A close-up, black and white photograph of a baby's face, smiling and looking slightly to the right. The baby has dark hair and is wearing a textured, knitted sweater. The image is overlaid with a white outline map of the state of Massachusetts, with the state's outline filled in purple. A white dot is visible on the map, located in the eastern part of the state, likely representing the area of Franklin Park and Melrose Park.

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



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 developed by local leaders in the communities of Franklin Park and Melrose Park for improving and growing early care and education capacity.



Overview of Franklin Park and Melrose Park Area

Franklin Park and Melrose Park are working class, industrial suburbs in western Cook County. Initially settled in the late 1800s, these communities expanded rapidly in the 1940s and 1950s as many manufacturers such as Douglas Aircraft and Buick opened plants in the area. Today, Franklin Park ranks as the fourth largest industrial area in Illinois.

The total population of this area grew slightly between 2000 and 2007 and is projected to remain steady through 2012. However, the stability of the total population obscures the significant demographic shifts that have occurred. The population of children under age six has grown by nearly four percent since 2000 and young children now make up nearly 10 percent of the total population. In addition, the Latino population has increased significantly from 47 percent of the total population in 2000 to approximately 55 percent. By 2012, it is projected to account for over 59 percent of the total population. Meeting the early care and education needs of the changing population in the area will require coordination and planning.

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

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

In the Franklin Park and Melrose Park area, 49 percent of children under age six are in families where either one parent or both parents are in the labor force.² Quality, affordable child care is essential to maintaining workforce participation and it is an important need for these families. Without access to dependable child care, many parents drop out of the workforce. Indeed, research shows that child care problems are 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.³ Child care is also an important support for parents who want to pursue further education to advance their careers: college students with children who have convenient access to child care have higher graduation rates and grade point averages than those without such services.⁴

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

Franklin Park and Melrose Park have 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 these communities. High quality early childhood care and education pays off immediately by ensuring parents are able to work, and in the long term by preparing children to succeed in school and ultimately in the workplace.

² Census 2000.

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

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

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

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

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

Franklin Park and Melrose Park Building Blocks Initiative

Through its work connecting families to supportive communities and resources, Illinois Action for Children (IAFC) recognized the significant demographic change in the area and knew that Latino families tend to be under-represented in Illinois' Child Care Assistance and Preschool for All systems. IAFC collaborated with Small World Learning Center to start a Preschool for All program in Franklin Park. Illinois' Preschool for All program emphasizes collaboration in order to offer families a range of coordinated services and both IAFC and Small World Learning Center had strong interest in forming relationships with other service providers and parents.

IAFC partnered with IFF in December 2007 to bring the Early Learning Planning Initiative to Franklin Park and Melrose Park to increase collaboration in the area and to develop service delivery models that could better meet the needs of young families. IAFC and Small World Learning Center served as the local lead agencies, bringing together community institutions and leaders and hosting the meetings.

A community Task Force formed in March 2008 and included representatives from the local school districts, Head Start, local child care and preschool providers, social service providers, and IAFC (the Child Care Resource and Referral 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. Using information provided by IAFC, IFF identified and surveyed early care and education providers to confirm the total number of children they can accommodate and the number of children currently enrolled in their programs. This information was mapped to provide the graphic presentation of the current need for and supply of early childhood care and education in the community.

