The background of the entire page is a photograph of a young child with light hair, laughing heartily. The child is wearing a dark-colored hoodie and is holding onto a wooden post. The image has a warm, yellowish-orange tint. In the bottom right corner, there is a white outline map of Illinois with a red square and a white dot indicating the location of LaSalle County.

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



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 three LaSalle County communities: Ottawa, LaSalle-Peru-Oglesby, and Streator.

## Overview of LaSalle County

LaSalle County, located along Interstate 80 in north central Illinois, is geographically one of the largest counties in the state. Most of LaSalle County's 115,000 residents live in the communities of Ottawa, LaSalle, Peru, Oglesby, Streator, and Mendota. The county is home to Starved Rock, one of the most popular state parks in Illinois.

LaSalle County's economy is diverse. The communities along the I-80 corridor are home to several large distribution centers that are some of the largest employers in the county. Other large employers include hospitals and 26 school districts serving the county. LaSalle County also has a substantial base of manufacturing and construction businesses.

The median family income in LaSalle County in 2006 was \$55,576, which is about 12 percent lower than the statewide median. The poverty rate for the county, however, was slightly lower than the statewide rate, 11.2 percent versus 12.3 percent. Approximately 86 percent of adults over age 25 in the county have a high school diploma or equivalent, but only 15.4 percent have a bachelor's degree or higher. This is significantly lower than the statewide figure of 29 percent.

The population of the county has grown about three percent since 2000 and is expected to continue to grow slightly through 2012. While some areas of the county have recently experienced an influx of immigrants (particularly around Mendota), only four percent of county residents are foreign born. More than 92 percent of residents are white.<sup>1</sup>

# Early Childhood Care and Education for LaSalle County's Economy

In LaSalle County, nearly 70 percent of children under age six are in families where either a single parent or both parents are in the labor force.<sup>2</sup> 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 an important cause of employee turnover and absenteeism, with as many as one-quarter of all unscheduled absences by employees resulting from family issues.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>

LaSalle County faces a shortage of early childhood care and education programs. Not only is this potentially problematic 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 LaSalle County. 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.<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup>

Communities in LaSalle County, like most communities in Illinois, are 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.

<sup>2</sup> 2006 American Community Survey.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> *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.

<sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> 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.

## LaSalle County Building Blocks Initiative

In late 2007, IFF began a collaboration with Youth Service Bureau of Illinois Valley (YSB) and Illinois Valley Community College (IVCC) to bring the Building Blocks program to LaSalle County. In November 2007, IFF, YSB and IVCC hosted an Early Learning Planning Initiative kick-off meeting to explain the Initiative's goals and planning process. IFF issued an informal request for proposals inviting targeted communities to apply for assistance in completing a detailed analysis of supply, demand, and barriers to accessing quality early childhood care and education and developing a community action plan to increase access.

Individual community Task Forces were led in Ottawa by YSB, in LaSalle-Peru-Oglesby by IVCC, and in Streator by Streator Child Development Center. Each community Task Force included representatives from the local school districts, Head Start, local child care and preschool providers, parochial schools, social service providers, local Chambers of Commerce, and state and local government officials.

IFF provided each 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 Forces analyzed these data and verified that they confirmed their knowledge and experience. Using information provided by Child Care Connection (the local Child Care Resource and Referral Agency), IFF identified and surveyed early childhood 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 each community and countywide.

Each local Task Force identified key community needs and developed a set of possible strategies to address them. This report represents the recommendations of the Task Forces for continued capacity-building for early childhood services in LaSalle County.

# Countywide Early Childhood Care and Education Assets and Gaps

**Child Care Needs and Services:** Approximately 9,040 children ages birth through five live in LaSalle County, including 4,610 children under three and 4,480 children ages three through five.<sup>7</sup> More than 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. More than 1,200 children ages birth through five need full-day, full-year care that can be found using the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), Illinois’ subsidy program for low-income families.

There are nine child care centers and 53 licensed family child care homes in LaSalle County. Together, these providers can serve only 428 children under age three and 620 children ages three to five. This represents only 30 percent of the total estimated need for full-day, full-year child care in the county. Members of the community Task Forces confirmed that families often have difficulty finding 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.

**Other Early Learning Needs and Services:** There are approximately 3,000 children in LaSalle County who are age-eligible for Preschool for All, the Illinois free preschool program. At least 765 of these children are from low-income families (below 185 percent of the Federal Poverty Level) and considered at-risk for educational failure. State-funded preschool programs (including those operated by school districts) can currently serve 920 children. Head Start, the federally-funded preschool program targeting families and poverty, can serve 293 children.

