The background is a photograph of a young child with light hair, wearing a patterned sweater and light-colored pants, being held by an adult. The child is looking down. A white outline map of the Round Lake Area is overlaid on the right side of the image. A small green square with a white dot is located on the map, near the top right corner.

**Assets, Gaps,
and a Way Forward:
A Report on Early
Childhood Care and
Education in the
Round Lake Area**



This report was completed under the auspices of the Illinois Facilities Fund's Building Blocks program. The Illinois Facilities Fund (IFF) developed the Building Blocks program together with funder 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 together with community stakeholders, Building Blocks identifies and addresses underlying gaps in the child care and early education service delivery system. Funded by a \$3.5 million GVF grant, Building Blocks leverages both private and public sector resources to address these wide-ranging needs. Projects underway are building community networks, adding bricks and mortar capacity, and helping bring state-funded programs to the areas where they are needed the most.

About the IFF

The Illinois Facilities Fund (IFF) is a nonprofit community development corporation 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 financing for real estate acquisition, facility construction or renovation, equipment, vehicles and facility repairs. Second position loans with another lender and leasehold mortgages are also available. Additionally, IFF conducts research and evaluation to help community stakeholders make informed public policy and resource allocation decisions that affect the nonprofit sector.

GRAND VICTORIA
FOUNDATION

Accessible, high quality early childhood care and education is a key component of a healthy and sustainable community. With the majority of mothers remaining in the workforce while their children are young, families need access to dependable, safe and nurturing care for their children—sometimes for as many as 50 hours per week. This care needs to be affordable for working families of all incomes, and needs to fit families’ work schedules.

Equally important is ensuring that every child has access to quality early learning experiences. Decades of research have shown that children who participate in high quality educational programs from birth to age five enter school better prepared to succeed in kindergarten and beyond. This is especially true for children who are “at-risk” for future school difficulties due to low parental education, low family income, lack of English language skills, or other factors.¹

Despite the importance of providing high quality, accessible environments, most communities do not yet have a solid system of early care and education for children ages birth to five. In many communities, child care and other early learning programs cannot accommodate all of the children in the community who need these services. In rapidly growing communities like those in the Round Lake Area, programs often cannot keep pace with the growing population and pool of children needing care.

In addition, parents may not be aware of the services that exist, and often service providers work in isolation rather than in coordination, leaving parents to navigate a fragmented system. As a result, many children enter school without having had the early experiences that could have best prepared them for success. In September 2006, the United Way of Lake County assessed the proficiency of Round Lake Area kindergartners in six areas of “kindergarten readiness” skills. Round Lake Area kindergartners are well behind in all areas.

1. See for example, Committee on Integrating the Science of Early Childhood Development, Board on Children, Youth, and Families, National Research Council and Institute of Medicine. (2000). *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*. Jack P. Shonkoff and Deborah A. Phillips, Editors. National Academy Press, Washington, DC.

A Community Capacity Approach to Early Childhood Care and Education

In most communities, early childhood care and education is provided by a wide range of providers in an equally wide range of settings (See Early Childhood Care and Education Service Types and Funding Streams). In a single community, providers may include for-profit companies, non-profit community based agencies, faith-based groups, school districts, park districts, and individuals providing care in their own homes. This diversity of providers generally means that families have many different types of care and early education to choose from and programs are often able to flexibly respond to families' needs. In many cases, however, a child may benefit from more than one program but cannot access both or all of them as they are offered by different providers at different sites. In most communities there is no overarching planning body responsible for ensuring that enough services exist, that they are affordable for families, and that they meet families' needs. Even where these entities exist, resources are not typically available to assess the community's needs and identify critical shortages.

A growing number of communities have come together to create their own local collaborative groups to jointly review and plan for early childhood care and education services. These local taskforces or collaborations assess community needs and current resources, and develop strategic plans for increasing their community's capacity to meet the needs of young children and their families.

With funding from the Grand Victoria Foundation, the Illinois Facilities Fund's (IFF) Building Blocks Initiative works with communities with especially large unmet needs for early childhood care and education to identify needs, develop collaborations, and set strategic goals. These communities include those identified through IFF's 2003 statewide needs assessment, *Moving Towards a System*, as well as additional communities that were not included in the 2003 assessment, but that county-level agencies identified as needing additional child care and early learning resources. The Building Blocks Initiative brings together a wide range of stakeholders in each community to examine the extent to which needed services are available, accessible, high quality, and efficiently distributed throughout the community and the extent to which families, public officials, and other service providers know about these early childhood services. The collaborators then develop a plan to strengthen their community's capacity to meet their early childhood care and education needs.

The Round Lake Area Early Childhood Care and Education Task Force

In 2005, IFF partnered with United Way of Lake County, YWCA Lake County Child Care Resource and Referral, and Lake County Community Foundation to better understand the needs identified through the statewide needs assessment. The Round Lake Area was quickly identified as an area of high unmet need. This community has grown substantially in recent years and has experienced a high level of immigration. In addition, according to data from the Round Lake Area Schools, the majority of students in the district are from low-income families and only 55 percent of students met or exceeded standards on recent statewide tests.

In April 2006, IFF and its Lake County partners hosted the Lake County Early Childhood Care and Education Summit to look at capacity and need for early childhood care and education in several communities, including the Round Lake Area. In a breakout session specifically focused on the Round Lake Area, the need for further analysis and strategic planning around community capacity was identified. During the summer, IFF issued an informal request for proposals inviting targeted communities to apply for assistance completing this analysis and plan.

