THE FIRST STEP TO EQUITY

Building a Better Future Through Early Childhood Education in St. Louis

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FORE-WORD

What we experience as a child sets the stage for life.

In the first five years of a child's life, the foundations of his or her social, emotional and even economic well-being are shaped by moments big and small. And yet, despite the efforts of many passionate people, this critical time of development has been overlooked and underfunded, as seen in our inequitable early childhood education system.

But why is it inequitable?

This is the question that inspired our research. The following report aims to quantify the issues, highlight the challenges faced by parents and early childhood education providers, and recommend actions we can take to improve the accessibility, affordability and quality of early childhood education programs in the St. Louis region.

We invite you to join us as we take the first step toward equity — by building an early childhood education system that will lead to a better future for St. Louis.

AC-KNOWL-EDGE-MENTS

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INTRO-DUC-TION

OFF TO SCHOOL AND BEYOND

For the nearly 80,000 children under the age of six that live in the St. Louis region, the first day of school is a pretty big deal. It's where they'll unlock the power of numbers, explore the furthest reaches of the alphabet, and make life-long friends. But preparing for this special day goes further than having a backpack, notebook and No. 2 pencil. Access to high-quality early childhood education (ECE) lays the groundwork for not only their first day of school, but for every other first in their life — their first day of high school, their first job, even their first child. And the ripple-effect doesn't stop there.

The Not-So-Small Impact of ECE

CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Positive behaviors and relationships that boost kindergarten readiness are developed in children enrolled in ECE programs, reducing the effects of toxic stressors outside the classroom.[1]

ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Children in ECE programs form strong social and academic skills, helping to even the playing field in school readiness.[2]

ECONOMIC GROWTH

St. Louis will see a stronger workforce built on parents returning to work and children succeeding academically.[3]

SUCCESSFUL ADULTS

The young children of today will blossom into the healthy, high-achieving adults of tomorrow, reducing the strain on public resources to support social services.[4]

Unfortunately, many challenges stand in the way of giving every child in St. Louis an equal chance at a successful first day of school. The biggest hurdle is the area's long history of economic and racial segregation, with discriminatory zoning policies and disinvestment in certain neighborhoods reaching back to the early 1900s.[5] Simply because of their skin color and address, multiple generations have been denied access to quality housing, employment, and education.

For families who are living in poverty, finding affordable, high-quality ECE programs in their neighborhood is very hard. What's worse, the few programs that are available don't have access to the right resources, hurting their ability to prepare children for school and for life.[6] It's an issue highlighted in many reports, notably the Ferguson Commission Report and For the Sake of All.[7,8]

It's time we took a stand.

By investing in high-quality, comprehensive, and accessible ECE programs, we can take the first step towards breaking the cycle of poverty, ensuring every child has the skills he or she needs to lead a successful life, and creating stronger, more vibrant communities for future generations in St. Louis.

AT FIRST GLANCE

An Overview of the St. Louis Early Childhood Education System

In this report, we'll take an up-close look at the strengths and weaknesses of the St. Louis early childhood education system and the communities it serves. Our goal is to shed light on where gaps exist and what we can do to ensure every child takes the first step into a better future. We'll pinpoint not just where the greatest need is for ECE services, but the issues driving that need. Finally, we'll make our recommendations on what steps should be taken to improve the system as a whole, both in the long- and short-term.

LAYING OUT ALL THE PIECES

To understand the issues affecting ECE access in specific communities, understanding the ins and outs of the overall St. Louis ECE landscape is key. This, in addition to the data, will give us a better idea of where to invest on the smaller scale and how to strengthen the system as a whole.

FORMAL VS. INFORMAL ECE SYSTEM

Formal ECE is care that is licensed or otherwise regulated. It can be provided in a home, school, or center-based setting. Informal ECE, which is often referred to as family, friend, or neighbor care, is unlicensed and unregulated. Because of this, very little information is available about informal care.

QUALITY

Missouri is one of the only states across the country that lacks a statewide Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). Without one, we can't objectively measure and communicate ECE quality to families, providers, and others who can implement change. We are currently seeing rumblings of change, however, as a state-level pilot program will be implemented in 2019-2020.

ECE WORKFORCE

ECE providers are facing a serious lack of qualified teachers. Low wages and lack of benefits are preventing professionals from entering and staying in the ECE field, which has led to high levels of turnover.

COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

St. Louis has several community development efforts including Promise Zones, a HUD Choice Neighborhood, the 24:1 Initiative, and Invest STL. These initiatives look to address broader community priorities such as housing, workforce development, and education. To ensure better coordination throughout the ECE system, access to high-quality ECE needs to be a major goal of all these initiatives.

FACILITIES

Because of its direct link to health and safety, the physical environment of an ECE facility is super important to both families and ECE providers alike. It's also an essential component of ECE program quality, since light-filled, comfortable interiors can stimulate brain development and promote learning.[9] However, the cost of meeting and maintaining quality standards has become too high for many ECE providers.

SUBSIDIZED CARE

In Missouri, families living at or below 138% of the federal poverty level (FPL) are eligible for state subsidies to help with the cost of ECE services. However, those subsidies don't cover enough of the actual cost of the services to make high-quality programs affordable for families or financially viable for providers.

Families living below the federal poverty level are eligible for the federally funded Early Head Start and Head Start programs, but these programs often don't have enough slots to meet demand. On top of this, ECE providers are also forced to cover the difference between what they receive in federal dollars and the actual cost of providing their services.

REIMBURSEMENT RATES

ECE providers that offer subsidized care to eligible families are reimbursed by the state for a portion of the cost. However, Missouri offers one of the lowest provider reimbursement rates in the country.[10] This makes it extremely difficult for ECE programs to stay afloat, let alone provide high-quality services to every child in their community. But with recent increases in funding for the federal Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG), there is a strong chance that we will see some improvements in these rates soon.

A Step-By-Step Guide to the State Subsidy Process

While the Missouri Childcare Subsidy Program makes it easier for families to afford ECE services, it can be a very difficult process for both parents and ECE providers to navigate. To be eligible for the state subsidy, a family's household income must be at or below 138% FPL at the time of enrollment. That's about $32,000 a year for a family of four.

Federal guidelines suggest that affordable care should cost no more than 7% of a family's income. That's about $2,240 a year, or $43 a week, for subsidy-eligible families. Given that the average annual market-rate cost of ECE services in St. Louis is $8,318[11], the state subsidy should ideally make up for the $6,000 difference between the cost of care and what families can afford. Faced with one of the lowest subsidy reimbursement rates in the country, ECE providers in St. Louis are challenged to cover the true cost of care by themselves and many families simply don't have access to affordable care.

When determining how much or how little subsidy a family receives, several factors are considered. These factors are highlighted on the next page, along with a real-life example of how the subsidy process works for a St. Louis family.

HOW THE STATE SUBSIDY RATE IS CALCULATED

BASE RATE
DETERMINATION FACTORS

Characteristics that affect the amount of money the state reimburses providers for the cost of providing ECE services to eligible families

CHILD SPECIFIC

HOURS ENROLLED IN CHILDCARE

FULL DAY	HALF DAY	PART DAY
5-10 HRS	3-5 HRS	30 MINS-3 HRS

PROVIDER SPECIFIC

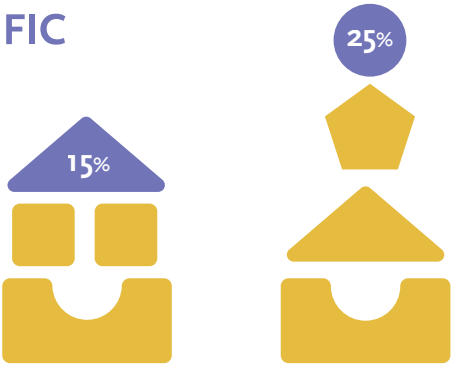
RESIDING COUNTY

FACILITY TYPE

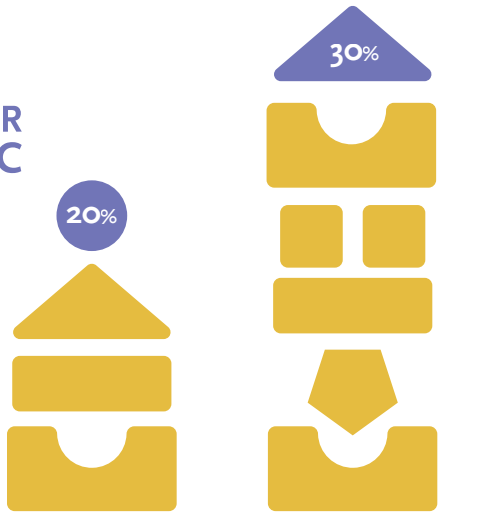
RATE ENHANCEMENTS

Factors that increase the reimbursement rate based on the percentage indicated

CHILD SPECIFIC



PROVIDER SPECIFIC



LOCAL SPOTLIGHT:

STATE SUBSIDIES

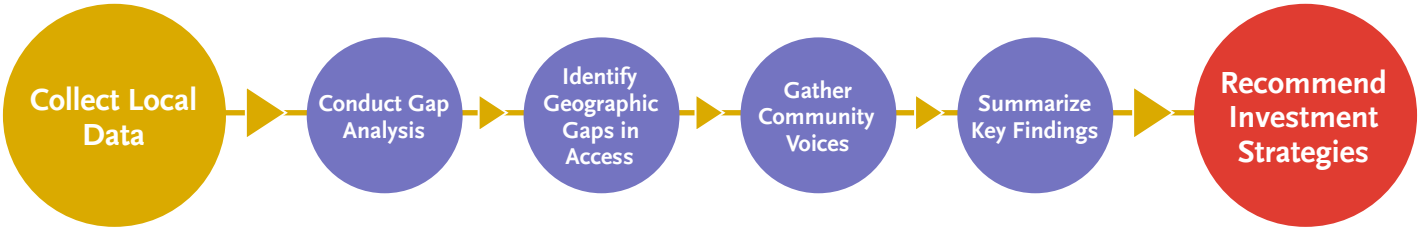
Michelle, a single mother of three who lives in St. Louis, is looking to enroll her one-year-old daughter in an ECE program. As a nail technician, Michelle makes $20,235 a year and is authorized by the state to receive 23 full days of care a month.