**Table 1: LaSalle County Early Childhood Snapshot**

<b>Gaps in LaSalle County’s Child Care Supply:</b>	
Estimated Number of Children Needing Full-Time Care	3,388
Number of Children that can be Served by Existing Supply	996
	Gap: <b>2,392</b>
<b>Preschool Need and Publicly Funded Slots:</b>	
Total Number of 3- and 4-year-olds	2,996
Low-Income 3- and 4-year-olds	765
Total Number of Publicly Funded Preschool Slots (including Head Start, At-Risk Pre-Kindergarten, and Preschool for All)	1,397

While there is an adequate supply of early learning programs to meet the needs of LaSalle’s low-income families, these families may not be accessing these programs, as discussed below. The greatest shortage, however, is for early learning programs to serve children of all incomes.

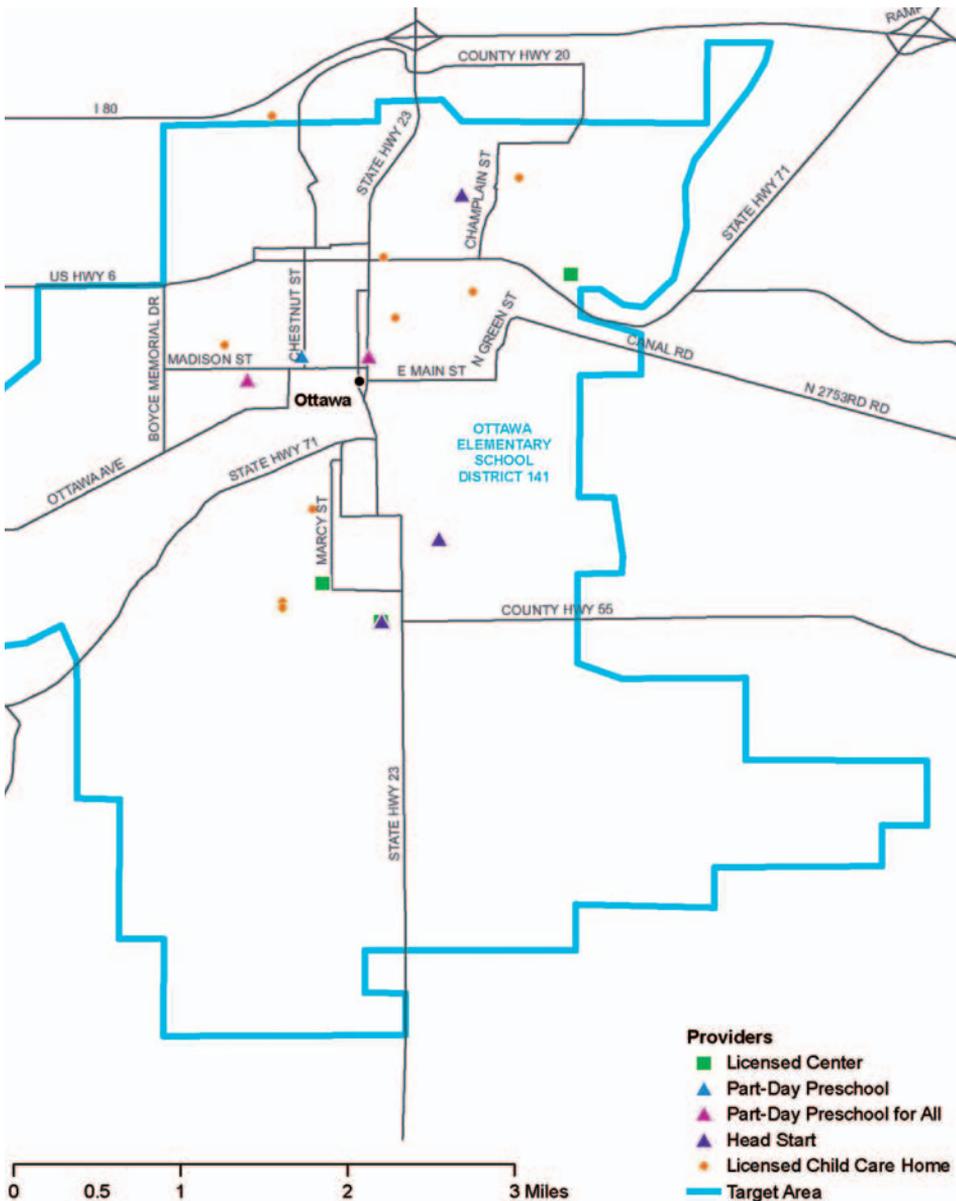
<sup>7</sup> 2007 ESRI Population Estimates.

# Ottawa

Ottawa is the county seat and the largest community in LaSalle County. It is located near Interstate 80, and has a large number of distribution center and telemarketing jobs that employ residents from Ottawa and the surrounding area. The Task Force members noted that many young parents work “split shifts,” with one parent working days and the other evenings and weekends to minimize child care expenses. In many other families, the sole parent or both parents work non-traditional hours with frequently changing schedules, which can make finding child care especially difficult.