The Village of Round Lake Beach applied and called together the first meeting of a Round Lake Area Task Force in September 2006. The Round Lake Area Park District subsequently assumed leadership of this group that included representatives from the Round Lake Area Schools, local child care providers, social service providers, and other interested parties. The Task Force chose to focus its efforts on the area served by the Round Lake Area Schools, plus the catchment area of Avon Elementary School.

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 this data and verified that it matched what they were seeing in the community. IFF also gathered information from the YWCA Lake County Child Care Resource and Referral and Illinois Department of Human Services databases about the availability of center- and home-based slots for child care and use of state-subsidized Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) certificates in the area. This information was mapped to provide the graphic presentation of the current need for and supply of early childhood care and education. Figures 1-4 on page 4-7 show supply and demand for four different services: full-day child care provided to children of all income levels, full-day child care provided to children qualifying for the state-subsidized Child Care Assistance Program, state-funded Preschool for All, and Head Start.

The Task Force identified several key community needs and brainstormed possible strategies for addressing these needs as detailed below. This report represents the recommendations of the Task Force for continued capacity building for early childhood services in the Round Lake Area.

Figure 1
2005 Estimated Demand by Census Tracts
for Full-Day Child Care

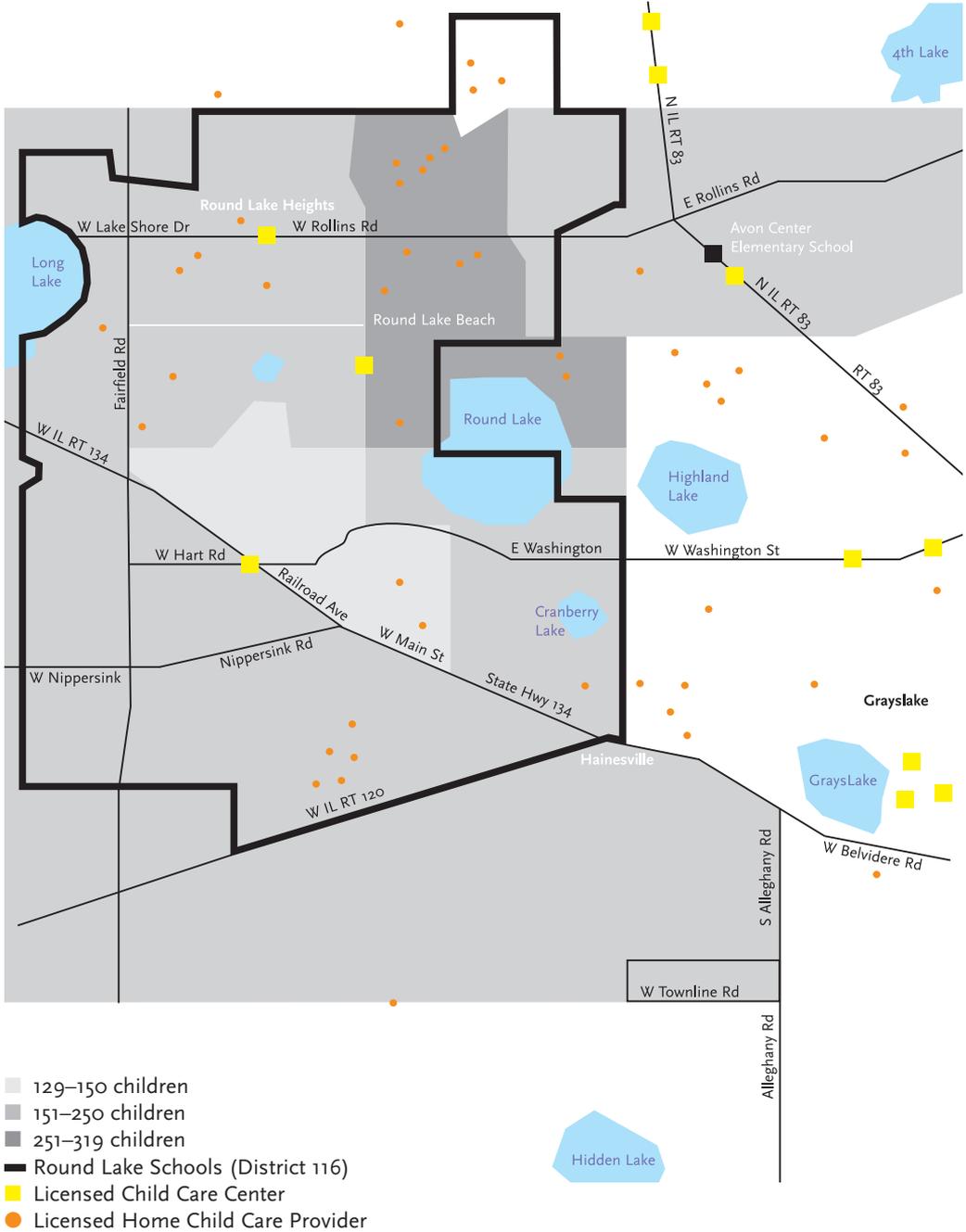


Figure 2
2005 Estimated Demand by Census Tracts for Full-Day Subsidized Child Care