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

About Illinois Action for Children

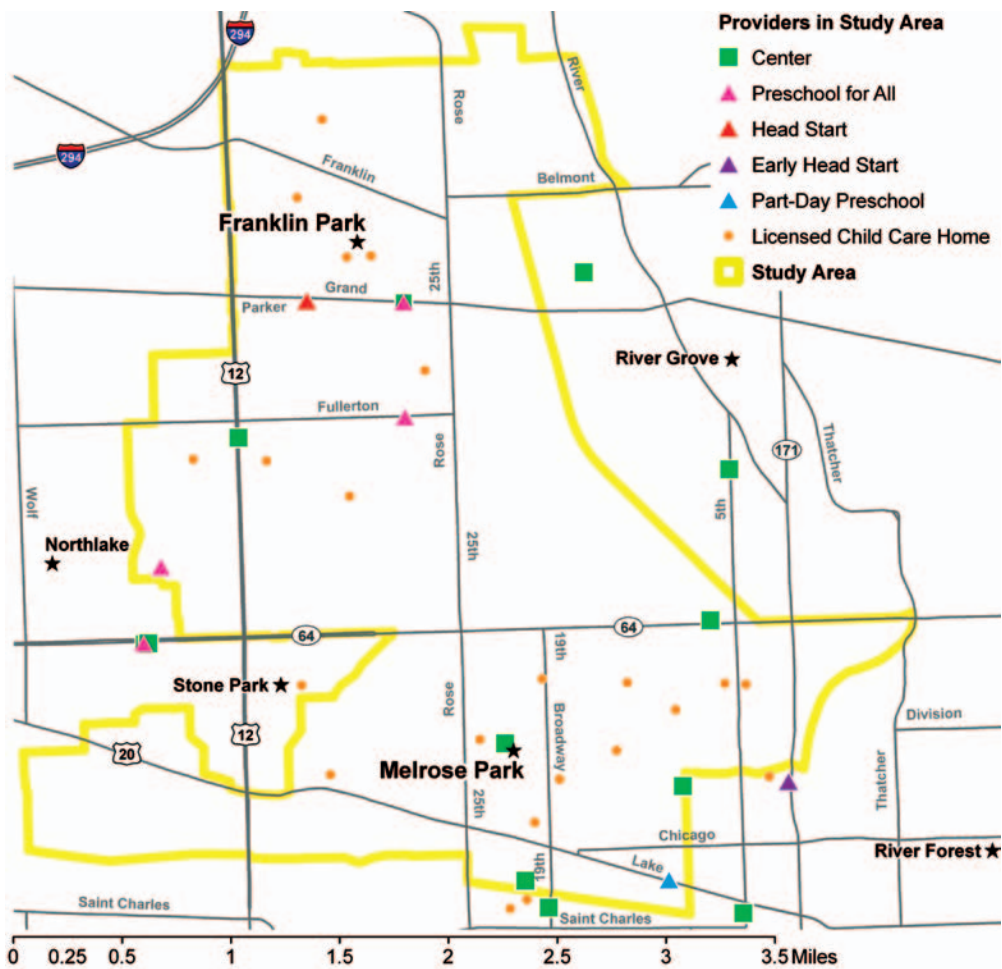
Founded in 1969, Illinois Action for Children (IAFC) works through advocacy and direct service to expand accessible, high quality programs supporting children's development, health and well-being, and promoting economic self-sufficiency in low-income families. With a staff of 350, IAFC seeks to connect the most isolated, fragile families in Illinois to supportive communities and resources. Programs include: Public Policy and Advocacy, Child Care Resource and Referral, administration of the Illinois Child Care Assistance program in Cook County, Preschool for All (in conjunction with child care centers and home-based providers).

Early Childhood Care and Education Assets and Gaps in Franklin Park and Melrose Park

Child Care Needs and Services

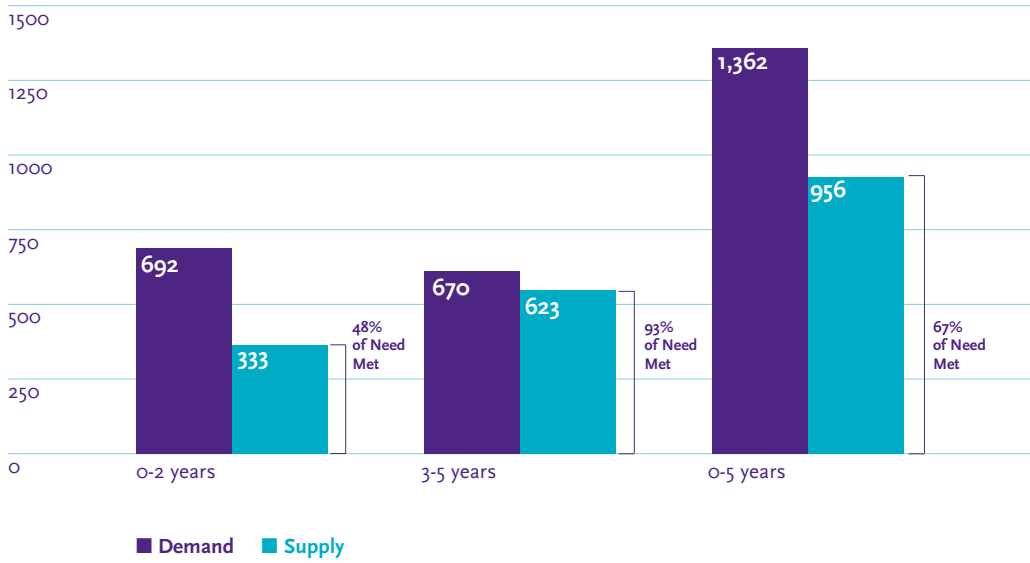
Approximately 4,320 children ages birth through five live in the Franklin Park and Melrose Park study area (Figure 1), including 2,200 children under three and 2,120 children ages three through five. More than 30 percent of these children need full-day, full-year child care because their parents work or attend school and do not have a relative or friend available to provide care. More than 500 children from birth through five need full-day, full-year care that can be funded using the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), Illinois’s subsidy program for low-income families.

