



# Jefferson Parish Early Learning

Capacity and Access Landscape Analysis | FEBRUARY 2022



# What would it mean to inspire change for Jefferson Parish's children, families, and communities?

*At the Jefferson Ready Start Network, we believe that change for our parish starts with change for our youngest children. We are a coalition of thought partners working towards a bold local vision for early childhood: all children birth to age five in Jefferson Parish have access to quality early childhood experiences that will prepare them to succeed.*

*We believe we can achieve this vision by creating a culture of high-quality, comprehensive early childhood services through engagement and partnership with families, educators, and community members. This work will take all of us collaborating to fulfill our shared responsibility to support the economy of today and the workforce of tomorrow.*

*A critical component of building the future is understanding the present. We have partnered with Start Early to gather qualitative and quantitative data about the early learning landscape with a focus on existing availability, quality, and accessibility of early care and education in Jefferson Parish. After launching this partnership, we also engaged Advancing Communities for Equity (ACE) to gather information on current access to high-quality early care and education for Latino families. We hope these findings and resulting recommendations support our next phase of work as we seek to build a stronger Jefferson Parish.*

*The future of our parish is in small hands – those of the infants, toddlers, and children who will grow to lead and support us. We hope you'll join us today in helping those hands grab hold of a brighter tomorrow.*



**Sarintha Buras Stricklin, Ph. D.**

Executive Director

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## Introduction & Overview

In partnership with the Jefferson Ready Start Network leadership, and with the support of Advancing Communities for Equity, Start Early has conducted an analysis of the early learning landscape, including a review of childcare access and demand. This effort is designed to support sustainable strategy, planning, and implementation to increase equitable access to early learning programs for the region's families



“[For childcare], I am looking for a trusting space.... I need to be comfortable that – because my child is 6 months old – she will be safe. [I need] a person, or a place where I have the confidence that they aren't going to mistreat her, hurt her, or ignore her.”

— **FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT**

This effort included collection and analysis of existing public data regarding availability, quality, and accessibility of early childhood services. This also included a review of information from the US Census Bureau, state and local budgets, the Louisiana Department of Education, the Louisiana Department of Health, the Bureau of Public Health, Kids Count, The Data Center, Diversity Data Kids, the United Way of Southeast Louisiana, and beyond.

Once collected and organized, data was reviewed and validated with key local leaders to assess accuracy, uncover underlying narratives, and identify gaps. Several stakeholders from Jefferson Parish Schools, early learning providers, and other state early childhood systems leaders were engaged, providing invaluable feedback and assistance.

In addition to quantitative data, focus groups and surveys were conducted with Latino<sup>1</sup> families. Previous landscape reviews suggested that Latino children were relatively underrepresented in childcare settings and services provided through the Jefferson Ready Start Network, despite data that suggests these families would be eligible for participation in these programs. Additionally, qualitative data from business leaders was also gathered through individual interviews and discussions with representatives from the local Chamber of Commerce and Jefferson Parish Economic Development Commission.

We'd like to specifically acknowledge the support of several key contributors: Paula Polito (*Beary Cherry Tree Child Development Center*), Emmy O'Dwyer (*Advancing Communities for Equity*), Teresa Falgoust (*Agenda for Children*), Kahree Wahid (*Head Start Collaboration Office*), Janai Garrison, Kim Jones, Julie Paley, and Jessica Rouquette (*Jefferson Early Childhood Network*), Devon Camarota (*Louisiana Department of Education*), Susannah Boudreaux (*Louisiana Department of Health*), Monique Rouege (*Carlie Care Kids Academy*) and Dr. Gina Easterly (*Louisiana Department of Health*).

# Executive Summary

Jefferson Parish is a diverse community which serves as one of the key economic drivers for Louisiana and boasts a growing multicultural and multilingual population. The region is home to many resources for families, as well as a robust network of individuals and organizations working to strengthen opportunities and access for all children. Both qualitative and quantitative data highlight the many assets of the region, including the strength of relationships across leaders serving the early learning ecosystem in different capacities. However, there is also a clear need for increased supply of high quality, accessible, and affordable early learning services, particularly for infants and toddlers. Additionally there is a need for enhanced outreach to ensure demand among all populations, with a focus on the Latino community. In the report that follows, we identify a number of key findings and propose a slate of aligned recommendations that serve as potential next steps. We also encourage further investigation of several remaining questions, as well as community engagement to chart the most impactful course of action.



Several of the primary findings are focused on issues of childcare supply, with recommendations focused on addressing each challenge. Supply is complex and can be difficult to accurately measure, but a few prominent themes emerged.

» **Finding #1: Cost is a Key Barrier to Accessing Childcare Supply**

» **Recommendation #1: Expand Access by Increasing Subsidies and Subsidy Participation**

*Consistent with national trends, cost for childcare is a key challenge in Jefferson Parish. While there are a number of solutions that can and should be explored, we recommend expanding access to the existing subsidy programs by supporting raised eligibility thresholds, identifying new revenue sources, expanding resources for families navigating the application process, and reducing other barriers to access.*

» **Finding #2: Accessible Infant and Toddler Seats are in Short Supply**

» **Recommendation #2: Explore Opportunities to Increase Infant and Toddler Seats**

*Jefferson Parish also follows national patterns regarding limited availability of affordable care for infants and toddlers. This is a complex challenge given the economic factors that undergird the early care and education sector. We propose several options for investigation to identify the best local solution including new public-private partnerships and strategies to build or convert supply.*

» **Finding #3: Childcare Supply Varies by Neighborhood**

» **Recommendation #3: Develop a Community-Targeted Approach to Supply**

*A review of the early learning offerings by community and neighborhood reveals both under and over supply. This is impacted by a number of factors including labor and commuting patterns, physical geography, and community demographics. Given this, we encourage an approach to balancing supply and demand that is tailored to specific communities, recognizing their unique differences*

The next several recommendations are focused on childcare demand, which is similarly multi-faceted. In Jefferson Parish, demand is influenced by some of the same factors impacting supply; that is, demand can be variable given cost, quality, type of setting and beyond. Demand also is impacted significantly by current conditions, particularly the ongoing challenges presented by COVID-19.