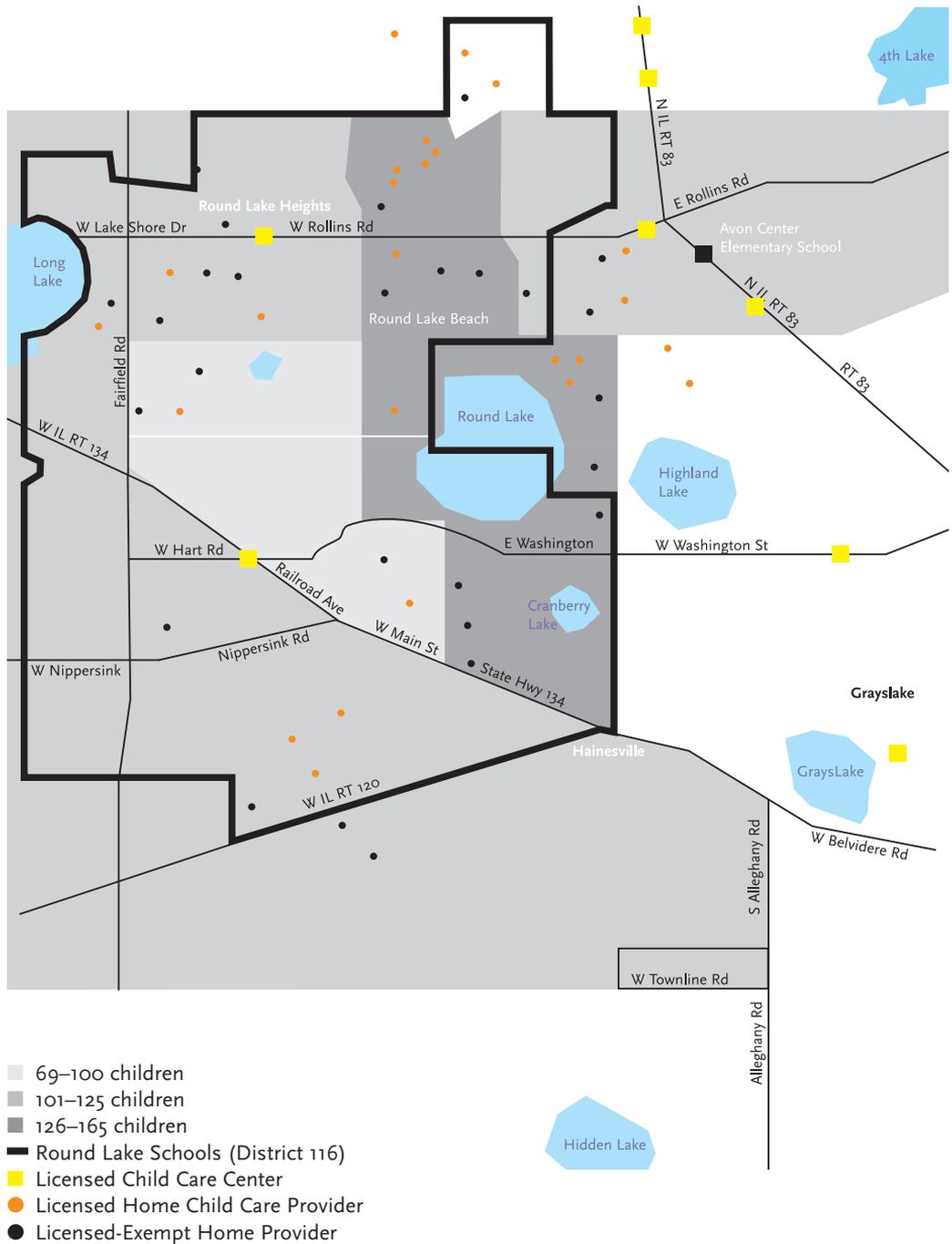


Figure 3
2005 Estimated Number of Preschool for All