Michelle has chosen a center where, based on its location and the rate enhancements the provider receives for accreditation and disproportionate share, the state will reimburse the provider $43.18 per day for full-day care. Combined with the $5 per day that Michelle must pay out of pocket, the provider receives a total of $13,192 per year.

However, the provider must pay at least $18,000 annually to provide services for Michelle's daughter, leaving a gap of almost $5,000 a year that they must fill by finding outside revenue sources, or sacrifice program quality by paying their teachers lower wages, eliminating benefits for their employees, or delaying facility maintenance.

Needless to say, this confusing system leaves families with few affordable options, ECE providers with limited resources, and employees and teachers with very little support. And at the center of it all, unfortunately, is the child.

How We Conducted Our Research



To find inequities in the ECE system, IFF first identified gaps in access to services. We compared the number of children likely to seek formal ECE services (i.e., the demand) to the number of available slots in the formal ECE system (i.e., the supply). The difference between these two numbers is called the service gap. The larger the service gap, the greater the need for ECE services in that community. The percentage of children who have access to an ECE slot is called the service level.

But our research didn't stop there. We explored gaps in ECE access by age and by funding source. We also looked at differences in access to providers that have made efforts in quality improvement by going above and beyond state licensing standards (e.g. programs with state or national accreditation, Pre-K programs, and Early Head Start/Head Start programs). Finally, we examined the role of subsidies and the affordability of care.

After identifying specific areas where the need was strongest, we researched those communities more thoroughly. With help from our friends at SkipNV, we interviewed ECE directors, teachers, employees, and parents of young children to get a better understanding of the ECE system through their eyes. We uncovered what factors play into parental decision-making, as well as the challenges of running a financially sound ECE program, maintaining program quality, and navigating the regulatory environment.

To learn more about our process, visit: **https://iff.org/our-services/research/.**

What the Data Says

It turns out the biggest obstacle to equal access isn't the number of slots available, but the affordability of those slots. The largest gap we found was in access to subsidized care — meaning slots for families who can't afford market-rate care. Of all children ages 0-5 in St. Louis who are eligible for subsidies, only 45% have a slot available to them in their neighborhood. What's worse, only 19% of children who are eligible for subsidies have access to a slot at a provider that has met requirements beyond licensing — an indicator of program quality.

Frankly, federal and state subsidies don't cover enough of the cost of high-quality care, leaving ECE providers no choice but to charge higher fees or not accept subsidies at all. This also makes services even more inaccessible to families with low incomes.

GAP ANALYSIS

By Program Type & Age Group

Service Gap (Supply less Demand; # of available ECE slots once demand is met)

Service Level (% of children with access to ECE slots)

	Age 0–2	Age 3–5	Age TOTAL
OVERALL ECE	2,691	5,353	8,044
	120%	125%	123%
OVERALL ECE Met Requirements Beyond Licensing	-8,181	-6,881	-15,062
	40%	67%	57%

	Age 0–2	Age 3–5	Age TOTAL
SUBSIDIZED ECE	-1,563	-3,208	-4,771
	55%	38%	45%
SUBSIDIZED ECE Met Requirements Beyond Licensing	-2,792	-4,293	-7,085
	20%	18%	19%

Case Study

To bring to life the challenges faced by ECE providers in St. Louis, we'll be sharing the story of Urban Sprouts Development Center and its director, Ellicia.

Urban Sprouts is one of the only mixed-income, Reggio-inspired ECE centers in Missouri. From its bright and spacious new center in University City, it provides high-quality programs to 124 children, 57% of whose care is state or federally subsidized. Urban Sprouts is a favorite ECE choice for a diverse set of families in St. Louis.

While Urban Sprouts is a high-quality program that families love (they have a waiting list of over 200 children), facilities used to be a major issue. Walking through the natural-light-filled, colorful, engaging center, you probably wouldn't guess that the program was once being operated in two relatively old buildings with significant maintenance issues. Every time it rained or a pipe burst, the building flooded and Ellicia was met with a shrug from her landlords, telling her to cover the cost herself. During her first five years of operating Urban Sprouts, she spent more than $100,000 repairing buildings that she didn't even own.

The expansion of Urban Sprouts into its new facility, however, didn't come without a few challenges. During the planning and development of the center, Ellicia faced a number of roadblocks related to its financing, construction, licensing, and opening. But thanks to the hard work of a large coalition of organizations and the use of special financial tools, her vision did eventually come to life. Unfortunately, Ellicia's was a special case. The sheer amount of time, effort, and investment that it took for Urban Sprouts to expand can't be easily replicated by other ECE programs.

FROM ASSESS-MENT TO ACTION

OUR PLAN FOR CHANGE

Based on our research, we've identified five key areas to address within the St. Louis ECE system if change is to be set in motion. In this chapter, we'll go through our recommendations for both immediate and longer-term improvements. Each of these recommendations is critical to creating a stronger ECE system and giving the children of St. Louis a more impactful first school experience.

1. Strengthen the ECE Workforce

When Ellicia decided to expand Urban Sprouts, she knew that finding qualified ECE teachers for her six new classrooms would be a struggle. What she didn't know, however, was that it would take nearly a year. Seeing the vacant classrooms in her beautiful new center would only serve as a stark reminder of the many barriers she had yet to face if she was going to provide high-quality ECE services to high-need communities.

ECE teachers and program leaders are at the heart of a strong ECE system — yet we have a staffing crisis on our hands. Low wages and a lack of benefits have caused high turnover rates in the ECE workforce, keeping qualified ECE teachers from staying in one place. Without efforts to better compensate and develop high-quality ECE teachers, this trend will only continue.

It's also important to note that many ECE owners and directors enter the field out of a passion for the work, often without formal business training. This makes an already complex landscape, complete with staff recruitment, management, and retention, even more challenging to navigate.

Community Voices

"When I first got into the industry, I never charged a sliding fee. I was like, "Oh no, they can't afford [that}" and when I started charging [sliding fees], [parents] pay it but we'll get some that leave, but then they'll go to a lesser quality place."

— Local provider on financial model

"We must view an ECE provider as an early childhood professional by encouraging leadership, adding value to others, and value this role as one that pays a living wage. We must view child care business owners as entrepreneurs and support them with business development practices, management and leadership practices so they have the tools to operate safe, high-quality and sustainable child care businesses so child care supply is increased and sustained."

— CEO of Child Care Aware of Missouri on the unstable supply of ECE providers

"I think that if they [increased subsidies] to the centers we can offer [more money] to our staff so that way [we] can always have a stable staff. I mean, most of us are small so we can only offer $9-$10 per hour because we don't have that funding behind us, so that's a big challenge."

— Local provider on staffing

LOCAL SPOTLIGHT:

TEACHERS

As part of our research, it was important to understand the challenges of the ECE system through the eye of parents and ECE providers. With help from our partners at SkipNV, we spoke with ECE owners, directors, teachers, and employees about the obstacles they face.

The key to providing high-quality care? "Patience."

We can understand why. On top of their already heavy workload with minimal resources (both in pay and classroom materials), ECE teachers also manage children with a wide spectrum of traumas, temperaments, learning needs, and behaviors in their classes. Throw in low wages, minimal benefits, and a lack of training/professional development, it shouldn't come as a surprise that many ECE teachers are leaving the field or not entering the profession at all.

2. Increase Access to Subsidized Care

Ellicia recognized that there weren't enough subsidized ECE slots to accommodate the children of families with low incomes in her community. To address this, she combined two older spaces into one larger center. But while Urban Sprouts doubled its capacity for subsidized care, Ellicia still had a long line of children on her waitlist.

Currently, St. Louis doesn't have enough subsidized ECE slots to give every child in a family with low income a chance at a high-quality early education.

While there are 8,700 children in the St. Louis region who are eligible for state-subsidized ECE services, there are only 3,900 subsidized slots available. And it certainly doesn't help that only half of the available slots are within programs that meet requirements beyond licensing standards.

Even with subsidies, tuition at most local community providers is still too costly for many families to afford. If we're going to bridge the gaps in ECE access, high-need communities need to be our first priority.

Along with greater access to subsidized care, we also must provide technical support to parents and ECE providers to help them successfully navigate the ECE system, as its various moving pieces (like health codes, licensing requirements, and the federal and state subsidy process) can be very confusing.

3. Make Quality a Priority

Ellicia's journey to get Urban Sprouts accredited through the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) was no picnic. She struggled not only to find teachers with the necessary degrees and work experience required by NAEYC, but also to pay the associated fees. Despite these challenges, Ellicia was determined to become NAEYC accredited, both for the mark of excellence that she knew parents were looking for, and the additional funding she would receive from the state.

Research has shown that high-quality ECE programs include highly trained teachers who implement responsive and developmentally appropriate practices with access to ongoing professional development and coaching to support their growth. These programs also have strong leaders and low teacher-to-child ratios, as well as a safe and nurturing environment that promotes the physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development of children. Finally, high-quality programs comprehensively support the needs of both the children and the families they are serving.[12]

But is this common knowledge?