» **Finding #4: Quality of Supply Influences Demand**

» **Recommendation #4: Targeted Quality Study and Improvement**

*Data about the quality of existing supply has been impacted by the pandemic, as ratings have been in a hold harmless pattern since March of 2020. However, it is clear that quality is a key factor in parent decision-making and can impact demand at various sites. To support providers who continue to have challenges reaching higher levels of quality, we encourage targeted study of the key barriers preventing improvement and engage stakeholders to identify the most actionable and effective next steps in eliminating barriers.*

» **Finding #5: Early Learning Educators are a Key Factor in Both Supply and Demand**

» **Recommendation #5: Build a Diverse, Supported, and Sustainable Workforce**

*The early learning workforce is a critical factor in both childcare supply and demand. Staffing challenges can significantly impact supply; educator quality and characteristics also impact parental demand for a particular program. Given this, we recommend a strategic approach to supporting and diversifying the workforce. While further study of the particular mechanisms to achieve this is encouraged, we suggest a focus on developing additional supports, such as a shared cost model for benefits, continued learning opportunities, and a systematic approach to diversification of the workforce.*



“The boundary that many mothers in the US have is language because many of us don’t know the language. Second, it is cost – because [employers] only want to pay us \$7/an hour. And many of these [early learning] places are \$35 a day minimum. Quality is also important. I would like it if there were many more quality places so that [your child] can be a success and move ahead. With help, you can move ahead more quickly in life.

— **FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT**

» **Finding #6: Language Is at the Center of Parent Decision-Making**

» **Recommendation #6: Expanding Access by Reducing Language Barriers**

*While connected to workforce diversity, language is a factor deserving particular consideration. For the nearly 40% of households in Jefferson who speak something other than English, language may play a role in early learning access or selection. In some cases, parents may need additional supports to access information about how to apply for subsidies or programs; in other cases, parents may seek caregivers who share a common language. We recommend a multi-pronged approach including, among other things, the development of a pipeline for Spanish-speaking staff members and a shared model for translation services.*

» **Finding #7A: There is Untapped Demand for Childcare**

» **Finding #7B: Engagement Requires Trust**

» **Recommendation #7: Develop an Outreach and Marketing Plan for Target Families**

*The evidence of an existing gap in Latino families' participation in early learning was part of the impetus for this landscape analysis. The focus groups conducted to learn more from those stakeholders confirmed that there is additional demand for childcare and learning from Latino families. There are a variety of barriers that currently face those seeking to access childcare. While factors such as cost are shared across many families, other factors are uniquely challenging for Latino community members. To support parents from all underrepresented communities in accessing early learning options, we encourage the development of an outreach and marketing plan targeted to the unique needs of each community. Note that this effort will need to build upon previous recommendations (#5 & 6) related to increasing quality and building a strong and diverse workforce.*

These findings and recommendations represent the next steps in Jefferson Parish's journey to developing an early learning ecosystem that supports all children in accessing quality early care and education that launches them towards a lifetime of success. While there are many steps outlined here, the Jefferson community, with its evident commitment and enthusiasm, is up for the challenge.

“I would want to make sure that [childcare providers] are loving. One of my children, he has an intense personality. He was just diagnosed with epilepsy. He can be grumpy, or angry. I really rely on his teachers to be kind and tell me how his day went. I rely on that. So for that reason, I need to be with teachers who I can talk to and to know that they are secure. I need to feel secure leaving my child with a stranger. I need to have an opportunity to talk with the teacher, and she knows us. We need to know who is at the school.”

— **FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT**



## Jefferson Parish: An Overview

Jefferson Parish is a long narrow slice of southeast Louisiana, running just west of Orleans Parish and south along the lower Plaquemines Parish down to the Gulf of Mexico, where it has a narrow share of coastline. The parish is split by the Mississippi river; the Westbank and Eastbank of the river have distinct differences grounded in economic disparities and racial differences. Many service providers and agencies also divide their services across each bank, meaning that the experience of residents can be quite different. The Eastbank of the parish is urban and suburban, while the Westbank is suburban and includes two communities separated geographically by marshlands (i.e., Grand Isle and Lafitte<sup>2</sup>). This geography holds significance for shaping the early childhood ecosystem in Jefferson Parish and the unique needs and experiences of its families.



As the second-most populous parish in Louisiana<sup>3</sup>, Jefferson is a key driver of the state's economy, contributing the third largest gross domestic product<sup>4</sup>. However, the parish's economic growth and, to a lesser extent, population growth have been slower than much of the state, lending increased urgency to strengthening the early care and education systems necessary to undergird a thriving economy and community.

Jefferson Parish is home to approximately 432,493 residents; slightly more than half of residents identify as White, with nearly a quarter identifying as Black or African American, and approximately 15% identifying as Latino or Hispanic. Other racial subgroups are represented at less than 5%.

More than 33,000 children under 6 years old live in Jefferson Parish, with an estimated 23% of all children living in poverty<sup>5</sup>. As of 2017, the poverty rate was even higher for children under 4, at almost 32%<sup>6</sup>. (For context, the federal poverty level for a family of 2 is just \$17,420; for a family of 4 it is \$26,500.) This is significantly higher than the overall poverty rate for the Parish (16%) and higher than the national child poverty rate (17%)<sup>7</sup> which highlights the unique challenges that children and their families face in Jefferson.

Approximately 10% of Jefferson Parish's population under 65 is identified as disabled based on Census data<sup>8</sup>. In Jefferson Parish's schools (both public and private) there are 9,425 students with special needs. This represents approximately 14.5% of the 65,070 total students served in Jefferson school systems as of the 2018-2019 school year, and suggests an important subgroup to consider.