Priority Children

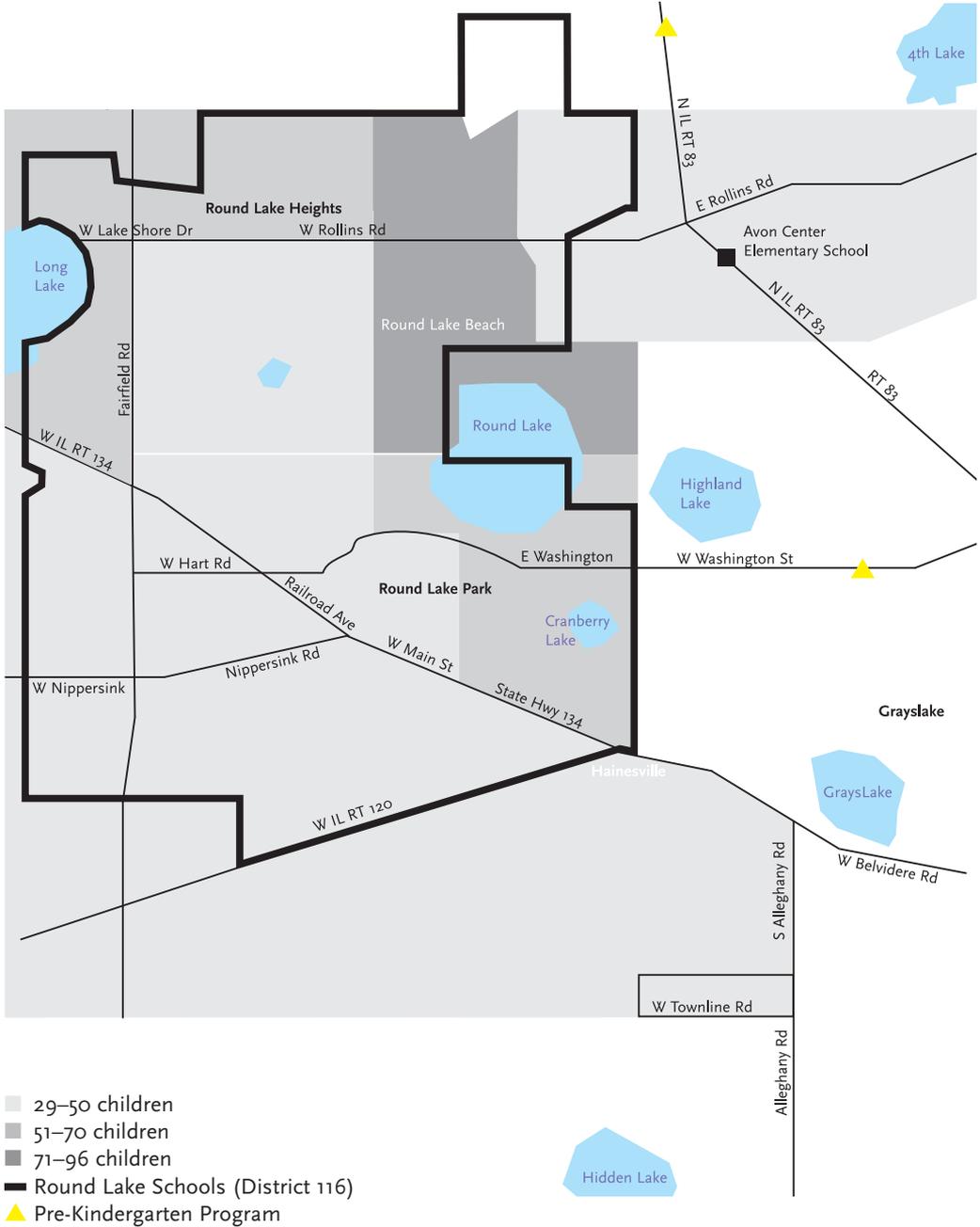
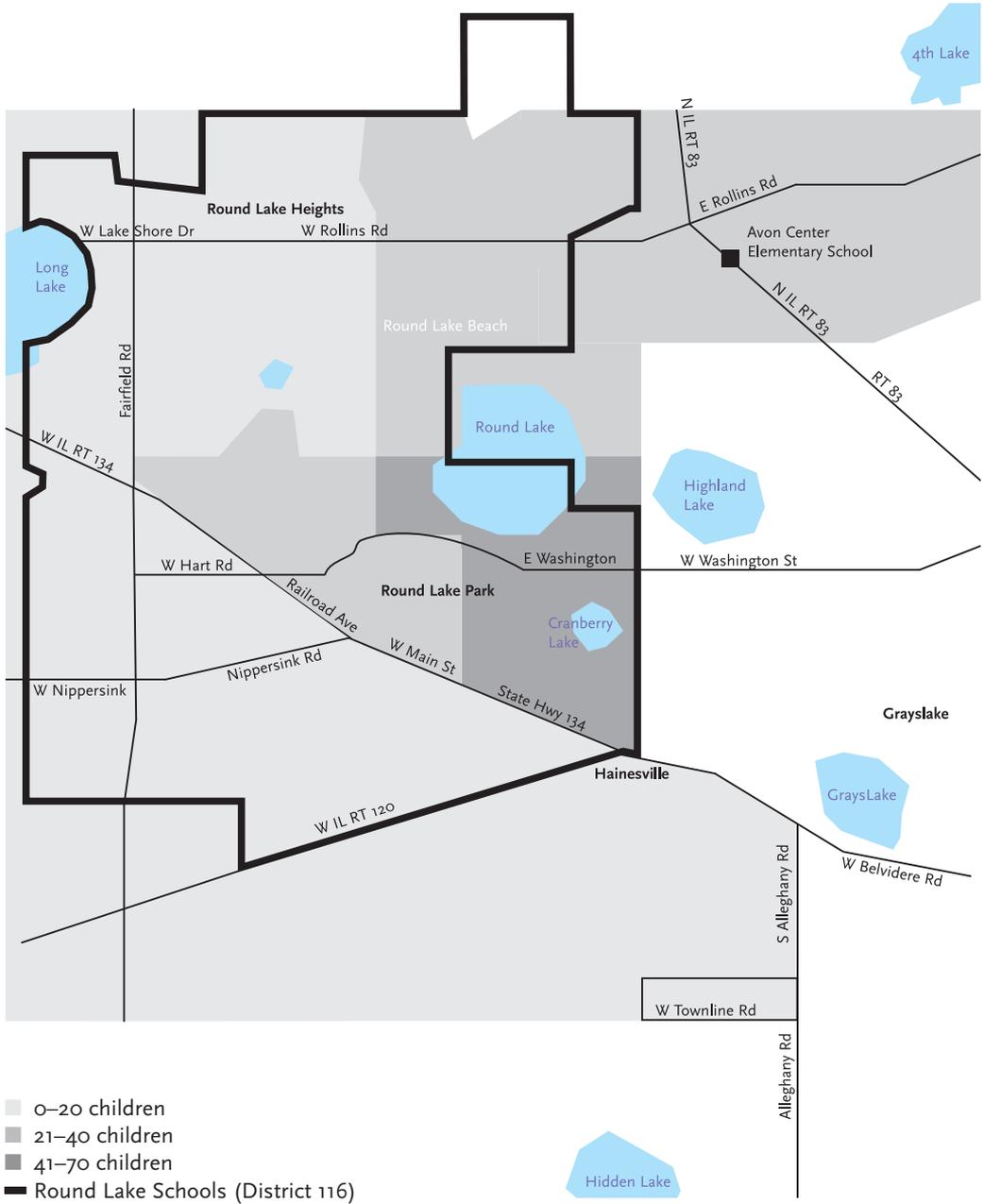