There are approximately 1,550 children under age six in the five-census tract study area that approximates the Ottawa Elementary School District and was studied by the Ottawa Task Force (Figure 1). This represents a five percent increase in young children in the area since 2000. Approximately 40 percent of these children are from low-income families. An estimated 657 children under six in the community are in need of full-day, full-year child care, but community care providers can serve only 311 children (Figure 2).

Figure 1: Ottawa Study Area and Early Childhood Care and Education Providers



**Table 2: Ottawa Early Childhood Snapshot**

**Gaps in Ottawa's Child Care Supply:**

Estimated Number of Children Needing Full-Time Care	657
Number of Children that can be Served by Existing Supply	311
<b>Gap:</b>	<b>346</b>

**Preschool Need and Publicly Funded Slots:**

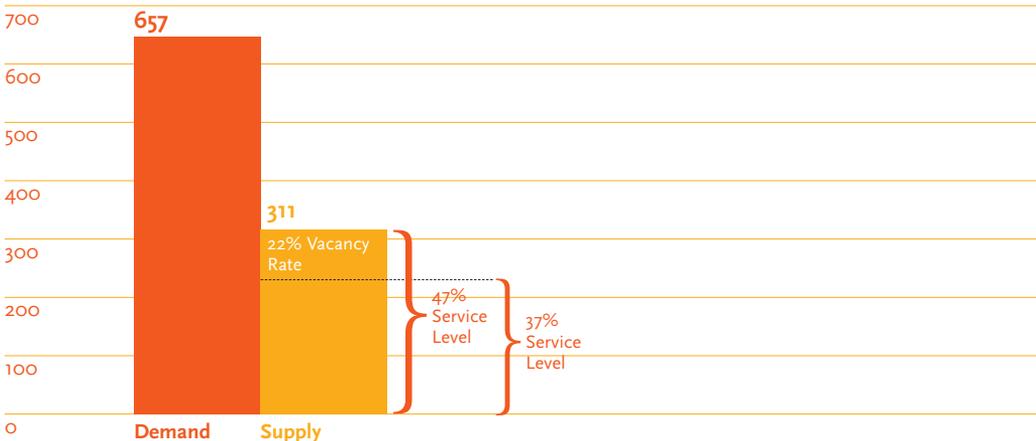
Total Number of 3- and 4-year-olds	514
Low-Income 3- and 4-year-olds	134
Total Number of Publicly Funded Preschool Slots (including Head Start, At-Risk Pre-K and Preschool for All)	286

**Key Issue: Families Most in Need Are Not Accessing Available Services**

Ottawa differs from other LaSalle County communities in that many of the child care and preschool providers reported under-enrollment and did not have long waiting lists for services. Although the data show that the current capacity falls far short of the estimated need and providers receive many inquiries, several barriers keep families out of formal early childhood care. These include:

- **Cost:** Each of Ottawa's three child care centers require parents using CCAP, the state child care subsidy program, to pay some amount above the state-mandated parent co-pay. These additional fees, which providers charge because the state reimbursement rates do not cover their costs, make center-based care too expensive for many families.
- **Access to CCAP:** Families looking for child care often need it immediately. However, families can only apply for CCAP once they have a job and it can take six weeks or more to receive notification of eligibility. Providers are reluctant to serve families until they have verified eligibility because if a family is found not eligible for CCAP, they will not receive reimbursement from the state for the care they provided that child.
- **Scheduling:** Many families need odd-hour, weekend, or flexible-schedule care. It is difficult for providers to serve families whose work schedules frequently change without losing money.
- **Awareness:** Providers report that families are often unaware of the services that are available in the community. The Ottawa School District reports that many families with children eligible for Preschool for All do not bring their children to preschool screenings (the entry point for District preschool) until well into the program year. Child care providers note that many families are unaware of the CCAP program or do not know how to apply for assistance.

*Figure 2: Estimated 2007 Demand and Current Capacity for Full-Day Care in Ottawa*



## Key Community Assets

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

- **Ottawa School District:** The Ottawa School District has a long history of providing preschool education to children who are at-risk or have disabilities. Since the beginning of its program, the District has maintained a partnership with Ottawa Opportunity School, a local community-based preschool program. The District is open to collaboration with others in the community.
- **Existing child care providers:** The three existing child care centers in Ottawa are all committed to working together to increase families' access to the services they offer. They are open to creating partnerships that will allow them to offer high quality, affordable services that meet families' needs.
- **Head Start:** Head Start has a strong presence in the community and has been successful in maintaining full enrollment for its programs.

## Goals and Strategies

The primary goals identified for the Ottawa community are:

- To reach more children, especially the most at-risk children, with existing services
- To create partnerships that ensure that all children's early care and education needs are met

To achieve these important and interrelated goals, the Task Force developed several strategies. These include:

**Develop partnerships between schools and full-day providers, possibly including placing Preschool for All services in full-day centers.** Easter Seals of LaSalle and Bureau Counties will take the lead on convening a work group to study how the schools and child care centers might work together. This group will study models for full-day Preschool for All used in other communities and develop an approach for offering integrated services, most likely beginning in the 2009-2010 school year.