## A Look At Jefferson Parish’s Children and Families

Early life experiences are critical in fostering a child’s early brain development and laying the groundwork for lifelong success. Families of all kinds need extra support when raising young children which can cause strain on everything from resources to employment. To ensure that parents and children in Jefferson Parish are prepared to thrive,



**More than 1 Million Neural Connections** formed every second in the first years of life<sup>9</sup>

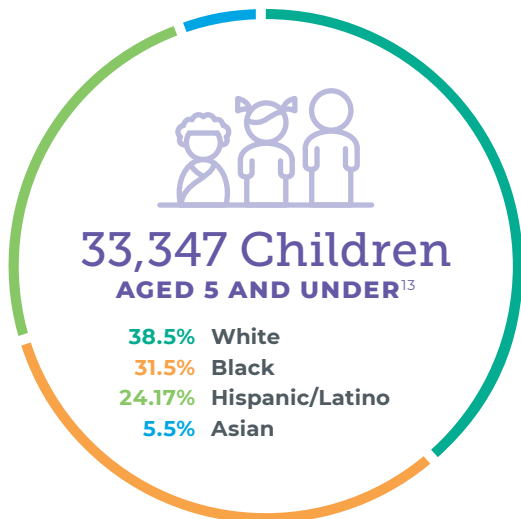
**13%**

**Return on Investment** for every dollar spent on high quality early learning<sup>10</sup>

**\$1.3**

**Billion Total Impact** of childcare breakdowns on Louisiana economy<sup>11</sup>

**Who are the Children in Jefferson Parish?**<sup>12</sup> Jefferson Parish is home to a diverse and changing group of children, who represent a diverse range of ethnicities, languages, and experiences.



**38%** of households speak a language other than English at home.

**60%** of these households speak Spanish.<sup>14</sup>



**In Jefferson Parish, we want children to have a strong and healthy start.** Data-related to indicators like birth weight, preterm births, and infant mortality can help shed light on the prenatal and perinatal supports and resources impacting families.

**In Jefferson Parish, 10.7% of babies are born at a low birthweight.**<sup>15</sup>



» **The infant mortality rate is 5.9 per 1,000 births,**<sup>16</sup> which is better than the overall rate for Louisiana: 7.8 per 1,000 births.

» **11.4%**<sup>17</sup> of births are preterm.

**Almost 1/4 of all women do not receive adequate prenatal care.**<sup>18</sup>

## A Challenging Context

Hurricanes have shaped the early childhood ecosystem in Jefferson Parish, including dramatic impacts on centers, programs, children and families. In 2005, Hurricane Katrina reshaped much of the Jefferson Parish ecosystem, with changes in population as many families left, some never to return, and other new families arrived. The lower-lying communities of Lafitte and Grand Isle were significantly impacted by that storm. Many additional storms have followed, each continuing to impact the Parish, with most recent damage to many of the same communities occurring during Hurricane Ida. In addition to changes in population, the hurricanes have also impacted families who may face new financial hardships and limited resources. Similarly, providers in those communities have frequently been impacted, in some cases forced to close for long stretches of time due to storm damage or other infrastructure challenges. In some cases, this may result in compounding challenges for families; new financial pressures and reduced childcare availability.

COVID has also been a force in shaping the economic and early childhood landscape in Jefferson Parish; whether these changes are short-term or long-lasting remains to be seen. Over the past year, the COVID pandemic has led to significant shifts in the regional economy, as reported by GNO, Inc. Their most recent jobs report shows that employment in Jefferson grew by 3% month over month from the fall of 2020 to fall of 2021 and unemployment claims are at pandemic lows. The report also describes the workforce demands in the post-COVID economic recovery, which places a strong emphasis on awareness of and equitable access to education and training opportunities. With equity in mind, the report acknowledges the many barriers that continue to interfere with access

to education and training, many exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic such as access to child care.

As early care and education programs began reopening following the COVID-19 shut down, the Jefferson Parish Early Childhood Collaborative and their research partners at the Study of Early Education in Louisiana conducted a survey of all child care teachers to identify the impacts of COVID on the sector. The survey included more than 300 early educators in child care settings operational in the fall of 2020; this data was compared with similar 2019 survey data from Jefferson Parish. The most prominent findings from childcare leaders reflect the significant staffing challenges. Ninety percent of leaders found staffing their sites difficult, and more than half said they lost valuable teachers due to COVID. Nearly two-thirds reported that they were struggling to find the teachers they needed. These data reflect the tumult in the child care sector nationally, but more data is needed to understand how the workforce is changing in response to COVID-19, with a particular focus on Jefferson Parish.

Both the changing climate and the evolving pandemic serve as backdrops for the experiences of children and families in Jefferson, as well as the early care and education landscape. Continued evaluation of the impacts of these twin challenges will be important as Jefferson Parish leaders work to strengthen the childcare sector and ensure that all children have access to high quality early learning experiences.

“Hurricanes are a fact of life in Jefferson Parish, but the damage they cause remains unpredictable, overwhelming, and affecting. The twin impact of hurricanes and the COVID pandemic has been challenging for many, but for the childcare sector this has been uniquely difficult. Recovery will be an ongoing process.”

— DR. LIBBIE SONNIER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, LOUISIANA POLICY INSTITUTE FOR CHILDREN

### A Changing Population

The child population of Jefferson Parish is changing, with more Latino representation than in the previous decade. While total births have fluctuated over the past ten years, increasing between 2011 and 2015 before beginning to fall again, the share of Latino births has risen steadily. From 2011 to 2020, the Latino birth rate has risen from 18.2% to 25.6%, meaning that one in four babies born in Jefferson Parish are now Latino.<sup>19</sup> This change is reflective of the national trend of population increases for Latino households.