Missouri's current lack of a common set of standards to measure ECE quality has left many families, providers, and funders uninformed. If we don't have an objective, standardized way to measure and promote consistent quality for our children's first educational experience, how can we be sure that they'll be prepared for every other first in their life?

The good news is, Missouri is in the process of launching a pilot effort to develop and implement a set of quality standards. However, we need to ensure that these standards are inclusive, equitable, and setting specific. Most importantly, we must make funding and resources available to these programs so they can achieve higher quality levels.

Community Voices

"It is essential that we have a consistent set of quality standards to work towards together as providers. However, it is one thing to be told or to know what the standards are…it is another thing to have the resources and support necessary to achieve them. Right now, we have neither."

— Local provider on program quality

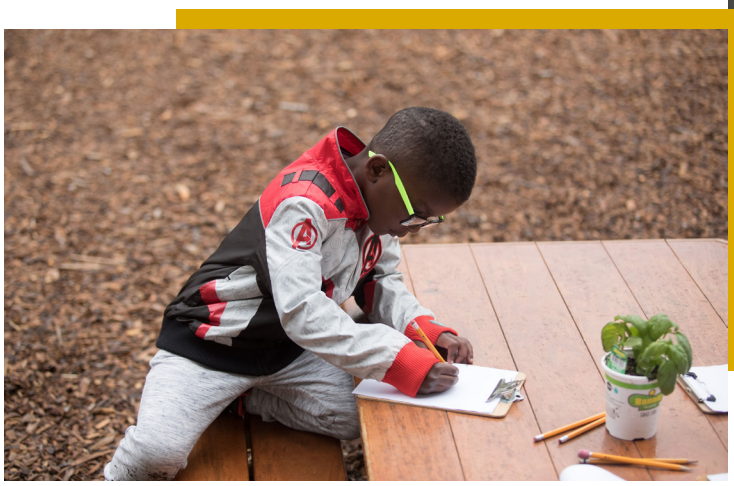
LOCAL SPOTLIGHT:

PARENTS

SkipNV interviewed parents from families with low incomes to understand what they consider when deciding whether to enroll their child in care, as well as what factors go into choosing a provider.

Major quality considerations include:

1) Perceptions of child abuse/neglect
2) Word-of-mouth recommendations
3) Teacher training and qualifications
4) The quality of food in the centers
5) Language assistance for caregivers for whom English is not their first language



4. Coordinate Across the Board

Without many formal options for partnership and network building in the ECE space, Ellicia and other local providers often work to create these opportunities themselves. However, they are still left with very little information about their industry, funding options, regulations, and advocacy efforts.

Even if the St. Louis region put the last three recommendations into action, its current lack of coordination would still weaken their impact on the ECE system and the community as a whole. This missing piece leaves many key players uninformed of the challenges faced by the ECE system and, further down the line, makes it hard for those in positions of influence to bring about change.

If our goal is to build and sustain the ECE system throughout the region, we must invest in a formal, staffed entity to coordinate efforts and bring the voices of stakeholders to the forefront.

5. Set Equity as the Goal

Even with the help of multiple organizational partners and special financial tools, it took over three years for Urban Sprouts to finish its expansion project. But this wasn't the end of Ellicia's challenges. In order to provide high-quality services and pay off the debt associated with the expansion project, she continues to take on extensive fundraising efforts every year.

The majority of ECE programs in St. Louis, especially those led by women of color and serving communities of color, don't have access to sufficient funding or the networks of advisors and funders needed to create high-quality programs. Based on our conversations with local providers, even high-quality centers of choice led by women of color have a much more difficult time fundraising and accessing resources than their white peers. If our goal is to create a system that serves St. Louis children and families in a holistic and culturally relevant way, these centers need to be our priority for investment and advocacy.

In the ECE system, inequity takes various forms. Unaffordability and geographical distance are barriers to accessing high-quality ECE services for many parents. Our community conversations revealed that providers feel marginalized based on the type of facility they run or where that facility is located. Specifically, home-based providers felt they were treated worse than their center-based counterparts. Providers also reported inconsistencies in code, sanitation, and licensing inspection processes based on neighborhood.

Community Voices

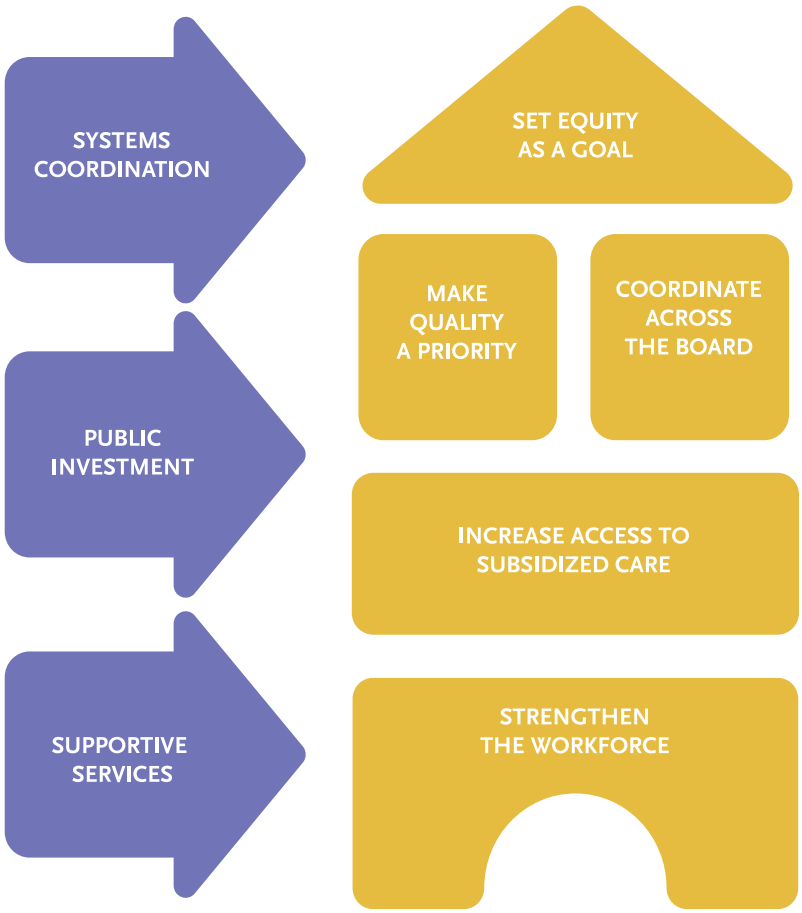
"We've had issues of the same [licensing] rep being in a North County location and our Ballwin location. Two totally different [experiences]. [We were] picked apart [at] our North County location like you would not believe and just breezed through [at] Ballwin — same inspector."

— Local provider on inspection process

THE STEPS WE CAN TAKE

THREE AREAS OF INITIATIVE

Now that we have the recommendations, it's time to take action. Using insights from our research, we've created the following framework to guide strategic investment and improvement in the St. Louis early childhood education system. It's our hope that, by focusing on these areas and strengthening our five recommendations, we'll take the first step towards a more equitable ECE system and a more promising future for St. Louis.



1. Public Investment

To build a better ECE system in St. Louis, greater public investment is a must. By exploring new sources of revenue, as well as making better use of or expanding current funding streams, we can give every child an impactful first school experience with quality high-quality facilities and highly trained, well-compensated teachers. This will also give providers the support they need to create high-quality programs that set children on the path to success.

LOCAL REVENUE

We need to identify long-term, local revenue streams to augment state and federal resources. These dedicated funding sources should assist providers with costs tied to increasing program quality, such as reducing child-to-teacher ratios, training a high-quality workforce, and making facility improvements.

To begin this process, we must organize an inclusive regional conversation to assess the feasibility and funding priorities for a tax initiative. Then, we need to complete a financial analysis to determine the funds needed to address the service gap and improve quality region-wide. Finally, we should conduct a poll to gauge the level of community support in the region.

Utilizing this research, we can inform and ready the coalition of critical stakeholders who will determine and lead next steps.

STATE REVENUE

We must advocate for increased funding of and a higher eligibility threshold for state subsidies, as too many families with low incomes are unable to afford the cost of care. This includes advocating for dedicated state education dollars for public preschool offered through school districts and district partners.

It's also essential that we advocate for funding to support coordination and alignment between regional and state ECE efforts. State-level stakeholders need effective ways to bring the challenges faced by local providers to the public eye.

Finally, we need to advocate for full funding and implementation of a statewide QRIS. This will ensure that more ECE providers can afford to implement and maintain quality improvement efforts.

FEDERAL REVENUE

To give more families access to Early Head Start and Head Start programs, we should advocate for increased federal funding. Additionally, we must advocate for continued investment in and increases to federal Child Care Development Block Grants (CCDBG). CCDBG is the primary source of state child care subsidy dollars, so to achieve increased reimbursements and eligibility levels at the state level, federal dollars need to be secured.

Lastly, we must advocate for increased national philanthropic resources from private and corporate entities to bridge financial gaps of running ECE programs overall.