**Develop a coordinated screening and referral system that ensures that children are placed in the services that best meet their needs and their families' eligibility.** Currently, developmental screening is being done by LaSalle/Putnam County Educational Alliance for Special Education (LEASE), the school district, and Head Start, with little coordination. LEASE will convene a work group of interested agencies, districts, and providers during the 2008-2009 school year to review how screening is conducted, how providers could reach more children, and how families could be directed to the services that best meet their eligibility and needs. To develop a more coordinated screening and referral system, the group will likely focus its efforts on identification of consistent screening areas and guidance to families on the services that best meet children's needs.

**Ensure that all those who work with families with young children in the community are aware of CCAP and can assist families in completing applications and accessing services.** Illinois Valley Community College (IVCC) will work with Child Care Connections to hold a training session for early childhood care and education providers, school social workers, human resources directors, and social service agency personnel to ensure they are aware of CCAP and can assist families in completing the application. This training will be repeated annually to ensure that all those working with families with young children are well-informed about the CCAP program.

**Raise awareness among parents and community members of the importance of early learning and stable child care, and of the availability of services in the community.** The Task Force members noted that it was important that they come together and speak with one voice about the importance of early care and education. IVCC will lead the process of developing a formal, ongoing collaboration among early learning providers in the Ottawa area. This group's first priority will be to create a collaborative marketing plan to educate the community about the importance of early learning and about services in the community.

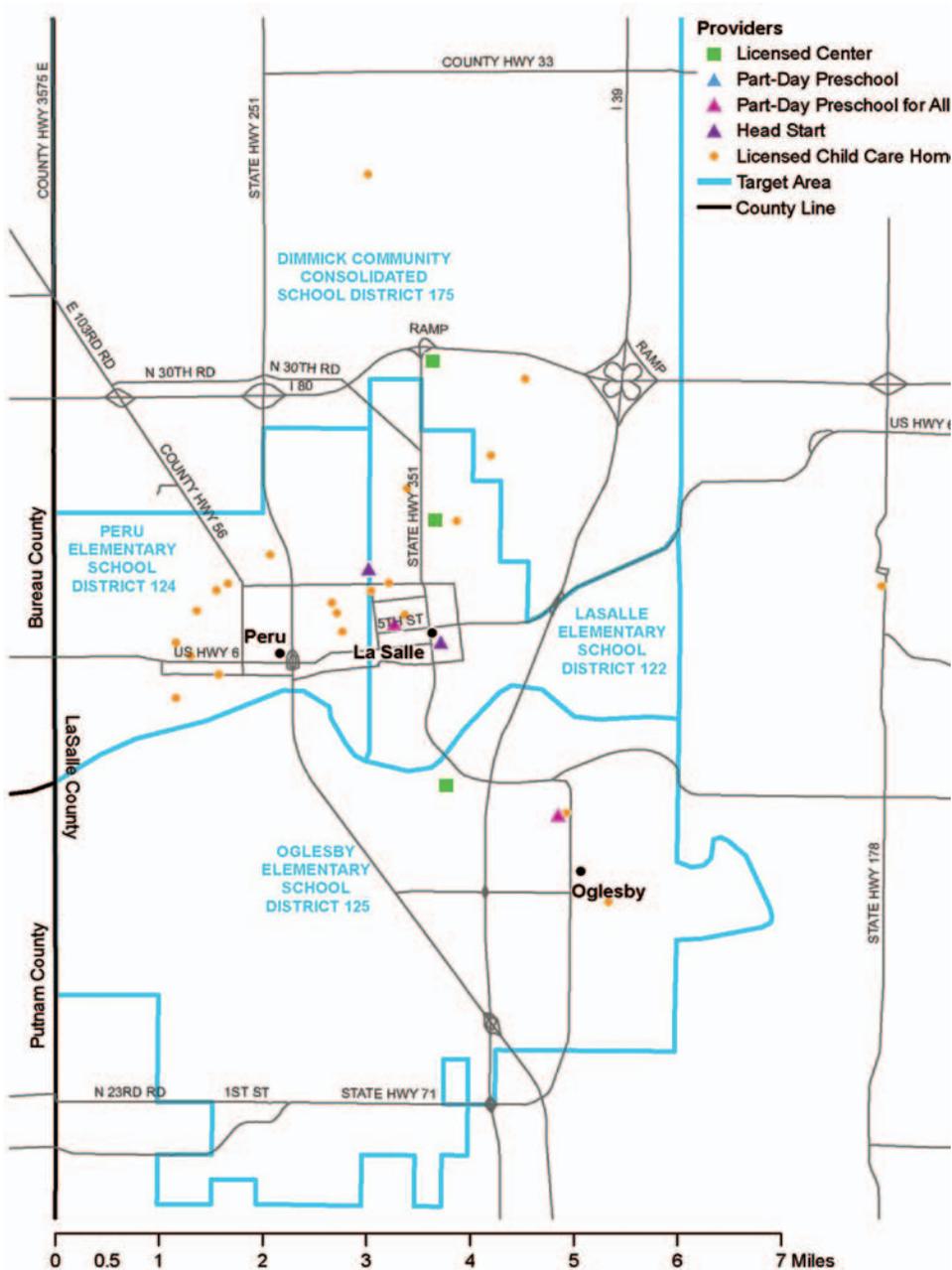
**Build relationships with employers and enlist their support in ensuring that children receive quality, stable early childhood care and education.** The Task Force identified employers as a potential ally in reaching young parents with the message that stable child care and enriching early learning experiences are important for children's healthy development. Reaching out to employers will be an important part of the collaborative marketing plan.

