A black and white photograph of a young child laughing joyfully, with their mouth wide open and eyes squinted. The child is wearing a light-colored, textured sweater. Overlaid on the bottom right of the image is a white outline map of West Virginia, with the state itself filled in a solid green color. A small white dot is visible on the map, likely representing the location of Wheeling.

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



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 Wheeling.

## Overview of Wheeling

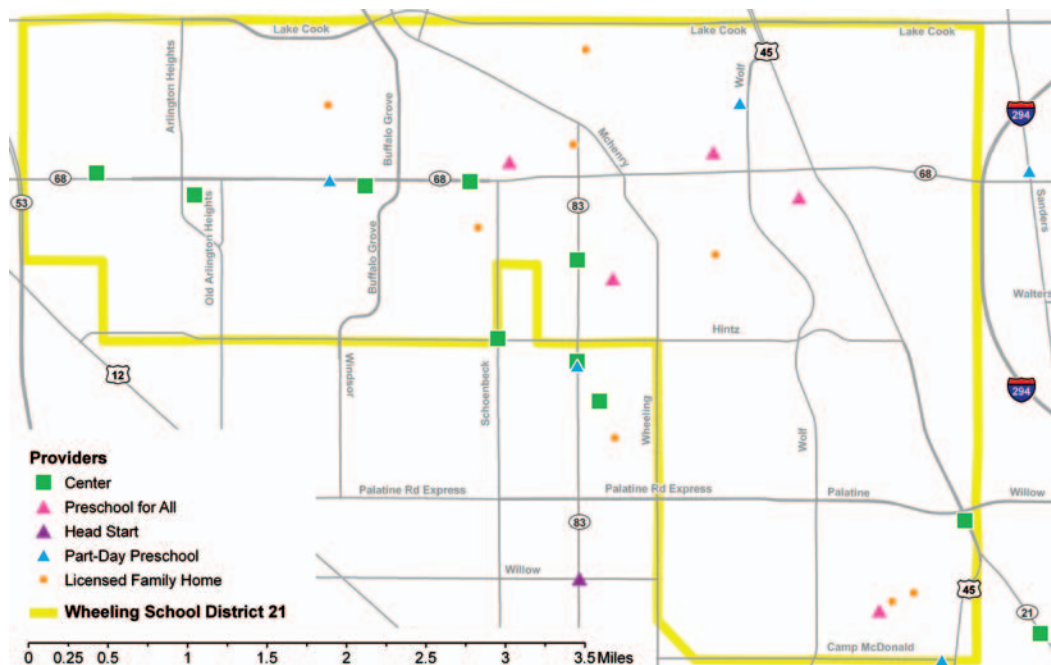
Wheeling is a middle class suburb in northwestern Cook County. Initially settled in the mid 1800s as a farming community, Wheeling expanded rapidly in the 1960s and 70s as manufacturing growth was followed by residential and commercial development. In the past decade, overall growth in the community has leveled off, but the community has experienced significant demographic shifts. There has been a significant growth in the Latino and Asian populations, while the number of White, non-Latino residents has declined 11 percent.<sup>1</sup>

Though the median family income in the area served by Wheeling School District 21 in 2006 was \$68,675, which is about 8.8 percent higher than the statewide median (\$63,121), 17.1 percent of children under age 18 were in households below the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). More than one-third of children under age 18 – 37.5 percent – were below 200 percent of the FPL. In addition, nearly 18 percent of households were linguistically isolated, i.e. households in which no one at least 14 years old speaks English or speaks a non-English language and speaks English “very well.”<sup>2</sup>

In 2007, approximately 45 percent of Wheeling School District first graders qualified for the Free and Reduced Price Lunch program based on family income. Altogether, approximately 65 percent of students in first grade could be considered as having entered school at risk of school failure due to their family’s low income, the child’s special education needs, and/or their status as an English Language Learner. Thus, for the majority of young children in Wheeling School District, quality early care and education are critically needed to ensure readiness for success in school.

For the purposes of this report, the study area is defined as Wheeling School District (Figure 1).

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



1 2000 Census, 2007 ESRI Population Estimates.

2 2006 American Community Survey.

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

More than 69 percent of children under age 18 in the Wheeling area in 2006 were in families where either a single parent or both parents are in the workforce.<sup>3</sup> Quality, affordable child care is essential to maintaining workforce participation and it is an important need for families with young children. 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 such as child care problems.<sup>4</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>5</sup>

As will be discussed later in this report, many working families in Wheeling 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 Wheeling. 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>6</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 as high as 12 percent.<sup>7</sup>

Wheeling has been successful in attracting and retaining good jobs in a variety of industries. Looking forward, the quality and reliability of the workforce will be key factors in the long-term economic success of this community. 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.