#### YEARLY BIRTH RATE AND SHARE OF LATINO BIRTHS

| Year <sup>20</sup> | Births       | Latino Share of Births |
|--------------------|--------------|------------------------|
| 2011               | 5,632        | 18.2%                  |
| 2012               | 5,660        | 18.5%                  |
| 2013               | 5,573        | 19.5%                  |
| 2014               | 5,892        | 21.2%                  |
| 2015               | 6,070        | 23.0%                  |
| 2016               | 5,885        | 23.3%                  |
| 2017               | 5,832        | 23.4%                  |
| 2018               | 5,641        | 23.6%                  |
| 2019               | 5,753        | 25.4%                  |
| <b>2020</b>        | <b>5,290</b> | <b>25.6%</b>           |

The share of Jefferson Parish that identifies as either African American or Asian also increased, as the share of White residents dropped from 64% in 2000 to 51% in 2020.<sup>21</sup> Many factors can contribute to population changes in a community, ranging from a generational shift in the timing of child rearing, housing costs, the job opportunities in a region, or in/out flow. In addition to birth rates, immigration is one cause of the changing face of Jefferson Parish. (Hurricane Katrina appears to have played a role in spurring immigration to Jefferson Parish and surrounding areas, though it is also clear that the population of the region has long been diverse.)<sup>22</sup> The population of those born outside of the United States grew from 7.5% in 2000 to 13.5% in 2018; approximately a quarter of all children under the age of 6 have at least one foreign-born parent.<sup>23</sup>



Given this trend, it may not be surprising that nearly thirty-two thousand families in Jefferson Parish speak a language other than English. This represents approximately 38% of all households. Spanish is the most common of these languages; it is spoken in approximately 60% of households speaking another language, making it a clear majority. Other languages with a significant presence are Vietnamese, which is spoken by 11% of families speaking other languages, French/Cajun/Haitian at 9%, and Arabic at 7%. Several other languages are present in smaller numbers.

#### LANGUAGES SPOKEN IN JEFFERSON PARISH

| Number of Families for Whom English is not Home Language <sup>24</sup><br>(does not provide information on the number or age of children) | 31,939 |
|---|--------|
| Spanish   | 18,436 |
| Vietnamese  | 3,597  |
| Arabic  | 2,354  |
| French, Haitian, Cajun  | 2,839  |

“Jefferson Parish Schools is committed to serving each of our students and families by embracing their individual experiences, strengths, and needs. This starts in our Pre-K program, which serves as the foundation for many children. We recognize the unique learning needs of our young English language learners and their families and are actively working to strengthen our research-based supports and services. We currently offer seven dual language learning classrooms in which children receive instruction in both Spanish and English. We also offer other resources such as multilingual newsletters and curriculum supports, interpretation and translation services, and continuing education opportunities for families. While we are proud of our effort to date, this work is ongoing.” — **LILI GUILBAULT, DIRECTOR OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION, JEFFERSON PARISH SCHOOLS**

The Latino population in Jefferson Parish is diverse; many of those classified as Latino may more strongly identify with other terms such as Chicano or Hispanic, or with their nationality. The country of familial origin with the largest representation is Honduras (27%), followed by Mexico (14%), and Cuba (14%). This diversity in nationality suggests the possibility for significant differences in the experiences, cultural norms, and even language of Latino Parish residents.<sup>25</sup>

The growing Latino community is not fully represented in the early learning sector; given this, it is a focal point in this landscape analysis. While more than a quarter of the children in Jefferson Parish Schools are Latino, a much smaller fraction (5%) of the infants and toddlers in publicly-funded seats are Latino.<sup>26</sup> Given the evidence that the Latino share of births has continued to increase year over year, this represents an even more significant gap in representation. While the landscape analysis seeks to understand the childcare supply, demand, and mismatch in general, focus groups were conducted to specifically understand the relative absence of Latino families from formal early learning spaces.

As we share additional data and context about the economic needs, family resources, and childcare landscape, we continue to consider the ecosystem as a whole, while also considering the unique needs of different communities across Jefferson Parish.



## Economic Factors and Family Needs

Jefferson Parish’s economy is characterized in part by its proximity and relationship to New Orleans and the Parish’s access to several transportation channels by air, land, rail, and water, as well as proximity to large regional businesses and organizations. The Parish, led by JEDCO (the Jefferson Parish Economic Development Commission) has invested in building a reputation as an attractive location for business, with key programs designed to attract and retain new businesses and a robust suite of resources touting the Parish’s desirability.<sup>27</sup> Greater New Orleans, Inc. (GNO, Inc.), a regional economic development nonprofit organization, also promotes and supports business development in Jefferson Parish as part of the 10-parish region of Southeast Louisiana. Most of the largest employers in Jefferson Parish are medical and governmental organizations, with Ochsner Health System, Jefferson Parish School Board, Acme Truck Line, and the Jefferson Parish government holding the top spots.<sup>28</sup>



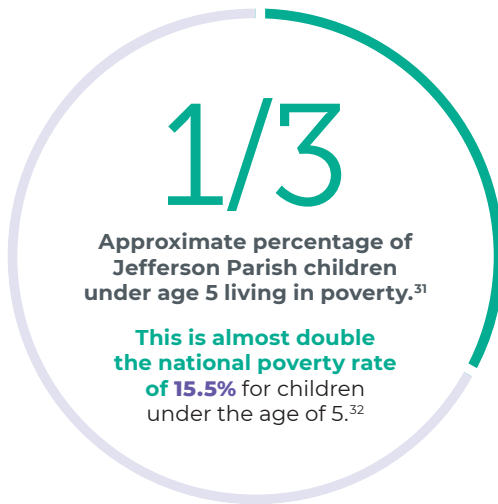
While there are many indicators of economic strength in Jefferson Parish, there are also many families who are struggling to make ends meet. The median household income in the parish is \$54,032, while the per capita income is \$30,374. Each of these values is higher than the state median at \$49,469 and \$27,923 respectively.<sup>29</sup> However, the cost of living in Jefferson Parish is also higher than the state’s average. For example, the median cost of monthly rent in Jefferson Parish is \$972, as compared to Louisiana’s \$866. In fact, the median percent of income spent on housing in Jefferson is 21.4%, with nearly a third of all households spending more than 30% of their income on housing.<sup>30</sup>