PROMISING PRACTICES — PUBLIC INVESTMENT

STATE WORKFORCE WAGE SUPPLEMENTS

- **Child Care WAGE$ Project** — A program administered by non-profit organizations that provides a semi-annual wage supplement based on the level of education of the early education professional. Florida, Iowa, Kansas, New Mexico, and North Carolina currently use this program.[13]

- **State Tax Credits** — Early education teachers in both Louisiana and Nebraska are eligible for increased tax credits based on their level of education and credentials.[14]

LOCAL REVENUE STREAMS

- **Denver, Colorado** — In 2006, the City allocated a .15% sales tax to fund the Denver Preschool Program (DPP), which provides local families with tuition assistance and information, and quality improvement supports to preschool providers. Over $106 million has been generated to increase preschool access for over 50,000 four-year-olds and the tax has been extended through 2026.[15]

- San Antonio, Texas — The City voted to raise its sales tax from 8.125% to 8.25% to invest in full-day preschool programs for high-need children. This funding supports professional development activities for educators and grants to local providers to increase the number of children served.[16]

- Miami-Dade County, Florida — County voters passed a four-year property tax increase to raise teacher salaries. This referendum passed with the support of 70% of the voters and will likely raise $232 million annually.[17]

2. Supportive Services

Providers are at the heart of creating the ideal ECE learning environment, but they can't do it alone. By directing both public and private investment in technical assistance, quality improvement frameworks, professional education and development opportunities, we can give the ECE system a stronger workforce and the children of St. Louis a better education.

QUALITY IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK

We must establish a consistent set of standards and an assessment framework for measuring program quality that aligns with the state pilot. Tailored to home-based as well as center-based providers, these standards should align with both research and parental priorities. They should focus on positive interactions, suitability of curriculum and assessment, physical standards for facilities, and professionalism of teachers and employees. We should also utilize public and private funding to invest in ongoing assistance and "quality coaches" to support providers who are trying to improve the quality of their programs.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Specialized technical assistance should be offered to ECE owners and directors, providing them with operational, financial and business management support. Professional resources like one-on-one coaching, mentoring or a cohort model should also be developed and enhanced for providers to create higher-quality programs.

EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Once compensation is addressed, investments should be made in professional development, financial aid, scholarships and tailored degree programs at local community colleges to bring more qualified ECE personnel into the workforce.

To strengthen the current ECE workforce, offer ongoing coaching, trainings, networking events and other opportunities for providers. The number of credentialed ECE teachers in St. Louis needs to be increased and strengthened overall. Finally, we should implement anti-bias, anti-racism (ABAR) training for all stakeholders who support ECE providers.

PROMISING PRACTICES — SUPPORT SERVICES

CAREER PATHWAYS

- **Early Educator Support, Licensure and Professional Development Unit** — North Carolina operates a two-part program for early childhood educators alongside regional higher education institutions. Participants graduate with their teaching license and go on to receive mentoring and a tailored professional development plan.[18]

- **T.E.A.C.H. Missouri Scholarship** — A scholarship program for early childhood providers, which has been in St. Louis for over 20 years, aims to keep quality teachers in Missouri by covering educational costs.[19]

- **Sheltering Arms, Georgia Training Institute** — Offers high-quality, online learning and in-person classes for ECE professionals, parents, and advocates to set higher program standards.[20]

QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

- **Earliest Impact Project** — An effort created by Child Care Aware of Missouri to encourage entrepreneurship, business planning, and curriculum development among early education providers in the Ferguson community.[21]

- **5byAge5** — A component of the 24:1 Initiative in North St. Louis County that provides funding to ECE providers for quality improvement activities in the local area. It's currently supported by the Community Impact Network, a non-profit foundation in St. Louis, which coordinates activities of government, local businesses, churches and other non-profits to address community needs within the Normandy School District.[22]

- **Meeting of the Minds (MOM)** — An informal group that was started by two providers looking for ways to network and complete professional development with others. Providers gather to discuss challenges and share best practices and resources.

- **Power to the Profession** — A taskforce created by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAYEC) to promote "knowledge and competencies, qualifications, standards of practice, and compensation for all early childhood educators." NAYEC plans to establish a financing strategy to implement.[23]

PROMISING PRACTICES — ANTI-BIAS ANTI-RACISM TRAINING

- **Crossroads Anti-Racism Organization & Training** — An entity that works with organizations to understand the challenges related to structural racism as well as training those organizations on how to dismantle biased and racist infrastructures. Crossroads conducts regular trainings and workshops on anti-racism practices and offers a workshop specifically tailored to education providers.[24] This training is critical for ensuring common historical knowledge, a common language, and a shared sense of urgency about dismantling racist infrastructure in the ECE system.

3. Systems Coordination

To establish a stronger ECE system, we must coordinate our efforts and elevate the voices of ECE stakeholders. To help accomplish this, a regional entity needs to be established to carry out the strategies in this report and to support ongoing initiatives. We should also organize philanthropic funding to seed investment in this coordinating entity that can hire full-time, dedicated staff to drive coordination of various regional ECE efforts. To sustain this entity long-term, we'll need to identify local revenue sources.

This entity should be tasked with establishing and leveraging partnerships with key stakeholders in the governmental, philanthropic, private and non-profit sectors, encouraging them to implement the recommendations and investment strategies highlighted in this booklet. Taking these initiatives a step further, this entity should advocate for the St. Louis ECE system at the state and federal levels, bringing awareness to issues and possible changes to policy.

Coordinating these changes will ensure providers receive consistent and timely communication from the City, the State, and each other. To assist families and promote the well-being of high-need children, we should connect the ECE system to other public and social services, as well as advocate for a statewide system that houses all ECE data in one place.

Racially equitable and inclusive standards should be established to promote quality improvement processes among providers. Acknowledging community preferences, and a general understanding that different facility types and program models have their own unique way of meeting the diverse needs of families, is essential to support quality improvement across the board for providers and community initiatives. The voices of parents, providers, and communities need to be represented.

PROMISING PRACTICES — SYSTEMS COORDINATION

UNDERSTANDING COMMUNITY PREFERENCES

- **Brightmoor Quality Initiative** — Community members in the Brightmoor neighborhood of Detroit identified the desire for high-quality, home-based ECE programs for their children. As a result, local philanthropy provided support to fund training and consulting services for home-based ECE providers serving children ages birth to five-years-old.[25]

- **Cincinnati Preschool Promise** — A 501(c)3 non-profit that aims to expand access to high-quality preschools. Funded by a five-year tax levy that generates $15M annually for early education, Preschool Promise has a full-time staff that works to better target ECE services to three and four-year-olds from families with low incomes.[26]

- **First Steps Kent** — Community-led efforts to strengthen and coordinate county-wide ECE services. Operated by a full-time staff and funded by a local property tax millage generating $5.7M annually, First Steps increases access for children birth to five-years-old to community-based services such as developmental screenings and home visits.[27]

WHERE TO START

We have the research, the recommendations, and a plan of action. But where is the need for improvement the strongest?

Throughout the St. Louis region, there are communities with a greater gap in access to subsidized care, particularly those of color and by families with low incomes. Every family deserves access to ECE services in their own neighborhoods, so a localized approach is key to understanding how access varies across the region. In this chapter, we'll identify specific high-need communities and lay out recommendations for strategies to address their unique needs.

ECE ACCESS BY COMMUNITY

To understand how access to high-quality ECE services varies across the region, we zoomed in on communities throughout St. Louis with specific ECE challenges. Within each map, we'll shed light on issues faced by communities using the following information:

ACCESS TO SUBSIDIZED CARE

We've categorized each community by the size of their subsidized ECE service gap (i.e. the difference between the number of children in need of ECE subsidized services and the number of subsidized slots available). The larger the service gap, the lower the access.

PROVIDER TYPE

Local families can access formal ECE services in a variety of settings. Family, Friend or Neighbor (FFN) care is informal ECE service provided in a home-based setting. These maps only display FFN providers that have registered with the state.

PROVIDER MET REQUIREMENTS BEYOND LICENSING

Certain providers have invested in improving the quality of their programs by going above and beyond state licensing standards (e.g. programs with state or national accreditation, programs utilizing T.E.A.C.H. Missouri Scholarships, school district-based Pre-K programs, or Early Head Start/Head Start programs).

The following maps also highlight providers that currently accept either state subsidies or are federally funded through Early Head Start or Head Start.

Where Families Struggle to Afford ECE

COMMUNITIES

Old North, Midtown, St. Louis Place, Shaw, Fox Park, Lafayette Square, The Gate District

LOCALIZED FINDINGS

Demand

- 4,300 children under six-years-old living in these communities
- 1,800 children in need of formal ECE services
- 800 children from families with low incomes/need subsidized ECE

Supply

- 200 subsidized slots available
- Few providers overall, including those offering subsidized care (27 licensed center and home-based providers)

Gap

- 600 additional subsidized slots needed to meet demand

Cost of Care

- $58k average household income
- 15% of household income spent on ECE vs. 7% national affordability standard

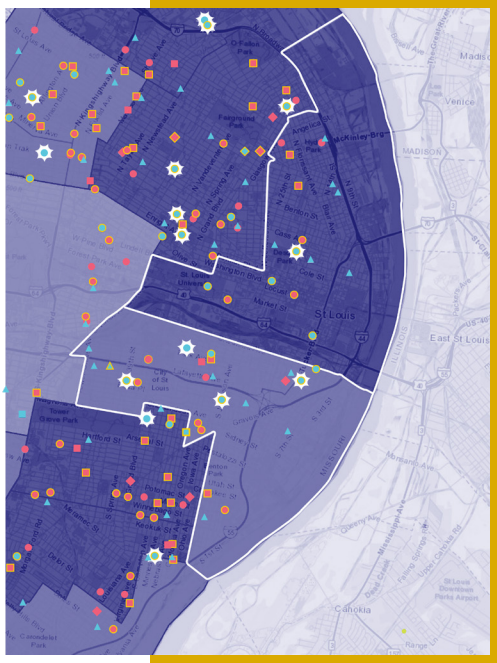
TARGETED STRATEGIES

Increase Access to Subsidized Care

- Expand subsidy eligibility to support families earning up to 200% FPL

Make Quality a Priority

- Fund provider start-up and expansion grants to increase number of high-quality, subsidized slots across setting type (home-based, center-based, school-based)