3 2006 American Community Survey.

4 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.

5 *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

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6 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.

7 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.

## Wheeling Building Blocks Initiative

The recent demographic shifts in Wheeling have created a sharply increased need for quality early childhood care and education. Wheeling School District is committed to ensuring its youngest children are ready to succeed in school, and asked IFF to bring the Early Learning Planning Initiative to Wheeling.

A community Task Force formed in May 2008 comprised of representatives from school districts, local park districts, Head Start, local child care and preschool providers, social service providers, and Children's Home + Aid, the Child Care Resource and Referral community partner agency.

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. In addition, Wheeling School District provided data on at-risk first graders to inform the estimates of need for at-risk early childhood care and education services. Using information provided by Illinois Action for Children (the Child Care Resource and Referral Agency), 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 each 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 Wheeling.

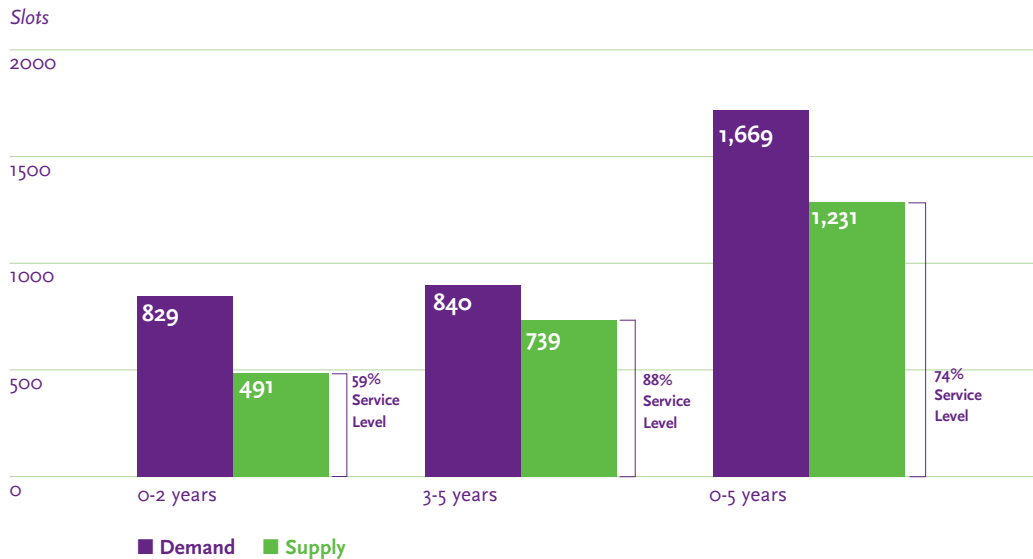
# Early Childhood Care and Education Assets and Gaps in Wheeling

## Child Care Needs and Services

Approximately 5,546 children ages birth through five live in Wheeling School District, including 2,758 children under three and 2,788 children ages three through five.<sup>8</sup> Thirty percent 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 830 children from birth through five need full-day, full-year care that can be found using the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), Illinois’s subsidy program for low-income families.

There are 11 child care centers and eight licensed family child care homes in the Wheeling area. Together, these providers can serve approximately 491 children under age three and 739 children ages three to five. This represents approximately 74 percent of the total estimated need for full-day, full-year child care in the area (Figure 2). Most of the gap between supply and demand is in services for children under age three: current providers can meet only 59 percent of the need for full-day, full-year care for children ages birth through two, while they can meet 88 percent of the need for children ages three through five.

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



8 2007 ESRI Population Estimates.

It is important to note that area child care centers report that they serve many children who live outside Wheeling School District, so the actual number of “slots” of child care available for children in this community is significantly less than a simple supply and demand analysis would suggest. At the same time, however, child care providers report that they have vacancies: in April 2008, providers reported a total of approximately 59 slots of infant-toddler care and 222 slots of full-day preschool-age care available and unused in private child care facilities in the Wheeling area. Nearly 80 percent of the children estimated to need full-day, full-year child care are not enrolled in the centers and licensed homes located in and around Wheeling School District.

Members of the Task Force confirmed that families often have difficulty finding affordable full-day, full-year care, and that many parents rely instead 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. There is a need for child care services that are more affordable and accessible for families in the community.