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



There are 13 child care centers and 23 licensed family child care homes in the Franklin Park and Melrose Park area that provide full-day, full-year care. Together, these providers can serve approximately 333 children under age three and 623 children ages three to five. This represents only 67 percent of the total estimated need for full-day, full-year child care in the area. Most of the gap between supply and demand is in services for children under age three. Providers can meet only 48 percent of the need for full-day, full-year care for children ages birth through two, while they can meet 93 percent of the need for children ages three through five (Figure 2).

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



In addition, it is important to note that area child care centers reported that they serve many children who live outside the Franklin Park and Melrose Park area, so the actual number of “slots” of child care available for children in this community is significantly less than it appears given a simple supply and demand analysis. There is a need for substantially more child care services that are affordable and accessible for families in the community.

Members of the Task Force confirmed that families in Franklin Park and Melrose Park often have difficulty finding affordable full-day, full-year care and that many parents rely on “patchwork care”—an ever-changing arrangement based on parents finding whoever is able to care for their children on a given day. This type of unstable care is far from ideal for very young children and leads to high stress and absenteeism for working parents.

Other Early Learning Needs and Services

There are approximately 1,440 children in Franklin Park and Melrose Park who are age-eligible for Preschool for All. At least 395 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 and those integrated with full-day child care) can currently serve 200 children. Head Start, the federally-funded preschool program targeting families and poverty, can serve 96 children in the area. This leaves many young, at-risk children without the early learning services that could prepare them for success in school.

Table 1: Franklin Park and Melrose Park Early Childhood Snapshot

Gaps in Franklin Park and Melrose Park’s Child Care Supply	
Estimated Number of Children Needing Full-Time Care	1,362
Number of Children that can be Served by Existing Supply	914
Gap:	448
Preschool Need and Publicly Funded Slots	
Total Number of 3 and 4 year olds	1,438
Low-Income 3 and 4 year olds	395
Total Number of Publicly Funded Preschool Slots (including Head Start, At-Risk Pre-Kindergarten, and Preschool for All)	296

Key Issue: Families Most in Need Are Not Accessing Services

Given the reports by providers that they serve primarily families who live outside Franklin Park and Melrose Park and school district administrators' reports that most children are coming to kindergarten with no prior formal early learning experiences, it is clear that many families are not accessing the early childhood education and care services they need.

Barriers for Families:

- **Need for Full-Day Services:** School district part-day Pre-Kindergarten programs noted that many families are unable to enroll their children because they need full-day care.
- **Awareness:** Many families do not understand the importance of stable, high quality early childhood care and education, and are not aware of available services.
- **Access to CCAP:** Many families are not aware of the assistance available through the CCAP program or need help in understanding how to access that assistance.
- **Cost:** Although 70 percent of the child care centers within the area studied accept Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) payments, the state child care subsidy program, many families struggle to afford the required co-payments for care. In addition, many families earn just over the income limit for CCAP eligibility and are unable to afford the full cost of care, which can exceed \$20,000 per year for a family with two young children. The school districts noted that they had considered creating a tuition-based preschool program to serve more children but concluded that few families would be able to afford it.
- **Legal Barriers:** Several programs reported encountering grandparents who are raising grandchildren but do not have legal guardianship and, therefore, cannot enroll children in programs. In addition, some undocumented immigrant parents in the community are reluctant to apply for CCAP or to enroll their children in preschool programs for which they may be eligible.

Barriers for Providers:

- **Lack of Qualified Staff:** Programs reported great difficulty in recruiting and retaining qualified staff for their programs. The shortage of qualified bilingual staff is particularly acute. There is also a lack of opportunity for staff to take college courses within the community.
- **Children's Special Needs:** There has been a significant rise in autistic spectrum disorders and behavioral issues among children in the community over the past decade. Child care programs have difficulty meeting these children's needs with limited training and without additional staffing.
- **Lack of Information about Supportive Services:** While some child care and early learning providers in the community are well-connected with available resources, others are not aware of the many sources of support for quality programs (e.g., TEACH Early Childhood Scholarships for staff, and Great START wage supplements for qualified staff).
- **Need for More Networking Among Providers:** The Task Force meetings represented the first time that most of the members had met one another and shared their experiences serving the community. The need for continued networking and communication among providers was acknowledged by all.
- **Facilities:** Most providers, especially school districts, noted that a lack of space prevents them from expanding their early childhood education and care services. Mannheim School District 83 is investigating the possibility of creating a new early childhood education center.