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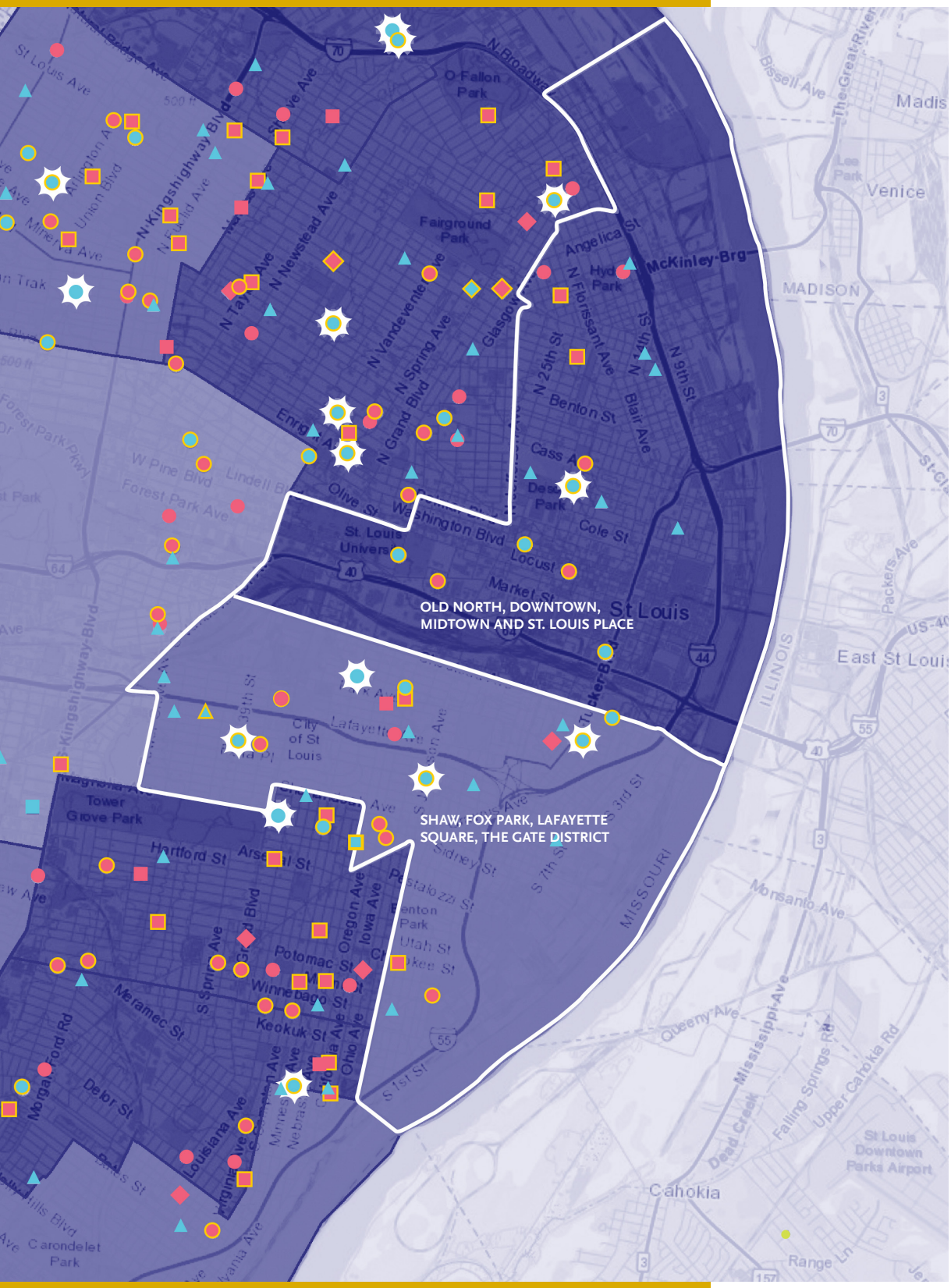


Focus Neighborhood

Access to Subsidized Care

- Lowest Access
- Low Access
- Moderate Access
- Highest Access

Provider Type

- Child Care Center
- Licensed Exempt Center
- District School Exempt
- Licensed Family Care or Group Home
- Family, Friend or Neighbor Care

Provider Met Requirements Beyond Licensing

- Child Care Center
- Licensed Exempt Center
- District School Exempt
- Licensed Family Care or Group Home

Provider Accepting State Subsidy

Early Head Start / Head Start Provider

Where Not Enough Providers of Subsidized Care Exist

COMMUNITIES

Jeff-Vander-Lou, O'Fallon, The Ville, Vandeventer, Baden, Walnut Park (East & West), Mark Twain, Penrose, West End, Wells Goodfellow, Kingsway (East & West)

LOCALIZED FINDINGS

Demand

- 6,000 children under six-years-old living in these communities
- 2,400 children in need of formal ECE services
- 1,300 children from families with low incomes/need subsidized ECE

Supply

- 400 subsidized slots available (272 at providers meeting requirements beyond licensing)
- Many existing providers, but few offer subsidized care (92 center and home-based providers)

Gap

- 900 additional subsidized slots needed to meet demand

Cost of Care

- $35k average household income
- 15% of household income spent on ECE vs. 7% national affordability standard

TARGETED STRATEGIES

Increase Access to Subsidized Care

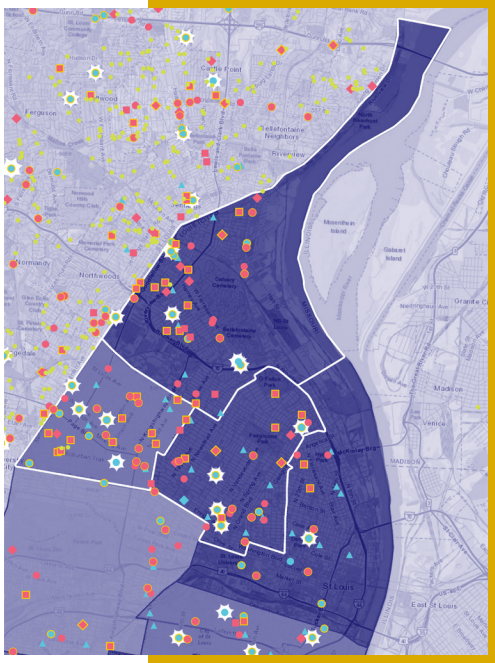
- Provide both financial incentives (through public and private sources) as well as technical assistance to encourage more providers to offer subsidized slots

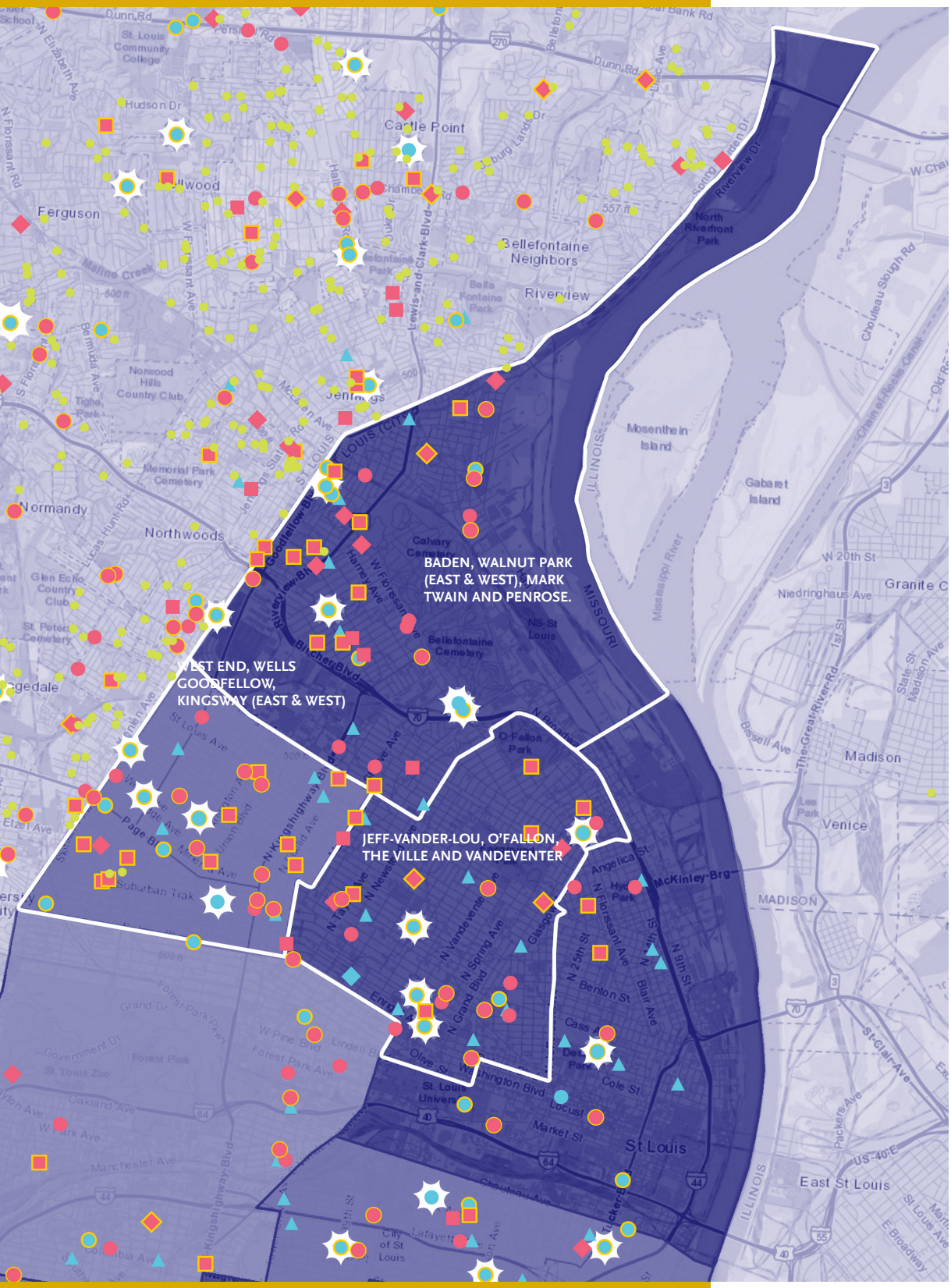
Make Quality a Priority

- Increase efforts to locate and register existing Family, Friend and Neighbor providers and include them in quality improvement initiatives)