Figure 4
2005 Estimated Demand by Census Tracts
for Head Start



The Children of the Round Lake Area

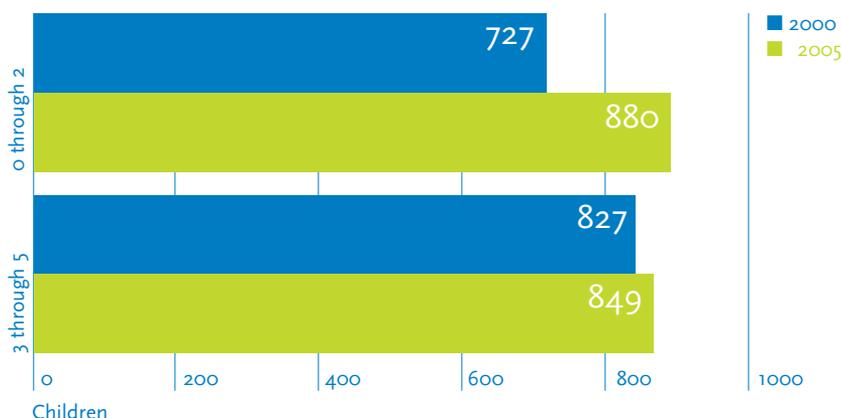
Number of children: In rapidly changing communities like the Round Lake Area, getting an accurate picture of young residents can be difficult. The 2000 Census data are now out-of-date, and area officials note that the Census figures (especially those related to family income) do not appear to reflect the current population. Therefore, several steps were taken to estimate the current population and its characteristics, including using 2005 population estimates from ESRI and school data on students' eligibility for Free and Reduced Price Lunch (see Methodology on page 19). According to these updated data sources, the Round Lake Area (defined as the area served by the Round Lake Area Schools and nearby Avon School in the Avon Community Unit School District) is home to approximately 4,790 children below school age. This includes approximately 2,430 children from birth to three and 2,360 children ages three through five.

The need for child care: Estimates of the number of children needing of full-day, full-year child care were created using a formula developed by IFF for its recent statewide assessment of child care demand and supply. This formula incorporates census-tract-level data on the number of families with young children in which all parents work, as well as national estimates of the percentage of such families in which full-day, full-year care is needed.

In the Round Lake Area, there are approximately 1,730 children from birth through five may need full-time, full-year child care. Of these, approximately 880 are infants through age two and 850 are ages three through five. This is a substantial increase from 2000, especially among infants and toddlers (see Chart 1). As Figure 1 shows, there is an especially high need for child care in the northern part of Round Lake Beach.

The need for subsidized child care: There has also been a dramatic 40.9 percent growth in the demand for child care subsidized through the state-subsidized Child Care Assistance Program over the past five years in the Round Lake Area. In 2005, approximately 910 children from birth through age five needed subsidized full-day, full-year child care, including about 450 children from birth through two and 460 children ages three through five (see Chart 2 on page 9). These children primarily live in Round Lake Beach and northern Round Lake Park.

Chart 1
Estimated Demand for Full-Day, Full-Year Child Care 2000 & 2005



The need for Preschool for All and Head Start: Of all of the children in the Round Lake Area, an estimated 38 percent live in families with low incomes, defined as below 185 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (the eligibility cut-off for Free and Reduced Price Lunch and Medicaid services). Approximately 890 of these low-income children are under age three while 920 are ages three through five. Approximately 870 Round Lake Area preschoolers qualify as high priority for Preschool for All. Furthermore, among these low-income children approximately 180 three- and four-year-olds and 196 children from birth to age three are in families with incomes low enough to qualify for Head Start or Early Head Start. As shown in Figure 3, there are especially high numbers of high priority Preschool for All children in Round Lake Beach. The number of Head Start-eligible children is highest in the area surrounding Round Lake (see Figure 4).

