charities Diocese of Joliet, Early Childhood Services Division

Fairmont School Pre-K

Joliet Junior College, Early Childhood Center

Joliet Junior College, Social and Behavioral Sciences Department,

Child Development/Education

Joliet Public School District 86

Little Learners Preschool

Little Red Schoolhouse, Inc.

Stepping Stones Home Child Care, Inc.

Will County All Our Kids Network

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