### TOP TEN BIGGEST EMPLOYERS:

|                                    |                                  |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1) Ochsner Health System           | 6) West Jefferson Medical Center |
| 2) Jefferson School Board          | 7) Laitrum Manufacturing, LLC    |
| 3) Acme Truck Line                 | 8) Al Copeland Investments       |
| 4) Jefferson Parish Government     | 9) Jefferson Sheriff’s Office    |
| 5) East Jefferson General Hospital | 10) Cox Communications           |

Adapted from: <https://www.nola.com>

## A Look at the Economic Wellbeing of Jefferson Parish's Children and Families



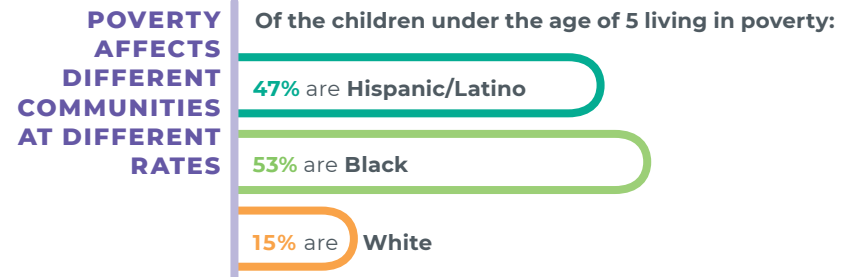
Many of Jefferson's families are working, but still struggling to make ends meet. These families have unique childcare needs. Inadequate access to care may prevent them from participating in the workforce. Despite their employment, they may still struggle to afford care and learning options.

**70%** of children under 6 have all available parents employed full time.<sup>33</sup>

**32%** of children are living with a single parent.<sup>34</sup>



**\$26,500** Federal Poverty Rate for a Family of 4



The United Way of Southeast Louisiana's ALICE® Report first shed light on the often overlooked households in Louisiana communities who work hard but struggle to make ends meet, households they call ALICE® — Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed. Many of Jefferson Parish's families fall into this category; they face financial challenges that may prevent them from accessing high quality childcare options but are also often not eligible for subsidies.

**\$75,720 annual total | \$37.86/hour**  
 The ALICE® household survival budget needed for a family of two adults with two children in childcare.<sup>35</sup>



Childcare is another key expense that many families face. Families with an infant spend approximately 15% of their income on care and learning; for those with both an infant and a three-year-old, that rises to 28%.<sup>36</sup> Considering that the average US household also spends an estimated 8.6% of income on food,<sup>37</sup> it is easy to envision a Jefferson Parish family that has spent nearly 70% of their income by the time they have paid for housing, food, and childcare. Costs such as transportation, utilities, technology, clothing, and medical care would be an additional strain on family resources.

One of the ways to capture the challenges of these families is through the ALICE<sup>®</sup> construct. ALICE<sup>®</sup>,<sup>38</sup> a widely used tool pioneered by the United Way, stands for Asset-Limited, Income-Constrained, Employed. It is designed to help understand the unique needs of families who earn more than the Federal Poverty Level but are still struggling financially. The ALICE<sup>®</sup> threshold for families in Southeast Louisiana with two adults and two children in child care is an hourly wage of \$37.86 or an annual wage of \$75,720. As of 2018, a total of 48% of families in Jefferson Parish were below the ALICE<sup>®</sup> threshold.

**AVERAGE ALICE<sup>®</sup> HOUSEHOLD SURVIVAL BUDGET**

**For a Family of Four in 2018 (2 Adults, 2 Children in Child Care)**

|                      |         |               |                 |
|----------------------|---------|---------------|-----------------|
| Housing              | \$1,005 | Health Care   | \$844           |
| Child Care           | \$1,252 | Technology    | \$75            |
| Food                 | \$899   | Miscellaneous | \$574           |
| Transportation       | \$850   | Taxes         | \$811           |
| <b>Monthly Total</b> |         |               | <b>\$6,310</b>  |
| <b>Annual Total</b>  |         |               | <b>\$75,720</b> |
| <b>Hourly Wage</b>   |         |               | <b>\$37.86</b>  |



“The United Way ALICE<sup>®</sup> Report shows the true level of financial hardship in our community by highlighting households who earn above the Federal Poverty Level, but not enough to afford a bare-bones household budget. Living paycheck to paycheck with no savings, ALICE<sup>®</sup> families are forced to make tough choices such as affording quality child care or paying rent. Quality, reliable child care is critically important for ALICE<sup>®</sup>, but often out of reach. For an ALICE<sup>®</sup> family in Louisiana with two young children, child care is their greatest monthly expense. Without access to reliable child care, career and training opportunities are limited for parents and their children may miss out on strong foundation for future success.”

— **CHARMAINE D. CACCIOPPI, EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT/CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER, UNITED WAY OF SOUTHEAST LOUISIANA**



It's relevant here to acknowledge the additional pressures and assets that impact Jefferson Parish families. As of 2017, nearly a quarter of births in the parish were to parents who did not receive early and adequate prenatal care.<sup>39</sup> While 98% of children under 6 had health insurance, a large percentage of Medicaid-insured children do not appear to be consistently receiving medical or dental care.<sup>40</sup> In 2019, 42% of children 3-5 did not have a Well-Child visit and 57% did not have a preventative dental visit.<sup>41</sup> Lead screening in Jefferson Parish is somewhat limited; in 2017, 17% of children were screened, with 3% of those children found to have elevated levels of lead.<sup>42</sup> However, there is evidence that lead may be a concern in some parts of the New Orleans region, with low-income communities particularly at risk.<sup>43</sup>

Jefferson Parish families also have access to a tapestry of resources and services that are also an important part of the early care and education ecosystem. Pregnant and birthing parents have at least six hospitals nearby, each of which is enrolled in key programs (e.g. Birth Ready hospital or Baby Friendly designations, Gift Shining Star breastfeeding programs) designed to support maternal and infant health. There are also home visiting programs, such as Parents as Teachers and Nurse Family Partnerships, available to families who may need additional resources or support. In 2021, 259 Jefferson Parish families were served through the Nurse Family Partnership program, approximately 75% of whom identified as Black or African American and 13% of whom identified as Hispanic. An additional 139 families<sup>44</sup> were served through the Parents as Teachers model, 59% of whom identified as Black and 17% of whom identified as Hispanic. Both programs currently have additional capacity to support Jefferson Parish families.