# LaSalle-Peru-Oglesby

The communities of LaSalle, Peru, and Oglesby sit along the Illinois River near the intersection of Interstates 80 and 39 in northern LaSalle County (Figure 3). Distribution centers, a retail mall, hospitals, and IVCC are among the area's largest employers. Together these communities are home to just over 26,000 people, including approximately 1,925 children under six. The number of young children has grown much more quickly than the general population over the past seven years (5.6 percent versus 1.3 percent).

Approximately 38 percent of the children under age six in LaSalle-Peru-Oglesby area are in low-income families. An estimated 775 children under the age of six in the community need full-day, full-year child care, but community providers can serve only 336 children. Part-day early learning programs are more available, including over 300 slots of state-funded preschool (Figure 4).

Figure 3: LaSalle-Peru-Oglesby Study Area and Early Childhood Care and Education Providers



**Table 3: LaSalle-Peru-Oglesby Early Childhood Snapshot**

**Gaps in LaSalle-Peru-Oglesby Area’s Child Care Supply:**

Estimated Number of Children Needing Full-Time Care	775
Number of Children that can be Served by Existing Supply	336
	Gap: <b>439</b>

**Preschool Need and Publicly Funded Slots:**

Total Number of 3- and 4-year-olds	630
Low-Income 3- and 4-year-olds	181
Total Number of Publicly Funded Preschool Slots (including Head Start, At-Risk Pre-K and Preschool for All)	362

Child care centers in the LaSalle-Peru-Oglesby area are operating at near capacity and those serving children under age three have particularly long waiting lists. Licensed child care homes also report having waiting lists for infants and toddlers, but many have openings for children ages three through five. Providers noted that many parents enroll their children in free part-day publicly funded preschool and patch together care for the balance of their working day in an effort to minimize child care costs. Concern was expressed that other parents may economize child care costs by using grade school children to provide care after school.

*Figure 4: Estimated 2007 Full-Day Demand and Current Capacity for Full-Day and Part-Day Care in LaSalle-Peru-Oglesby Area*



### **Key Issue: Families need more services that are affordable and meet their child care needs**

There are not enough services in the LaSalle-Peru-Oglesby area for families that need full-day, full-year care for their children. The need is particularly acute for infants and toddlers—existing centers and licensed child care homes can only serve 32 percent of the estimated demand for care for children under three. For children ages three to five, full-day, center-based providers are operating essentially at capacity, while part-day preschool programs are nearly 16 percent vacant.

Building upon the currently available services, programs need to adapt to better meet families' needs. In particular, programs should address these key issues:

- **Cost:** Centers that charge low-income families receiving state-subsidized child care only the state-mandated co-pay are much more likely to be full.
- **Blended Funding:** Providing affordable services is more feasible when programs rely on multiple sources of funding, rather than solely on parent fees or CCAP. In particular, bringing Preschool for All funding into programs can help support a high-quality, affordable program.
- **Age Ranges Served:** New or expanded programs should include infants, toddlers and school-age children, not just preschool children, as parents have difficulty navigating multiple child care arrangements. While infant-toddler care is expensive to provide, it is more feasible when it is combined with services to older children in a comprehensive program.
- **Scheduling:** Programs should consider the work schedules of parents when designing new services. For example, there may be a significant number of families for whom an afternoon preschool program paired with extended care until 6:00 pm would cover their child care needs and ensure a stable environment for children.

### **Key Community Assets**

The early childhood care and education community in the LaSalle-Peru-Oglesby area has many assets to build upon. These include:

- **School districts' commitment to early childhood:** Combined LaSalle and Oglesby Elementary School Districts currently serve more than 300 children in state-funded pre school programs. Peru Elementary School District is planning a new early childhood center to house expanded preschool services. Each district is aware of the importance of early childhood services for preparing children to succeed in school.
- **Existing licensed family child care providers:** The LaSalle-Peru-Oglesby area has a strong base of licensed family child care providers that have been in business for many years. They are open to working together and may be a resource to help new family child care providers become established. Similarly, there are three child care centers with a long history of effectively serving the community.
- **Head Start:** Head Start has a strong presence in the community and has been successful in maintaining full enrollment for its programs.
- **Providers open to creating new services:** Some area service providers, such as Trinity Catholic Academy, have space available and have expressed interest in developing new services to meet families' needs.
- **Support from policymakers:** State Senator Gary G. Dahl's office has actively participated in the planning process and supports efforts to expand early learning services in the community.