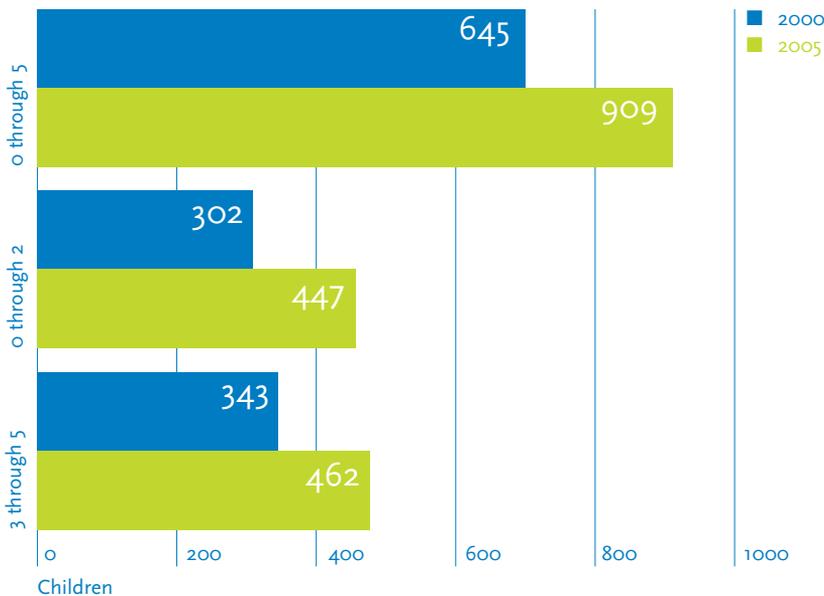
Current Programs and Services

Child Care: According to YWCA Lake County Child Care Resource and Referral, full-day, full-year center-based child care programs in the Round Lake Area can currently accommodate approximately 740 children. This includes slots in 11 child care centers located in or very near Round Lake, Round Lake Beach, and Round Lake Park. In addition, approximately 360 slots are available in licensed family child care homes in this area. As shown in Figure 1, the child care centers are distributed throughout the Area, while the licensed family child care homes are mostly located in the northern part of Round Lake Beach and Round Lake Heights. The majority of providers in the area accept Child Care Assistance Program certificates as payment for child care, although some providers require parents to pay the difference between their usual market rates and the state reimbursement rate.

Preschool for All: Two area child care centers, and a third in nearby Fox Lake/Ingleside, began providing Preschool for All services integrated into their full- day, full-year programs for children ages three and four in 2006. At this time there are no half-day or other Preschool for All programs in the Round Lake Area.

Head Start: Head Start does not provide any services in the Round Lake Area. No data on the number of children attending Head Start programs in other communities was available.

Chart 2
Estimated Demand for Subsidized Child Care 2000 & 2005



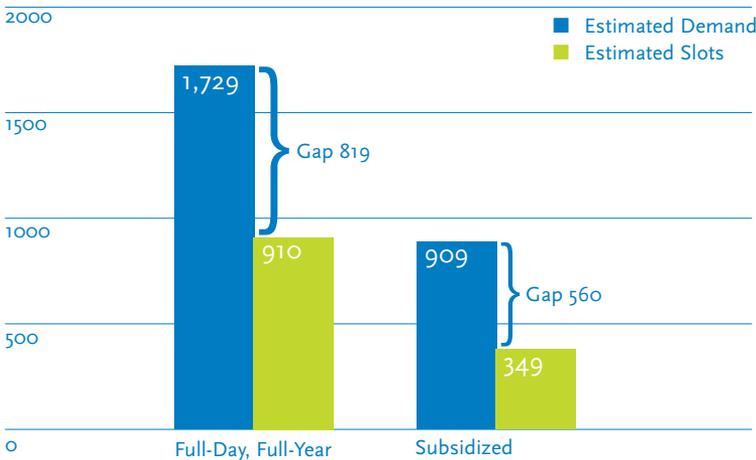
Critical Service Gaps

Full-Day Child Care: There is a substantial gap between the supply of licensed child care available in the community and the estimated demand. An additional 820 or more slots are needed from ages birth through five (See Chart 3). Almost all of this unmet demand is for subsidized child care: approximately 100-150 more slots of subsidized infant-toddler care and 250-300 more slots of subsidized care for children ages three through five are needed. Because children who receive subsidy are often at risk for later school difficulties, these expanded child care services will need to be educationally enhanced and ideally integrated with Preschool for All and/or Head Start services.

Subsidized Child Care: Taken together, the findings suggest that there are many families in the area who are eligible for subsidized child care but are not currently receiving it. Much of the unmet demand in the area is for subsidized child care and only about 12 percent of Child Care Assistance Program certificates in the area are used for license-exempt care (as compared to about 53 percent statewide). Many of these families may not be aware of their eligibility for this critical family support or may not know how to apply for a certificate.

Preschool for All: The Round Lake Area School District has identified increasing children’s preparedness for kindergarten as a key strategy for improving children’s success in school. Currently there are no part-day, publicly-funded preschool education programs located in the Round Lake Area (except services for children receiving special education) and only 120 slots of Preschool for All integrated into full-day, full-year child care. With as many as 870 Round Lake Area preschoolers in low-income families, and many with other risk factors such as low English proficiency, there is a critical need for additional no-cost preschool. Both half-day programs and programs integrated with full-day child care are needed. Ideally, these programs should work in tandem ensuring that families are directed to the programs best suited to their needs.