“Beary Cherry Tree is located in the heart of Jefferson Parish and currently has over 100 families on our waiting list. There is a lack of high quality early care and education centers across the Parish.”

— PAULA POLITO, OWNER AND DIRECTOR, BEARY CHERRY TREE

## Jefferson's Childcare Demand

There are 33,347 children under the age of six in Jefferson Parish in approximately 8,200 households. Of these children, approximately 70% have all available parents in the workforce, demonstrating a robust need for accessible, affordable, and high-quality early care and education. (Note that, of course, additional early learning options might further increase the number of parents in the workforce.) In addition, approximately a third of children of all ages reside with a single parent<sup>45</sup>; there is a unique need for childcare options in those families.



“I have six children (11, 7, 6, 5, 3, and 1). When I have to go somewhere, I bring them all with me. It’s not easy, but I do it from my heart. This is why I cannot work.”

— FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

Another critical component of understanding the childcare demand is understanding employment patterns. Families often pursue childcare options near their home or their place of work. The available data suggests that commuting may have an impact on increasing childcare demand in Jefferson Parish with 54.9% of those employed within Jefferson residing externally, and 50.8% of those living in Jefferson commuting externally.<sup>46</sup> This means an approximated net influx of 14,089 workers into Jefferson Parish daily. It is challenging, however, to identify the precise commuting patterns of families. Some may opt for a location that is on their commuting route rather than near their home or work. Others may rely on public transportation and prefer to seek options near bus stops or other transportation centers. Nevertheless, we can consider commuting data as a potential additional childcare demand pressure.

Demand for early care and education also depends on affordability. For many Jefferson Parish families, participation in public subsidies (e.g., B-3 seats, Early Head Start, Child Care Assistance Program) is critical to ensuring that childcare is accessible and affordable. For example, Paula Polito, Director of Beary Cherry Tree, shares that “the increased reimbursement rates by the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) have been incredibly helpful in assisting parents with their co-pays. In some instances, parents pay only \$4/week for childcare services.” In 2020, approximately 14,89 new applications for CCAP subsidies were received, with a monthly average of 1,893 children receiving CCAP subsidies. Of note is the fact that approximately 48% of Jefferson Parish applications to the Louisiana Department of Education for CCAP in 2020 were rejected.<sup>47</sup> Based on interviews with state and local specialists, there are several reasons for this. In many cases, this may simply be the result of duplicate applications; families may apply multiple times to try to expedite their verification process or because of confusion.

### A NOTE ON CHILDCARE AND THE ECONOMY

With 70% of parents working and nearly 30% of children residing with a single parent, childcare is pivotal to families, but also employers. To date, we have been unable to locate local, parish-level, studies of how child care instability affects Jefferson Parish's workforce productivity. However, *Losing Ground: How Child Care Impacts Louisiana's Workforce Productivity and the State Economy* reports the demand for quality early care and education and the economic impact of child care instability in Louisiana, using statewide data.

The study reports that:

- » Half of survey respondents rely on family members for child care.
- » One in 6 respondents quit a job due to child care issues.
- » One in 13 were fired due to recurring child care issues.
- » Over 40% of respondents reported missing work due to child care issues in the past 3 months.
- » Absences and employee turnover cost Louisiana employers \$816 million a year.
- » Child care issues result in a \$1.1 billion loss annually for Louisiana's economy.
- » Louisiana loses almost \$84 million annually in tax revenue due to child care issues.

This study – the first of its kind in the state of Louisiana – demonstrates that child care issues clearly affect a wide cross-section of Louisiana workers, resulting in major economic costs to employers and a large economic impact on the state. While this study reports data collected statewide, interviews of Jefferson business representatives indicate similar challenges in Jefferson Parish. The lack of quality, accessible early care and education creates workforce challenges such as tardiness, absences, reduced applicants for positions, and reduced ability to fill vacancies. These challenges have some larger businesses in Jefferson researching personnel needs for child care and whether or not onsite child care is needed to recruit and retain a qualified workforce.



However, there are additional reasons that families may be denied eligibility. They may be over the income cap, not have submitted all the required paperwork, or not have evidence that they are working, seeking work, or in a training/education program. Families may also be unaware about elements of the eligibility or application process, including if they need to switch centers. An additional concern for many families was the inability to access a pay stub or other verification document; some families reported minimal support (or active resistance) from their employer. Finally, eligibility is particularly challenging for families who have been displaced through natural disasters like hurricanes or who are otherwise struggling with housing.

To support families with this process, the Louisiana Department of Education has launched the Early Childhood Guides (EC Guides)<sup>48</sup> program who work to build relationships with families and demystify the application. In Jefferson Parish, this program has an eligibility success rate of approximately 90%, significantly higher than the overall rate. Applicants are prescreened to ensure they will meet income thresholds and supported to gather and submit all required documentation. While the Jefferson Early Childhood Network Bilingual Early Childhood Guide position was open for several months, a new bilingual EC Guide has begun supporting families who need assistance in Spanish. There is not currently a waitlist for

CCAP, so additional families could access CCAP resources if given this form of personalized support. Access to other publicly-funded seats is typically more limited. While the birth-3 (B-3) seats newly approved through the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education do not currently have a waitlist, that is anticipated to change within the next month. Those seats are expected to remain full with a waitlist for the upcoming school year. Similarly, the state-funded pre-kindergarten seats (LA 4) are typically full; only two schools had persistently low enrollment, and those vacancies may result from perceptions of quality rather than demand.