Coordinate Across the Board

- Invest in community-led initiatives (i.e., Project Launch, Promise Zone, HUD Choice Neighborhood, and InvestSTL) that seek to implement our recommended strategies related to quality improvement





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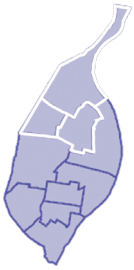


Focus Neighborhood

Access to Subsidized Care

- Lowest Access
- Low Access
- Moderate Access
- Highest Access

Provider Type

- Child Care Center
- Licensed Exempt Center
- District School Exempt
- Licensed Family Care or Group Home
- Family, Friend or Neighbor Care

Provider Met Requirements Beyond Licensing

- Child Care Center
- Licensed Exempt Center
- District School Exempt
- Licensed Family Care or Group Home

Provider Accepting State Subsidy

Early Head Start / Head Start Provider

Where Many Providers Exist, Yet Few Meet Requirements Beyond Licensing

COMMUNITIES

Ferguson, Jennings, Riverview, Bellefontaine Neighbors, Glasgow Village, Pagedale, Wellston, Normandy, Northwoods

LOCALIZED FINDINGS

Demand

- 8,300 children under six-years-old living in these communities
- 3,500 children in need of formal ECE services
- 1,800 children from families with low incomes/need subsidized ECE

Supply

- 400 subsidized slots available
- 270 registered Family, Friend and Neighbor providers

Gap

- 1,400 additional subsidized slots needed to meet demand

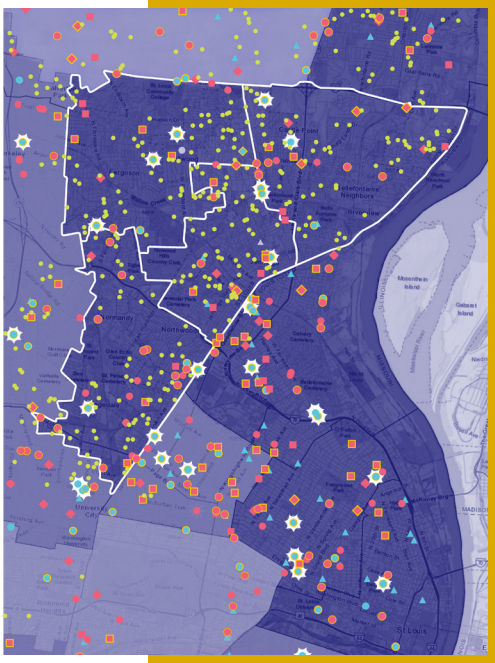
Cost of Care

- $44k average household income
- 13% of household income spent on ECE vs. 7% national affordability standard

TARGETED STRATEGIES

Make Quality a Priority

- Invest in quality improvement efforts to expand access to high-quality care with both private and public funding sources
- Support providers to help them go from registered to licensed and beyond (e.g. accreditation, Early Head Start/Head Start partnerships, etc.)



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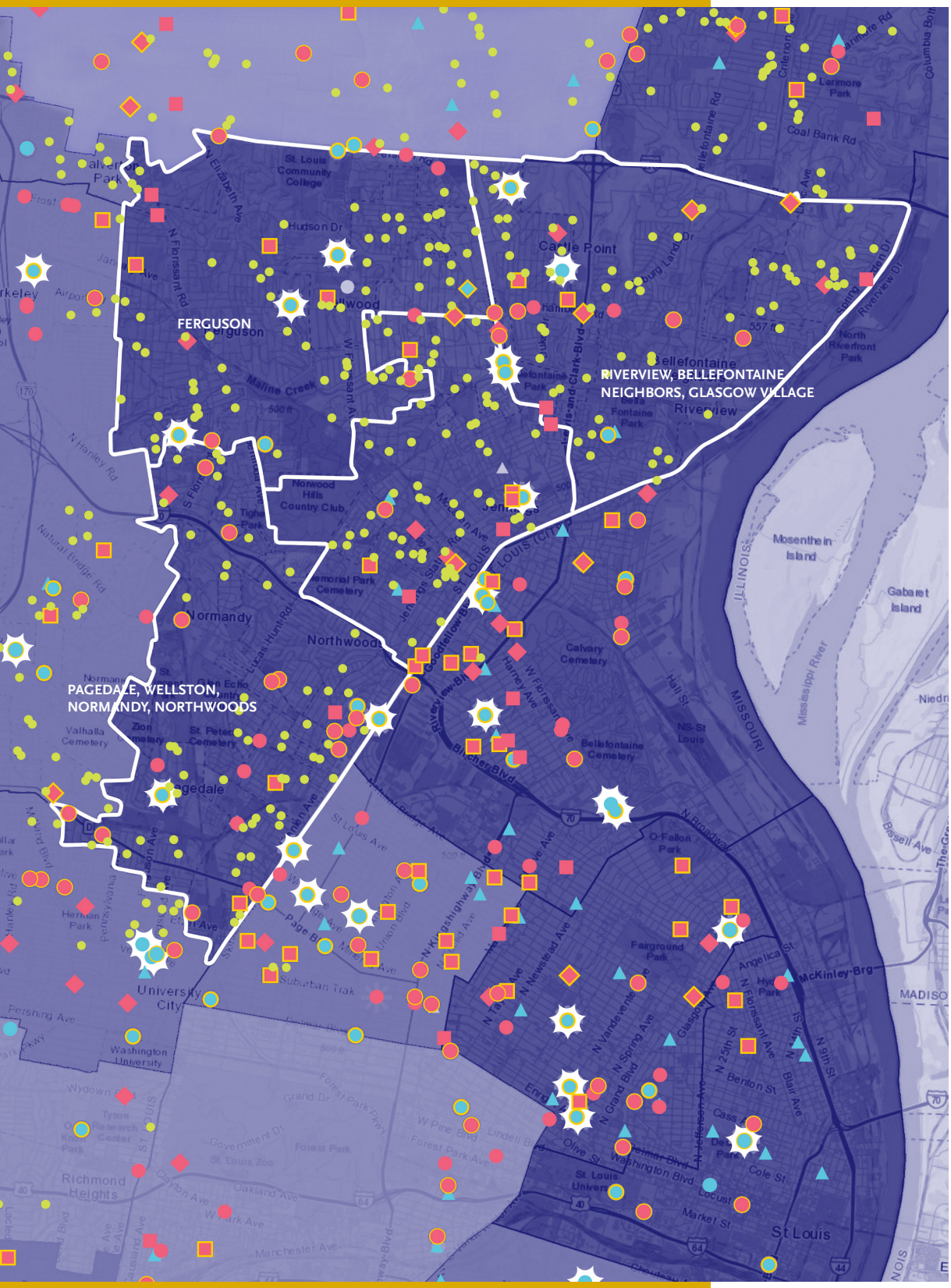


Focus Neighborhood

Access to Subsidized Care

- Lowest Access
- Low Access
- Moderate Access
- Highest Access

Provider Type

- Child Care Center
- Licensed Exempt Center
- District School Exempt
- Licensed Family Care or Group Home
- Family, Friend or Neighbor Care

Provider Met Requirements Beyond Licensing

- Child Care Center
- Licensed Exempt Center
- District School Exempt
- Licensed Family Care or Group Home

Provider Accepting State Subsidy

Early Head Start / Head Start Provider

Where Not Enough Providers Exist Overall

COMMUNITIES

Bevo Mill, Dutchtown, Tower Grove South, Benton Park West, Gravois Park, Carondelet, Patch, Holly Hills

LOCALIZED FINDINGS

Demand

- 6,300 children under six-years-old living in these communities,
- 2,500 children in need of formal ECE services
- 1,000 infants and toddlers in need of formal ECE services
- 1,200 children from families with low incomes/need subsidized ECE

Supply

- 500 available slots for infants and toddlers
- 200 subsidized slots available
- Few providers overall, especially those serving infants and toddlers
- Few providers meet requirements beyond licensing (50 subsidized slots)

Gap

- 1,000 additional subsidized slots needed to meet demand
- 500 additional slots needed to meet demand for infants and toddlers