Chart 3
Estimated Demand vs Estimated Slots, 2005



Glossary

Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP)	Illinois Department of Human Services program that subsidizes child care for low-income working families
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
DCFS	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
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
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
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; Licensed-exempt home providers are typically relatives or close family friends who care for no more than three children
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	In 2006 the Preschool for All Program was created, expanding eligibility for state-funded preschool to all children. Programs that serve primarily at-risk populations receive priority in funding. Administered through the Illinois State Board of Education Early Childhood Block Grant
Round Lake Area	For this report, the Round Lake Area refers to the area served by the Round Lake Area Schools (District 116), as well as the catchment area for Avon School
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	For this report, the group of individuals in each community who met regularly and contributed to the development of this report

Strategies for Meeting the Needs in the Round Lake Area

To better meet the needs of children and families in the Round Lake Area, all stakeholders will need to act to increase the availability, quality, and accessibility of early childhood care and education services.

Round Lake Area Schools: One key strategy is for the Round Lake Area Schools to apply for Early Childhood Block Grant funding to develop a Preschool for All program. This program could start relatively small (perhaps two double-session classrooms serving 80 children) and then expand to meet the full demand for half-day programming. To avoid program fragmentation, and to support families needing both Preschool for All and full-day care, the Preschool for All program should ideally be designed to work not only with children’s families, but also with any home child care providers that care for the children (whether licensed or license-exempt). Specifically, over the next year, the schools could:

- Identify an initial site for at least two classrooms of Preschool for All for the 2007-08 school year
- Apply for funding for FY 2008 for this initial program
- Work with the other local providers of Preschool for All and with Head Start to develop a joint screening and referral program to ensure that programs are reaching all families in need and are not “competing” for children
- Develop a plan for expanding the Preschool for All program over the next several years, ideally placing preschool programs in every neighborhood so that they are easily accessible for families
- Develop a partnership with the YWCA Lake County Child Care Resource and Referral to promote communication and collaboration between licensed and license-exempt home child care providers and the Preschool for All program

Child Care Providers: Many new slots of full-day, full-year center-based child care need to be created to meet the demand in the Round Lake Area. Current providers in the area should be encouraged to expand and/or open additional centers, targeting families who are eligible for the Child Care Assistance Program. Programs should be designed to incorporate Preschool for All services in a full-day setting. Specifically, child care providers in the Round Lake Area and surrounding communities could:



- Explore feasibility of expanding existing facilities and programs
- Consider opening additional child care facilities in the Round Lake Area, especially in central Round Lake Beach and northern Round Lake Park
- Apply for Preschool for All funding to ensure that children have access to early education programs that are integrated with the full-day, full-year child care that centers provide
- Explore possible partnerships with Head Start, either allowing Head Start to use part of its facility (such as an after-school program room that is vacant during mid-day) or integrating Head Start services into its full-day program

Municipal Officials: Local municipal officials can support the expansion or development of additional child care centers by:

- Assisting child care providers in identifying suitable sites for new locations
- Ensuring that zoning and building requirements are not putting undue burdens on those interested in opening or expanding a child care center
- Encouraging developers to include child care facilities in new commercial and planned use developments
- Improving public transportation in the community so that families can access early care and education services

YWCA Lake County Child Care Resource and Referral:

The Child Care Resource and Referral should continue its efforts to recruit additional licensed family child care providers. As mentioned above, these new family child care homes should be linked with half-day Preschool for All or Head Start programs to ensure that children receive high quality early education services. Specifically, the Child Care Resource and Referral could:

- Partner with community-based organizations like Mano a Mano and local churches to build awareness about the child care licensing process and the need for additional licensed child care providers in the community
- Offer orientation and training in the Round Lake Area for those interested in becoming licensed family child care providers

Head Start: Head Start has been seeking a location to provide services in the Round Lake Area. Partnerships with the schools, park district, child care centers, or local community groups and churches should be pursued to create a program in the Round Lake Area. The Task Force could assist in this by surveying these organizations to determine whether they have appropriate spaces that are vacant at least part of the day and could be used as a Head Start site.

Other Community Groups: Social service agencies, churches and faith based groups, parent organizations, and other community groups can help strengthen community capacity by:

- Spreading the word about the Child Care Assistance Program, and helping families to apply for this critical support
- Increasing awareness among parents of young children about the importance of quality early learning experience
- Learning about the programs and resources available in the community, and helping families connect to these services

The Task Force: Members of the Task Force and potentially a broader group of providers serving young families in the Round Lake Area can help move all of the recommendations forward and maintain communication across agencies and programs by:

- Formalizing the Task Force into an Early Learning Council or other collaboration
- Setting an agenda to address the major recommendations identified in this report
- Acting as ambassadors for the Round Lake Area's child care and early education programs
- Helping to grow and strengthen support for the child care and early education sector

Early Childhood Care and Education Service Types and Funding Streams

Publicly-funded early childhood care and education in Illinois is often referred to as a “three-legged stool” comprised of Head Start, the Child Care Assistance Program, and Preschool for All funding streams. Each of these has a unique role in ensuring that all families have access to high quality, enriching care and education for their young children.

Child Care Assistance Program: The Illinois Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) was created to ensure that low-income parents have access to affordable child care so they can remain in the workforce and, ultimately, to ensure that young children have access to high quality early care and education, regardless of their family’s income or geographic location. The program is administered by the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) and is funded through the federal Child Care and Development Block Grant, TANF funds, and State General Revenue.