### Other Early Learning Needs and Services

There are approximately 1,826 children in Wheeling School District who are age-eligible for Preschool for All, the Illinois free preschool program. Approximately 920 of these children are estimated to be considered at-risk for educational failure. Publicly funded preschool programs (including those operated by Wheeling School District, Early Childhood Development Enrichment Center (ECDEC), and Head Start) can currently serve 557 children. This leaves over 300 young, at-risk children without the early learning services that could prepare them for success in school.

**Table 1: Wheeling Early Childhood Snapshot**

<b>Gaps in Wheeling's Child Care Supply:</b>	
Estimated Number of Children Needing Full-Time Care	1,669
Number of Children that can be Served by Existing Supply	1,231
	<b>Gap: 438</b>
<b>Preschool Need and Publicly Funded Slots:</b>	
Total Number of 3 and 4 year olds	1,826
At-risk 3 and 4 year olds	922
Total Number of Publicly Funded Preschool Slots (including Head Start, At-Risk Pre-Kindergarten, and Preschool for All)	557



## Key Issue:

# Many more children need accessible, affordable early education and care

Given Wheeling School District's reports that most children are coming to Kindergarten with no prior formal early learning experiences and reports by providers that they serve primarily families who live outside Wheeling School District, it is clear that many families are not accessing the early childhood education and care services they need. At the same time, in many young families in Wheeling School District all parents are working, and approximately 30 percent of all young children in the community need full-day, full-year child care that cannot be provided by a family, friends, and neighbors.

The Wheeling community needs to create more opportunities for young children to receive early learning services. These new opportunities should be created with attention to families' needs for affordable, high quality child care.

### Barriers for Families:

- **Need for Full-Day Services:** Many families may be unable to enroll their children in part-day preschool programs like Preschool for All and Head Start because they need full-day care.
- **Availability:** The existing no-cost preschool programs in Wheeling (Head Start, ECDEC, and district-run programs) are at capacity with waiting lists. There are not enough "slots" to serve all of the families that would like to enroll their children in these programs.
- **Cost:** Although almost all of the child care centers and licensed homes within the area studied accept CCAP, the state child care subsidy program, many families struggle to afford the required co-payments for care. Most providers also require parents to pay some part of the difference between their standard tuition and the state reimbursement rate, so that even with subsidy parents may need to pay several thousand dollars per year for child care.
- **Access to CCAP:** Relatively few families in Wheeling School District are currently using CCAP. This may be due to both a lack of awareness of the program and difficulty for families in completing the application.
- **Awareness:** Many families are not fully aware of available high quality early childhood care and education services.
- **Transportation:** Many families are not able to provide transportation for their child to attend an early childhood education and care program.

### Barriers for Providers:

- **Space within Schools:** Wheeling School District's lack of identified space has hampered efforts to expand their early childhood education and care services. Finding space within existing facilities for additional classes of Preschool for All is an immediate priority.
- **Lack of Qualified Staff:** Child care programs report difficulty recruiting and retaining qualified staff for their programs. The shortage of qualified bilingual staff is particularly acute.
- **Need for More Networking Among Providers:** The Task Force meetings were the first time that some of the child care program leaders had met school district and park district staff and shared their experiences serving the community. The need for continued networking and communication among providers was acknowledged by all.

## Key Community Assets

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

- **School District Support:** Wheeling School District recognized the importance of early education and is committed to ensuring that more children enter school prepared to succeed.
- **Hawthorne Early Childhood Center:** Wheeling School District provides early childhood and special education programs for children in the district through this center.
- **Early Childhood Development Enrichment Center (ECDEC) Partnership:** Wheeling School District is one of seven school districts that partner with The Center: Resource for Teaching and Learning to jointly apply for continued and expanded funding for Preschool for All. This collaborative serves 1,640 children in the northwest suburbs and provides a strong system of support and oversight that ensures high quality services.
- **Child Care Resource & Referral:** Children’s Home + Aid, the community partner for Action for Children in this area, is committed to working with providers and community members to strengthen early childhood care and education in Wheeling.
- **Existing Child Care Capacity:** Wheeling has a substantial base of child care capacity on which to build, and child care providers are actively involved in the planning process.

# Goals and Strategies

The Wheeling 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:

## Identify spaces for additional classes of Preschool for All

- Wheeling School District and ECDEC Staff will work with all task force members to identify potential spaces in schools, park districts, child care centers, churches, apartment complexes, etc.
- As part of this process, Wheeling School District and ECDEC Staff will gather information about spaces that could be renovated or converted for preschool use so that Wheeling is prepared to apply for funding if and when facility capital funds become available.
- Wheeling School District and ECDEC Staff will explore possible partnerships with child care centers to provide Preschool for All services in a full-day, full-year setting.
- Wheeling School District will consider whether “third shift” late afternoon classes in existing classrooms might be viable.
- Once spaces are identified, apply for additional funding for Preschool for All.