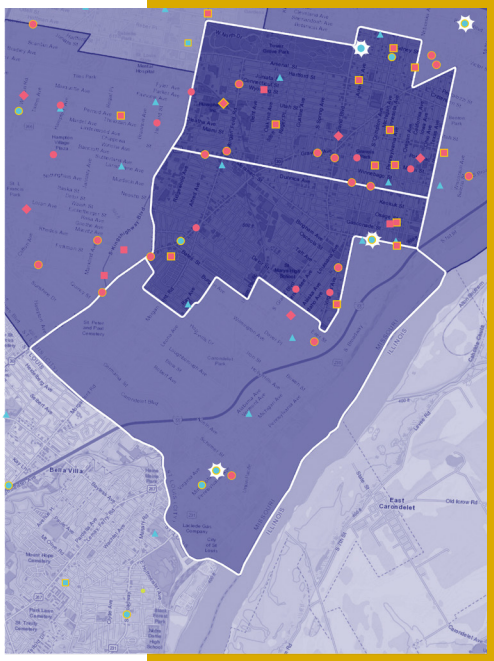
Cost of Care

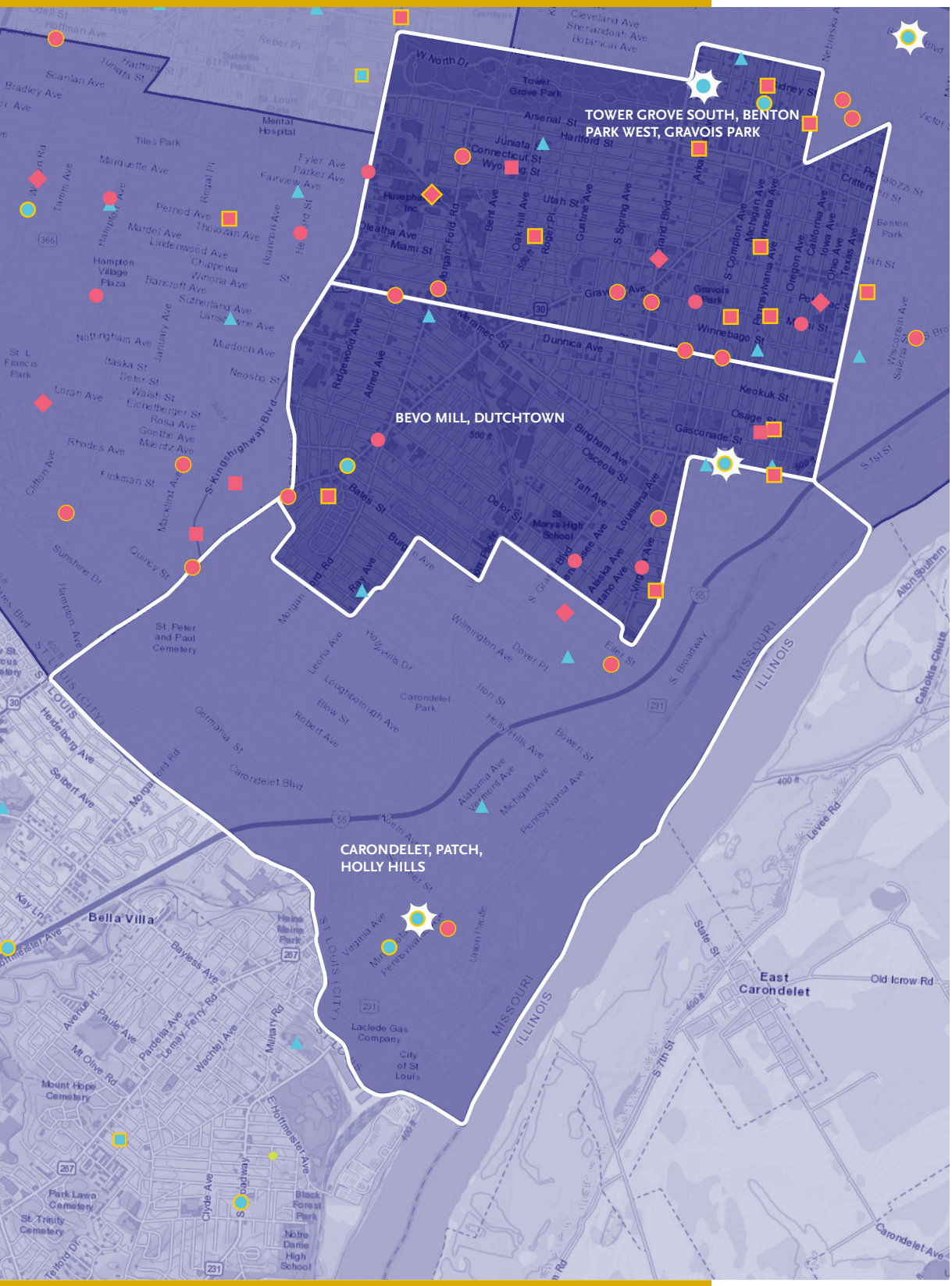
- $49k average household income
- 12% of household income spent on ECE vs. 7% national affordability standard
- Mixed-income communities need both subsidized and market-rate care options

TARGETED STRATEGIES

Make Quality a Priority

- Fund facility development or expansion through both public and private funding sources to increase supply of infant and toddler slots
- Invest in technical assistance to help providers improve quality and implement blended income models





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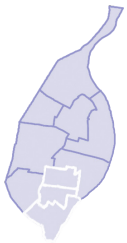


Focus Neighborhood

Access to Subsidized Care

- Lowest Access
- Low Access
- Moderate Access
- Highest Access

Provider Type

- Child Care Center
- Licensed Exempt Center
- District School Exempt
- Licensed Family Care or Group Home
- Family, Friend or Neighbor Care

Provider Met Requirements Beyond Licensing

- Child Care Center
- Licensed Exempt Center
- District School Exempt
- Licensed Family Care or Group Home

Provider Accepting State Subsidy

Early Head Start / Head Start Provider

Where Few Providers Meet Requirements Beyond Licensing

COMMUNITIES

Florissant West, Overland

LOCALIZED FINDINGS

Demand

- 4,000 children under six-years-old living in these communities
- 1,700 children in need of formal ECE services
- 500 children from families with low incomes/need subsidized ECE
- Many families with incomes at or just above subsidy eligibility

Supply

- 100 subsidized slots available
- Only 18 licensed providers, including 6 who have met requirements beyond licensing
- 44 registered Family, Friend and Neighbor providers in area, likely many more unregistered FFN providers

Gap

- 400 additional subsidized slots needed to meet demand

Cost of Care

- $61k average household income
- 10% of household income spent on ECE vs. 7% national affordability standard
- Many families with incomes at or just above subsidy eligibility

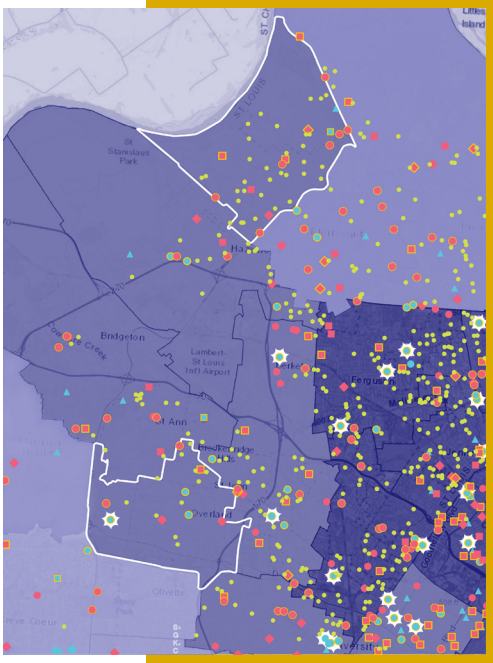
TARGETED STRATEGIES

Increase Access to Subsidized Care

- Utilize existing or newly generated local, public revenue to create sliding scale tuition subsidies for families who make just over income eligibility limits, but still can't afford to pay the market rate for tuition

Make Quality a Priority

- Fund facility development or expansion to increase high-quality supply
- Support providers to help them go from registered to licensed and beyond (e.g. accreditation, Early Head Start/Head Start partnerships, etc.)



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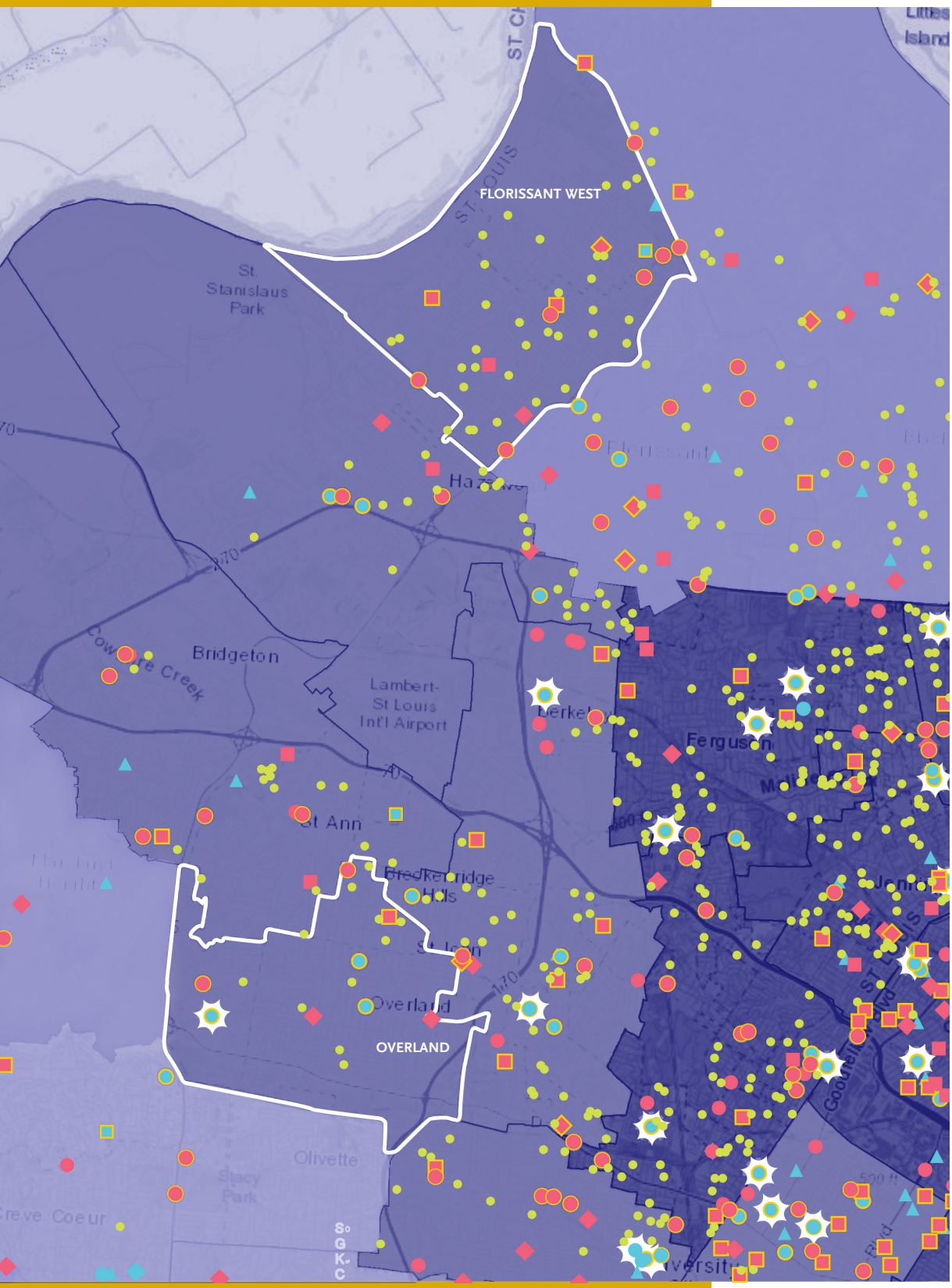