In order to qualify for assistance, a family must have an income below 50 percent of the state median income, or \$36,184 for a family of four in 2006 and be engaged in an allowable activity (such as work or certain education and training activities, including high school for teen parents). The subsidy will pay for care that is provided during the hours reasonably associated with the parent’s work/school schedule, including transportation and study time. Reimbursement is made at a half-day rate for less than five hours per day of care, and at the full-day rate for more than five hours. Thus, to qualify for a full-day center-based program, parents must be engaged in an allowable activity for at least five hours per day.

Eligibility is typically re-determined every six months, and families can lose eligibility if their income rises above the income cut-off or if they lose their job. All families are required to contribute a co-payment for their child’s care that is based on their income and the number of children they have in care who also receive a subsidy. This co-pay can be as high as 12 percent of the family’s gross income; a single mother who earns \$1,850 per month and has two children in care would have to contribute a co-pay of \$234 each month.

Eligible families in the Round Lake Area can access subsidized care through the YWCA Lake County Child Care Resource and Referral. Families receive a Child Care Assistance “certificate” and can choose from a wide range of child care services, including licensed center-based care, licensed family day care homes or legally license-exempt care (usually care by a relative or care in the child’s own home). Providers must meet all state licensing standards, or in the case of license-exempt care, pass a child abuse and neglect-focused background check. IDHS pays a daily rate to child care providers that varies by the type and location of the providers. This ranges from a low of \$9.48 per day for license-exempt home providers to a high of \$24.34 per day for a center-based program serving preschoolers in Lake County.

This rate is reduced by the amount of the required parent co-pay. Subsidies are provided only for those days children actually in attendance with parents engaged in an allowable activity (centers are reimbursed for all days the child is eligible as long as the child maintains 80 percent attendance). In 2006, approximately 350 children from birth through five in the Round Lake Area were receiving some type of subsidized child care, including approximately 185 children who received center-based care.

Preschool for All: Illinois’ Preschool for All (PFA) program was created in 2006 and is the outgrowth of the successful 20-year-old State Prekindergarten program. Funded with General Revenue dollars and administered through the Illinois State Board of Education Early Childhood Block Grant, Preschool for All provides funding for a half-day, school year-long program for children ages three and four. While priority is given in to programs serving a majority of “at-risk” children, all children are eligible to participate in Preschool for All programs.

Preschool for All programs may be operated by school districts or a wide range of community-based organizations, including non-profit and for-profit child care providers. While state funding provides for only 2.5 hours of instruction per day, Preschool for All can be integrated into a full-day, full-year child care program. Programs must use a research-based curriculum and must have Type-04 (Early Childhood) certified teachers.

Head Start: Head Start is a federally-funded program administered by Lake County Community Action Agency that provides a comprehensive set of educational, health, and social services to children ages three to five and their families in an effort to “break the cycle of poverty” and improve children’s chances for success in school and later life. Participants’ household income must be below the poverty line (currently \$19,350 for a family of four) or they must be receiving TANF or SSI benefits to qualify for the program, although once a child is enrolled he or she can remain in the program until kindergarten entry even if the family’s income rises.

Head Start programs must comply with the Head Start Performance Standards, a set of federal regulations that require the provision of a wide range of health, nutrition, mental health, special needs, and social services to enrolled children and their families. The Head Start program employs several staff members in addition to classroom staff in order to provide these services. Federal funds cover the cost of a half-day (3.5 hr/day, four day/week) center-based program.

Methodology

The population of low-income students enrolled in the Round Lake Area Schools was used to help determine the estimated demand for subsidized child care and Preschool for All based on a common community sentiment that the 2000 Census underestimated the low-income population in the area.

The following steps produced the estimate of low-income children used in this report:

The number of students enrolled in the Round Lake Area Schools that are considered low-income by district standards in 2000 and 2005 and the total number of school-age children in the census tracts comprising the approximate Round Lake Area Schools catchment area in 2000 (using Census 2000 data) and in 2005 (using 2005 ESRI Population Estimates) was determined.

The number of low-income students enrolled in the Round Lake Area Schools in each year was divided by the total number of school-age children in each year to arrive at an approximate low-income population proportion. The resulting overall low-income population proportions are 29.8 percent and 37.7 percent for 2000 and 2005, respectively.

These percentages were then applied to the total number of children in each census tract needing full-day child care to determine the total number that may be eligible for the state-subsidized Child Care Assistance Program and to the total number of three- and four-year-olds to determine the number that may need Preschool for All.

In addition, to develop an estimate of low-income children under age six, the low-income population proportions were multiplied by the appropriate age cohorts.

All other analyses in this report follow the methodology outlined in the IFF's 2003 report: *Moving Towards a System: A Statewide Early Childhood Care and Education Needs Assessment for Illinois*. This report is available at iff.org.

Data on the current supply of child care and early education programs was provided by the YWCA Lake County Child Care Resource and Referral and through direct contact with area providers.



Task Force Participants

Round Lake Area Park District, Lead Agency

Catalyst
Children's World Learning Center
College of Lake County
Community Action Partnership of Lake County
Kids Success
La Petite Academy
Mano a Mano
Round Lake Area Schools
St. Joseph School
Trinity Lutheran Youth Services
Village of Round Lake Beach
YWCA Lake County Child Care Resource and Referral

Special Thanks to Peggy Dohr, Round Lake Area Park District Assistant Director, and Theresa Hawley, consultant, both of whom made significant contributions to the development of this report.





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