### **Goals and Strategies**

The primary goals for the LaSalle-Peru-Oglesby area are:

- To create or modify existing services to meet more families' needs for early childhood care and education, including expanding services for infants and toddlers
- To ensure that children in the community receive the early learning experiences they need to succeed in school

To achieve these important and interrelated goals, the Task Force developed several strategies. These include:

**Completing a study of families' specific needs for child care.** The members of the Task Force noted that although the data on demographic trends and existing services indicate significant needs in the community, it is important to learn from parents what their specific needs are in terms of the hours of care needed, preferred location, and related services such as transportation. A survey of families with young children, to be distributed and collected through elementary schools, early childhood programs, health care providers, and other avenues, will allow the Task Force to create new services that better meet families' needs and that will have the best chance of achieving full enrollment.

**Building upon existing part-day programs to create more full-day options for families.** This may include partnerships between part-day preschool/Head Start and family child care providers, or converting part-day programs into full-day programs using blended funding models. IVCC and Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) will meet with family child care providers in the community to explore ways to effectively implement a full-day model.

**Expanding services to families with infants and toddlers, including quality child care and home visiting early education programs.** While Oglesby Elementary School District serves many children through its Families First program and LaSalle Elementary School District has a birth-to-three program, the Task Force members agreed that there are far too few services available in the community to support new parents. The Districts (and perhaps other community-based providers) will apply for additional funding to serve children through the Prevention Initiative component of Preschool for All.

**Developing a coordinated screening and referral system that ensures children are placed in the services that best meet their needs and their families' eligibility.** LEASE will convene a countywide work group of interested agencies, districts, and providers leading to a consistent system (see Ottawa strategies).

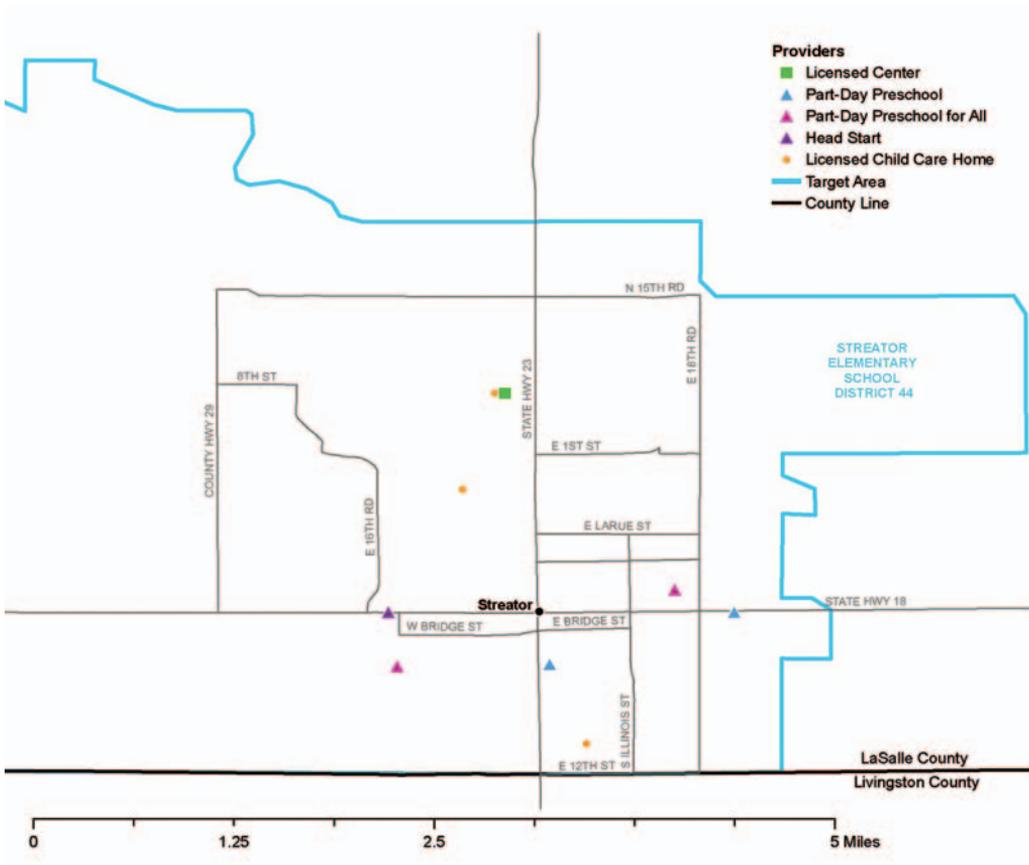
**Raise awareness among parents and community members of the importance of early learning and stable child care and of the availability of services in the community.** IVCC will lead the process of developing a collaborative marketing plan to educate the community about the importance of early learning and about services in the community. This process will be coordinated across all the communities in LaSalle County, so materials promoting early childhood care and education have a consistent identity and message. Senator Dahl's office will coordinate an early childhood information session in early August 2008 in Peru. For more information contact Senator Dahl's office at (815) 220-8720.