Focus Neighborhood

Access to Subsidized Care

- Lowest Access
- Low Access
- Moderate Access
- Highest Access

Provider Type

- Child Care Center
- Licensed Exempt Center
- District School Exempt
- Licensed Family Care or Group Home
- Family, Friend or Neighbor Care

Provider Met Requirements Beyond Licensing

- Child Care Center
- Licensed Exempt Center
- District School Exempt
- Licensed Family Care or Group Home

Provider Accepting State Subsidy

- Early Head Start / Head Start Provider

Where the Population is Growing

COMMUNITIES

Eureka, Manchester, Ballwin

LOCALIZED FINDINGS

Demand

- 6,300 children under six-years-old living in these communities
- 2,900 children in need of formal ECE services
- 170 children from families with low incomes/need subsidized ECE

Supply

- 240 subsidized slots available
- 28 center and home-based providers, 11 who meet requirements beyond licensing

Population Trend

- Population will grow by 10,000 in next 5 years
- Will not have enough supply to meet future demand

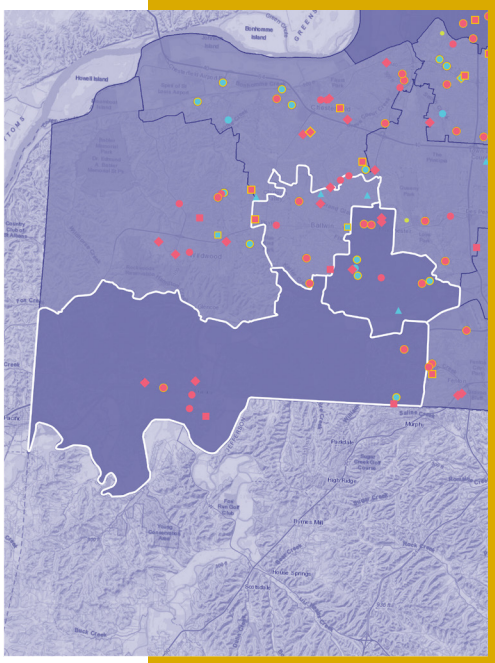
Cost of Care

- $104k average household income
- 10% of household income spent on ECE vs. 7% national affordability standard

TARGETED STRATEGIES

Make Quality a Priority

- Fund facility development or expansion to increase quality supply, especially of providers who meet requirements beyond licensing
- Increase efforts to locate and register existing Family, Friend and Neighbor providers and include those programs in quality improvement initiatives



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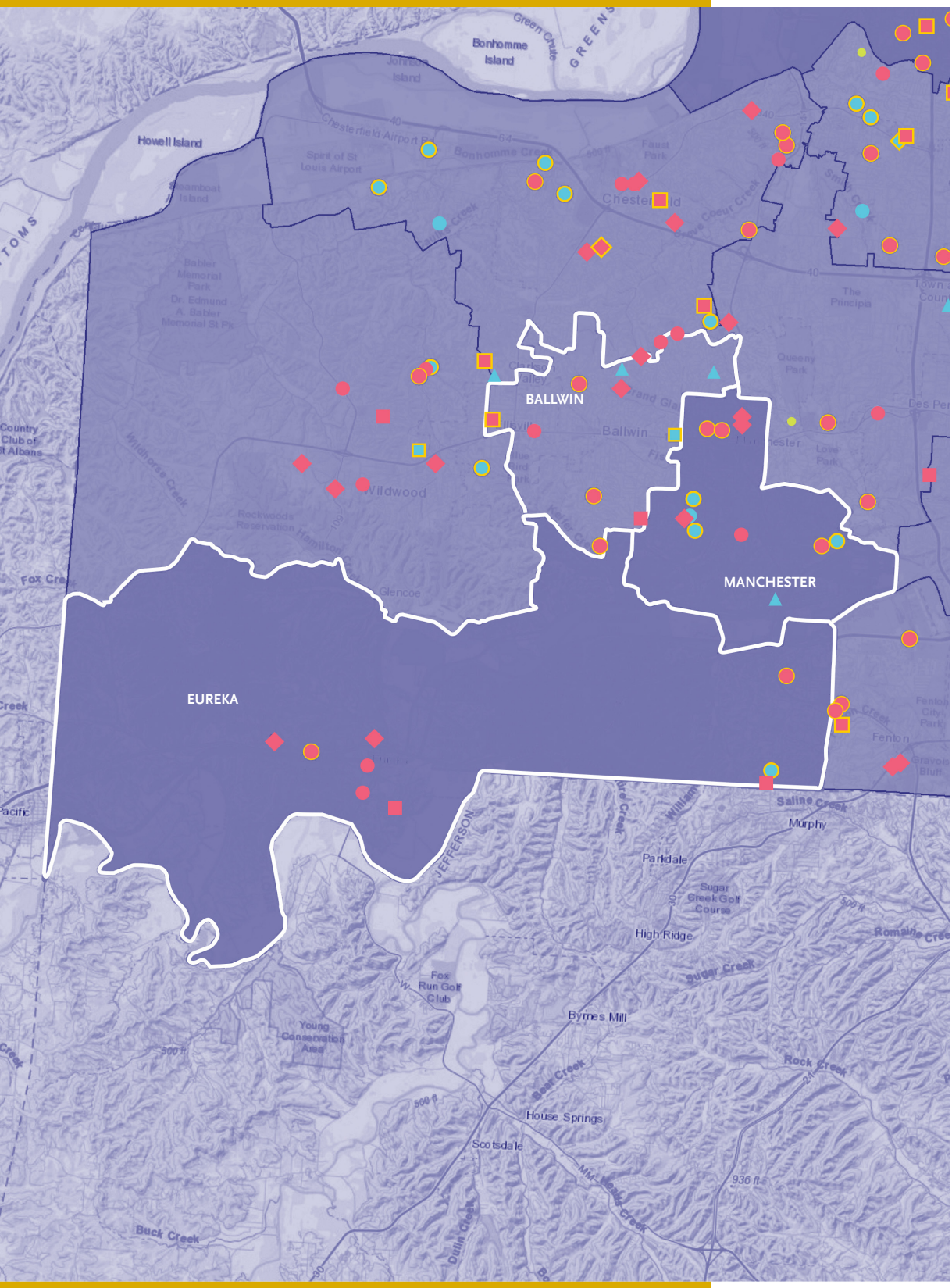

Focus Neighborhood

Access to Subsidized Care

- Lowest Access
- Low Access
- Moderate Access
- Highest Access

Provider Type

- Child Care Center
- Licensed Exempt Center
- District School Exempt
- Licensed Family Care or Group Home
- Family, Friend or Neighbor Care

Provider Met Requirements Beyond Licensing

- Child Care Center
- Licensed Exempt Center
- District School Exempt
- Licensed Family Care or Group Home

Provider Accepting State Subsidy

- Early Head Start / Head Start Provider

CONC-LUSION

If you visit the Urban Sprouts Development Center website, you'll find a mission statement that reads, "We envision a community where the ideas of children matter, a society where education is a right, and a world [where] the image of each child is valued."

Just imagine if every child's first educational experience was based around this mission. That they grow up feeling valued, educated and respected for who they are. Imagine the confidence they could develop, the adults they could become, the impact they could have on our communities.

Shouldn't we want that future for every child?

It is our hope that, with the presented information and framework, we can take steps towards making this vision a reality. That by supporting providers like Urban Sprouts through investment and development of the early childhood education system, we can foster a generation of children who are prepared and empowered to be their best selves for every other first in their life.

We ask for your help in this effort. For your children. For others' children. For the future of St. Louis.

All you need is the courage to take the first step.

To learn more about what you can do to bring us closer to equity, visit **https://www.southside-ecc.org/media-center**

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http://www.caastlc.org/information-and-guidelines/

BASE MAPS:

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