Ultimately, understanding demand is more complex than simply understanding the demographic, cost, and workforce data. It is clear that parents consider a number of different factors<sup>49</sup> as they seek to choose the right setting for their families. Quality is a critical part of parent decision-making, but parents may have differing visions of what a quality setting looks like. Health and safety are similarly important; this is particularly critical during the COVID pandemic, as parents seek to protect their children from the unknown short and long term impacts of COVID. (There is no doubt that parents have found childcare challenging to navigate during the pandemic; this was a consistent theme in the focus groups.)<sup>50</sup> Of course, factors such as convenience and schedule also matter.<sup>51</sup> Finally, alignment with culture, ethnicity and/or language of caregivers may also play a role. Some parents may opt for informal care — often referred to as family, friend, and neighbor care — if they do not find the qualities they are looking for in the formal system; in other cases, a parent may choose (or be forced) to stay home if care costs more than their income. Data from the focus groups underscores the lengths to which parents go to ensure their children have the best available opportunities for early care and education.

Several of those who participated in the focus group expressed interest in accessing childcare, but also trepidation about developing a trusting relationship with caregivers and establishing a sense of safety and comfort. Many referenced the importance of finding a high-quality early care and education program to allow both parents to work, but also stressed needing a location that is convenient and/or accessible without transportation. Ultimately, there is a significant need for affordable childcare seats, but both the specifics of those seats and the staff providing care play a role in shaping that demand.



“I’m fortunate because I work from home. She is always with me. It might seem radical. When I work she is with me. I focus 100% on her, and she helps me with the business (cooking). I don’t have language or cost as a barrier. We don’t want for anything. Everything we do is a learning moment. The truth is there aren’t these barrier. She helps me. It is a lot of fun. When I was going to have her, I didn’t know what I was going to do without her father. But I made my life around her, instead of her around me. I focused on how do I make this work.” — **FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT**



“Early intervention is a critical component of the early care and learning system. We strive to ensure that all of our learners with exceptionalities receive high quality instruction tailored to their individual strengths and needs. Strong communication with early intervention providers can make that easier. However, many children join us in Pre-K with previously unidentified needs. As a state, we need the capacity and flexibility to enroll more children in early intervention programs.”

— **LILI GUILBAULT, DIRECTOR OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION, JEFFERSON PARISH SCHOOLS**

The demand for childcare for children with disabilities also is challenging to capture. Estimates of the number of children with disabilities vary dramatically. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) estimates that an increased number of children have developmental disabilities reported by their parents, rising to approximately 17% of all children between 3 and 17. In Jefferson Parish, approximately 14.5% of school-aged children participate in special education, while Census data suggests 10% of the population (under 65 years) have disabilities. It is reasonable to assume that some young children may have needs that have not yet emerged. In fact, a strong early childhood ecosystem may have countervailing effects on the number of children identified with needs.

On the one hand, robust early identification systems may increase the number of children diagnosed with disabilities; on the other hand, strong pre/perinatal supports, early intervention systems, and high quality early care and learning offerings may reduce some needs.

**ESTIMATING THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES AND GAPS IN SERVICES**

| Age         | Estimated Number of Children, Based on Birth Rate | Estimated Number of Children with Disabilities (10%) | Number of Children Served Through IDEA <sup>52</sup> | % Gap Between Children Estimated to Have Need and Those Served |
|-------------|---|--|--|--|
| Infants     | 5,468   | 547  | 45   | Est. 502 Children: 92%   |
| 1 Year Olds | 5,475   | 548  | 111  | Est. 347 Children: 80%   |
| 2 Year Olds | 5,469   | 547  | 326  | Est. 221 Children: 40%   |
| 3 Year Olds | 5,574   | 557  | 175  | Est. 382 Children: 69%   |
| 4 Year Olds | 5,714   | 571  | 185  | Est. 386 Children: 68%   |

The chart above demonstrates that there is a significant gap between the number of children with disabilities we would anticipate to find in Jefferson Parish and those who are currently being served. This may suggest that the early identification system needs to be strengthened; it may also result from Louisiana’s stringent identification criteria.<sup>53</sup> This gap decreases from birth to age two, which might be expected as children’s needs emerge over time. However, it increases again between ages two and three. This may be the result of the transition between IDEA Part C, the Early Steps program administered by the Department of Health, and IDEA Part B, which is administered by the Jefferson Parish School District.

In the next section, we examine childcare supply. For children with disabilities, supply and demand are intimately interconnected. Once eligibility for service has been established, there is a legal mandate for care and learning. However, it is not necessarily the case that the quality and type of service matches the goals or interests of parents. For example, parents may prefer an inclusive setting for their child, but there may not be a program that meets their needs, is located conveniently, and has availability. While we don’t include specific data about the supply side of care and learning for children with disabilities, this may merit further study.

## Jefferson's Childcare Supply

Understanding the supply for childcare is complex, as is the early learning ecosystem as a whole. There are several types of formal childcare settings, each of which may be attractive to families for different reasons. Excluding elementary school programs, there are 144 licensed early learning providers in Jefferson Parish. These providers are inclusive of 13 family child care providers, 41 Type I programs, 12 Type II programs, and 78 Type III programs.<sup>54</sup> Of these, only Type III providers can serve publicly-funded children. There are a number of different public funding streams available in Jefferson Parish, including federal, state, and local fund sources. These funding streams are captured in the table below, along with the estimated total numbers of students served.<sup>55</sup>



The publicly-funded supply of childcare includes federal programs such as Early Head Start and Head Start, Louisiana state programs such as CCAP and LA 4, and programs with a mix of federal, state, and local funding such as the B-3 program; these programs are also part of the quality rated system.

Note that there is currently a pilot underway to expand CCAP subsidy bonus payments and quality improvement initiatives to family child care providers. In addition to licensed providers, there are also license-exempt family child care providers. These providers are also divided into three categories – certified, registered, and unregistered. Only the certified programs are eligible to accept public subsidies, but both certified and registered programs receive state inspections and are required to follow some standards. All sites who serve more than six children or operate more than 12 ½ hours per week are legally required to be either licensed or registered, or they may be operating illegally. Note that we have limited data on unregulated supply, whether larger providers operating without a license or families, friends, or neighbors serving as temporary or full-time childcare.