# Streator

Streator is a city of nearly 16,200 residents, located in southern LaSalle County (Figure 5). Founded in the mid-1800s, Streator began as a coal mining community and was a center for glass and brick manufacturing through the 20th century. Today, St Mary's Hospital and Vactor Manufacturing are its largest employers.

While the overall population of Streator has remained stable, there has been approximately 13 percent growth in the number of children under age six in the community since 2000. There are an estimated 1,300 children ages birth through five in Streator, including approximately 690 children under age three and 610 children ages three through five. Approximately 36 percent of these children are in families with incomes below 185 percent of the Federal Poverty Line. Streator Elementary School District notes that many children in the community enter school lacking the language and early literacy skills they need to succeed.

Figure 5: Streator Study Area and Early Childhood Care and Education Providers



**Table 4: Streator Early Childhood Snapshot**

**Gaps in Streator's Child Care Supply:**

Estimated Number of Children Needing Full-Time Care	535
Number of Children that can be Served by Existing Supply	119
	Gap: <b>416</b>

**Preschool Need and Publicly Funded Slots:**

Total Number of 3- and 4-year-olds	424
Low-Income 3- and 4-year-olds	126
Total Number of Publicly Funded Preschool Slots (including Head Start, At-Risk Pre-K and Preschool for All)	145

As in the other communities, any services to be created must be sensitive to families' needs in terms of affordability and accessibility (see LaSalle-Peru-Oglesby Key Issue section). New services should rely on multiple sources of funding to ensure children receive high quality, comprehensive services.

**Key Community Assets**

The early childhood care and education community in Streator has many assets to build upon. These include:

- **School district leadership:** The Streator Elementary School District was very involved in the Task Force and is willing to provide leadership to the effort to expand quality early childhood care and education in Streator. The District understands the link between the lack of quality services currently available and the low levels of school readiness it sees among many of its incoming Kindergarten students.
- **Head Start:** Head Start has a strong presence in the community and has been successful in maintaining full enrollment for its programs.
- **Existing program with blended funding model:** Streator Child Development Center already successfully operates with a blended funding model, and is willing to mentor a new program in developing a similar approach.
- **Support from City:** Mayor Ray Schmitt was involved in the Task Force meetings and has pledged his support in finding an appropriate location and needed resources for a new early childhood center.

*Figure 6: Estimated 2007 Demand and Current Capacity for Full-Day Care in Streator*



## Goals and Strategies

The primary goal for Streator is to create additional capacity for licensed full-day, full-year child care for children ages birth through five.

To achieve this goal, the Task Force developed two primary strategies:

**Increase the number of licensed family child care providers in the community.** Streator Child Development Center will partner with Child Care Connections to host an information session for individuals interested in becoming licensed family child care providers. This session will be advertised through elementary schools, Head Start, social service providers, public housing, and public aid offices. Child Care Connections and DCFS will then follow-up to provide technical assistance to those who decide to apply for a license.

**Create a plan for opening a new child care center in the community.** A Planning Committee will be formed to investigate potential lead agencies for a new child care center, including the YMCA, which is contemplating including a child care center in its facility expansion. The lead agency will then, with input from the Task Force, begin the planning process for a new center, including space planning, capital budgeting, operational budgeting, and finance planning. Mayor Schmitt will help ensure the Planning Committee has access to all the information it needs to create this plan, and will help identify resources for the project.

## Countywide Challenges

While many aspects of the need for and availability of quality early childhood care and education varied across the specific communities, some issues are common across the county. These include:

**Need to Develop Collaborative Approach to Serving Families:** Many children may need and benefit from participating in multiple programs. For instance, a child may be at-risk and in need of Preschool for All, but also need full-day child care. There are very few programs in LaSalle County, however, that combine programs and funding to provide families with full-day, enriched early care and education. As a result, full-day programs serving low-income families struggle to provide quality services with only CCAP funding, and school district and Head Start programs struggle to meet families' need for full-day care.

**Need for Effective Outreach to the Most-At-Risk Families:** In every community, despite the presence of a substantial number of Head Start and state-funded preschool slots, school districts noted that a large number of children arrive at Kindergarten unprepared and without receiving any early learning services. Often these children's families are unaware of available early learning programs, or cannot access them due to need for full-day care, a lack of transportation, or other barriers. Screenings to identify eligible children are often not coordinated across providers, so there is no coherent system for helping families find the program that best meets their needs.