## Increase use of existing child care supply by families in Wheeling

- Increase awareness of Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) among families in Wheeling, including the fact that undocumented families are eligible for the program. Children’s Home + Aid will work with the Wheeling School District and Head Start to schedule presentations (in English and in Spanish) on CCAP at parent meetings.
- Children’s Home + Aid will also work with Wheeling School District to provide training about CCAP and its application process to school social work staff and other social service providers in Wheeling.
- Children’s Home + Aid will work with local child care providers to create a simple directory of available services in the community that can be distributed by the schools, Head Start, and social service agencies.
- Children’s Home + Aid will support centers in engaging in the Quality Ratings System (QRS) process through Illinois Department of Human Services Child Care Bureau. The QRS provides higher CCAP reimbursement rates for centers that meet certain quality criteria, and centers who receive these higher payments may be financially able to charge families a smaller out-of-pocket amount. Through this process, Children’s Home + Aid will also encourage local centers to accept additional subsidy families.

## Increase the availability of licensed family child care in the community

- Children’s Home + Aid will work with Wheeling School District and ECDEC staff to identify individuals who are currently caring for children in the community and invite them to explore the possibility of becoming a licensed family child care provider.
- The Task Force will work with village officials to explore strategies for lessening the financial barriers to starting a licensed family child care home business. This may include lowering required fees and creating a small grants program to help potential licensed family child care providers make required health and safety improvements to their homes (e.g., hard-wired smoke detectors).
- ECDEC will work with Children’s Home + Aid to develop a program to combine part-day preschool with high-quality home child care.

## Future Direction in Wheeling

Wheeling has a strong group of committed early childhood professionals who want to expand children's access to high quality early childhood care and education and care. The Task Force meetings marked the first time many of the early childhood care and education providers had come together with the school district, park district, and village officials to share information and plan collaboratively.

The Task Force identified concrete action steps to move ahead on each of the identified goals and strategies in the summer and fall of 2008. Members expressed an interest in continuing to work together over the coming year to develop more formal collaborations. Continued collaboration will be the key to reducing the barriers to accessible, affordable early education and care and strengthening the system of early childhood care and education in Wheeling.

The continued leadership of the Wheeling School District and Children's Home + Aid will be crucial to 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 Wheeling. 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 ages 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 is based on an unduplicated count of first graders in Wheeling School District 21 schools during the 2007 school year that participate in the Free and Reduced Price Lunch program, status as an English Language Learner, or participation in special education. The proportion of at-risk first graders as a percentage of the total population of first graders was applied to three- and four-year-olds for Preschool for All "at-risk" demand.
- 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 Illinois Action for Children, the local Illinois Child Care Resource and Referral Agency, in January 2008. IFF surveyed area providers in April 2008 to update and expand upon the data provided.

## Glossary

<b>Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP)</b>	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.
<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>	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.
<b>Early Childhood Development Enrichment Center (ECDEC)</b>	Collaborative early childhood education project through The Center: Resource for Teaching and Learning. Provides Preschool for All in seven school districts (Districts 15, 21, 23, 25, 26, 54 and 57), three CEDA Head Start sites, and five child care and community-based sites in the northwest suburbs.
<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>FPL</b>	Federal Poverty Level
<b>Hawthorne Early Childhood Center</b>	Wheeling School District 21's early childhood center serving District preschoolers through the Early Childhood Special Education program and the LEADERS pre-K program—part of the District's bilingual/English as a Second Language program.
<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. Early Head Start similarly provides services to children in poverty ages birth through three.
<b>ISBE</b>	Illinois State Board of Education
<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. License-exempt centers include those in schools.
<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. For this report, "Preschool for All" includes the State Pre-Kindergarten At-Risk program.
<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 the community who met regularly and contributed to the development of this report.

## Task Force Members

### **Wheeling School District 21, Lead Agency**

Buffalo Grove Park District  
Children's Home + Aid  
Early Childhood Developmental Enrichment Center,  
Wheeling School District 21  
Hawthorne Early Childhood Center,  
Wheeling School District 21  
Jolly Fun House Playschool  
Omni Youth Services  
Prospect Heights Park District  
River Trails Park District  
Township High School District 214  
Village of Prospect Heights  
Village of Wheeling  
Wheeling Park District  
Wheeling Police Department

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