Key Community Assets

The early childhood care and education community in Franklin Park and Melrose Park has many strengths. These include:

- **Existing Programs with Blended Funding Model:** Small World Learning Center and ABC Children's Center successfully operate with a blended funding model, combining Preschool for All and child care funds. They can serve as a model for expanding educationally enriching full-day services in the community.
- **School Districts:** The elementary school districts in the area are committed to early education, and are interested in expanding their programs to ensure that more children enter school prepared to succeed.
- **Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R):** IAFC and Children's Home + Aid are committed to working with providers and community members to strengthen early childhood care and education in Franklin Park and Melrose Park.

Goals and Strategies

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

Establish an ongoing forum for communication and partnership-building among early care and education providers and other service providers in the Franklin Park and Melrose Park Area.

- Children's Home + Aid will provide organizational support for the development of a local early learning collaboration and Director's Network that will meet six to eight times per year to share information, stay informed of currently available resources, and learn from outside speakers.

Develop a plan for recruiting and training more qualified staff, especially bilingual staff, for the early childhood care and education workforce in the Franklin Park and Melrose Park area.

- Once formed, the Director's Network will work with Children's Home + Aid to develop a plan for providing professional development to area child care staff.
- Triton College will investigate the possibility of providing early childhood course work in the community, perhaps on-site at child care centers as they have done in Oak Park.
- The Director's Network will work with local four-year colleges (e.g., Dominican University, Concordia University, and Elmhurst College) that offer an Early Childhood Education major to recruit graduates to work in local programs.

Increase awareness of the importance of quality early childhood care and education and of the services currently available in the community.

- Procure Head Start and Early Head Start will share its annually updated community resource directory with other early care and education providers in the community.
- The Director's Network will create a resource directory for families and will update it at least annually. It will create partnerships in the community (e.g., with local service clubs, hospitals, pediatric clinics, etc.) to publish the directory and distribute it to all families with young children. Directories from Oak Park, Cicero, and All Our Kids Networks will be collected as examples.

Develop programs that are accessible and targeted to families to meet the growing demand in Franklin Park and Melrose Park.

- Task Force Members will develop a plan for disseminating this report to municipal leaders, and will encourage these leaders to include early childhood care and education as part of their plans for community development.
- Child care providers, school districts, and community agencies will continue to look for licensable space for expanding early learning services and full-day care.

Future Direction in Franklin Park and Melrose Park

The Task Force meetings 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.

Moving forward, it will be important to develop a collaboration structure that is sustainable. 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 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 fund this type of network through contributions from participating institutions and organizations such as, school districts, Head Start, child care centers, and the Child Care Resource and Referral, among others.

Many of the children that live in Franklin Park and Melrose Park and need full-day, full-year care are not enrolled in area centers. Addressing this apparent mismatch and the need for additional capacity, especially for infants and toddlers, will mean working to reduce the barriers parents face, increasing awareness of the importance of quality early childhood care and education and of the services currently available in the community, and increasing the amount of full-day capacity in Franklin Park and Melrose Park.

The continued leadership of IAFC and Children's Home + Aid will be crucial in ensuring that the momentum developed in these Task Force meetings is sustained.

Methodology

This report analyzes the supply and demand for and geographical distribution of early childhood care and education resources in Franklin Park and Melrose Park. 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 CCAP subsidized child care program (both licensed and license-exempt), Head Start/Early Head Start, the Preschool for All programs, and state Pre-K programs.

IFF determined demand for the 10-census tract study area by combining updated 2007 population data and household income data acquired from ESRI with Census 2000 data on the work status of parents and other program-specific eligibility requirements.

- Full-day, full-year child care demand includes all children from birth through five in working families after removing a fraction to reflect families that work split shifts or have other family members care for their children based on estimates adapted from the Urban Institute's *National Child Care Survey*.
- Subsidized child care demand includes all children ages birth through five in working families with incomes at or below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) after removing a fraction to reflect families that work split shifts or have other family members care for their children.
- Head Start/Early Head Start demand includes 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 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 Child Care Resource and Referral Agency, in January 2008. IFF surveyed area providers in March 2008 to update and expand upon the data provided by Child Care Connections.

Glossary

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

Task Force Members

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