**Need to Build Awareness of the Importance of Early Learning:** Task Force Members in every community identified the need to build greater awareness of the importance of early learning and the value of high-quality early care and education. Although parents are the first and most important target for this message, employers and other community members also need to understand why a strong, accessible system of early childhood care and education is vitally important to the communities' long-term strength.

## Future Direction in LaSalle County

The Task Force meetings in each community marked the first time many of the early childhood care and education providers had come together to share information and plan collaboratively. Participants expressed an interest in continuing to work together and developing more formal collaborations. The continued leadership of county-wide entities such as IVCC, LEASE, and the Regional Office of Education will be crucial to sustain and build upon the momentum developed in these Task Force meetings.

Moving forward, it will be important to develop a sustainable, collaborative structure. This may include creating a formal network similar to the state-sponsored All Our Kids Networks which have at least one dedicated staff person and resources to produce materials, organize meetings, collect needed information, manage the production of reports, brochures, and directories, and facilitate other aspects of collaborative planning and service delivery. While state funding for a network may not be available, it may be possible to piece together adequate funding for this type of network through relatively small contributions from every entity involved such as school districts, Head Start, child care centers, and Child Care Connections.

Continued collaboration will be the key to strengthening the system of early childhood care and education in LaSalle County.

## Methodology

This report analyzes the supply and demand for and geographical distribution of early childhood care and education resources in LaSalle County. 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 185 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 Free and Reduced Price 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 programs 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 Connections, the local Illinois Child Care Resource and Referral Agency, in January 2008. IFF surveyed area providers in February 2008 to update and expand upon the data provided by Child Care Connections.

# Glossary

<b>Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP)</b>	Illinois Department of Human Services program that subsidizes child care for low-income working families.
<b>Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&amp;R)</b>	Illinois Department of Human Services-funded system for providing child care referrals to parents and training to child care providers.
<b>DCFS</b>	Department of Child 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.
<b>Early Childhood Block Grant</b>	Mechanism for funding Preschool for All, Parental Training, and Prevention Initiative programs.
<b>Early Childhood Care and Education</b>	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.
<b>Full-Day, Full-Year Child Care</b>	Child care that is available throughout normal business hours and is open all year long.
<b>Head Start</b>	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.
<b>ISBE</b>	Illinois State Board of Education
<b>IVCC</b>	Illinois Valley Community College
<b>Licensed child care</b>	Care provided by a center or home that has been licensed by DCFS.
<b>License-exempt care</b>	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.
<b>Home Child Care Provider</b>	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.
<b>Preschool for All</b>	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.
<b>Slots</b>	Number of spaces available, or the number of children a program or center can accommodate at full capacity.
<b>Subsidy</b>	Child care assistance for low-income working families.
<b>Task Force</b>	The group of individuals in each community who met regularly and contributed to the development of this report.

## Task Force Members

The overall planning process for LaSalle County was led by Dave McClure of Youth Services Bureau of Illinois Valley (YSB) and Diane Christianson of Illinois Valley Community College (IVCC). In every community there was broad participation in the Task Force Meetings.

### Ottawa

Illinois Valley Community College, Lead Agency  
 Youth Services Bureau of Illinois Valley, Lead Agency  
 College Avenue Child Care  
 Easter Seals of LaSalle and Bureau Counties  
 Gramma Sue's Day Care and Education Center  
 LaSalle County Regional Office of Education  
 LaSalle/Putnam County Educational Alliance for Special Education  
 Ottawa Opportunity School  
 Ottawa Area Chamber of Commerce and Industry  
 Ottawa Elementary School  
 Step by Step Child Care Center, Inc.  
 Tri-County Opportunities Council—Head Start

### LaSalle-Peru-Oglesby

Illinois Valley Community College, Lead Agency  
 Youth Services Bureau of Illinois Valley, Lead Agency  
 Child Care Connection  
 City of Oglesby  
 Department of Children and Family Services  
 Grundy County Democrats  
 Holy Family School  
 LaSalle Elementary School  
 LaSalle/Putnam County Educational Alliance for Special Education  
 Oglesby Elementary School District's Preschool Program  
 Oglesby Elementary School District  
 Peru Elementary School District  
 State Senator Gary G. Dahl  
 Tri-County Opportunities Council—Head Start  
 Trinity Catholic Academy  
 Rudy Martin, Former Candidate for Illinois Senate District 38  
 Steve Stout, Candidate for Illinois Senate District 38

### Streator

Illinois Valley Community College, Lead Agency  
 Youth Services Bureau of Illinois Valley, Lead Agency  
 Even Start  
 LaSalle/Putnam County Educational Alliance for Special Education  
 Options Counseling  
 St. Anthony School  
 Streator Area United Way  
 Streator Child Development Center  
 Streator Elementary School District  
 Streator Mayor Ray Schmitt  
 Tri-County Opportunities Council—Head Start





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