**JEFFERSON PARISH'S CHILD CARE PROGRAMS:  
FUNDING, ALLOCATION, AND POPULATION SERVED**

| Funding Stream                                 | Program Name   | How Seats Are Allocated  | Serves Infants and Toddlers?              | Total Number of Students Served                               |
|--|--|--|---|---|
| <b>Federal</b>                                 | Early Head Start   | Distributed by local Head Start grantees, Jeff CAP and Kingsley House  | Yes<br><i>(Infants and Toddlers Only)</i> | 305   |
|  | Head Start   | Distributed by local Head Start grantees, Jeff CAP   | No  | 348   |
|  | Title I  | Jefferson Parish Schools allocates funding   | No  | 41  |
|  | IDEA - Part B  | Jefferson Parish Schools allocates funding   | No  | 556 <sup>56</sup>   |
|  | Idea Part C  | LA Dept of Health administers the program; funding is a mix of state and federal   | Yes<br><i>(Infants and Toddlers Only)</i> | 482 <i>(45 infants, 111 one year olds, 326 two year olds)</i> |
| <b>State</b>                                   | Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP)                         | Families apply to the state for CCAP; can be used at any eligible provider   | Yes                                       | 1,701   |
|  | Nonpublic School Early Childhood Development Program (NSECD) | Families can apply through the Jefferson Common Enrollment and Registration System to participate; participating programs are reimbursed | No  | 224   |
|  | LA 4 Program   | LDOE allocates seats; Jefferson Parish Schools administers seats in Jefferson Parish   | No  | 1,784   |
|  | 8(g) funding   | BESE allocates funding; Jefferson Parish Schools administers program   | No  | 42  |
| <b>Mixed Federal, State, and Local Funding</b> | Federal B-3 Care   | Preschool Development Grant funds flow through the LDOE to JPS as Lead Agency  | Yes<br><i>(Infants-Three)</i>             | 503 Seats Funded  |
|  | State B-3  | State funding matched to the amount of local funds raised for B-3 seats  | Yes<br><i>(Infants-Three)</i>             | 17 Seats Funded <sup>57</sup>                                 |
|  | Local B-3  | Local funding raised by the Jefferson RSN  | Yes<br><i>(Infants-Three)</i>             | 17 Seats Funded <sup>58</sup>                                 |

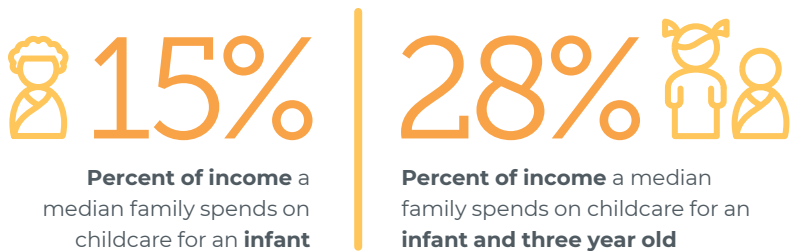


“The cost [of care] is important. I have tried to use the schools through the government, but I cannot because we make too much money. For that reason, because it is too much, I have to use a babysitter. Thank God, I found a babysitter who doesn’t make me pay too much.”

— FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

## A Look at Childcare Access and Supply in Jefferson Parish

Affordability is a key factor in families' ability to access child care. Nationally, many families struggle to manage the costs of childcare and may need to make difficult decisions about balancing affordability with quality, safety, and other considerations. In Jefferson Parish, families must make these same choices.



Based on Type III center-based child care.



### Subsidies can have a dramatic impact on families' choices.

In Jefferson Parish, there are several different subsidized options including federally-funded programs such as Head Start and locally-funded subsidies. Nevertheless, many families do not have access to publicly-funded care and learning opportunities.



Children from economically disadvantaged households who lack access to publicly-funded childcare.

**\$54,032** Median Family Income in Jefferson Parish<sup>59</sup>

### School Readiness is a Community-Wide Endeavor.

It includes ensuring that schools are ready to receive students, that families have the tools they need to support their children, that providers from medical to education are aligned, and that students are prepared to thrive. While entry assessments are only one part of that picture, they can provide a snapshot of students when they enter Jefferson Parish Schools.

**24.4%** Children meeting literacy standards at Kindergarten entry, based on Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills(DIBELS)<sup>63</sup>

**12.4%** Children who enter Kindergarten considered 'ready to learn'<sup>64</sup>





While we do not have data on actual numbers of children served across all sites, we are able to report the approximate number of publicly-funded enrolled students. (Note that many children are not in publicly-funded seats, but rather privately-funded, tuition-based seats.) Across all providers, including Head Start sites, elementary schools, and Type III licensed child care providers, 4,722 children were enrolled in October of the 2020-2021 school year.

**PUBLICLY-FUNDED ENROLLMENT BY PROVIDER TYPE**

| Provider Type <sup>65</sup> | Number of Providers | Publicly-Funded Enrollment | Publicly-Funded Enrollment of Infants and Toddlers Only |
|-----------------------------|---------------------|----------------------------|---|
| School                      | 58                  | 1,985                      | 29  |
| Child Care                  | 58                  | 2,294                      | 1,251   |
| Early Head Start            | 14                  | 305                        | 305   |
| Head Start                  | 8                   | 348                        | 0   |
| <b>Total</b>                | <b>124</b>          | <b>4,722</b>               | <b>1,375</b>  |

The publicly-funded Head Start enrollment listed here are not inclusive of all the possible seats available through Head Start, a federally-funded program that serves primarily low income children. The total funded enrollment for the Jefferson Community Action Program (Jeff CAP) Head Start program in 2021 was 980. Of these slots, 922 were for center-based care and learning (including 48 at center care partners), 30 were for home-based services, and 28 were

slots reserved for pregnant women. The vast majority of slots (537) were dedicated to three and four year olds. While funded enrollment was 980, cumulative enrollment in 2021 was only 639, suggesting a number of vacant seats. The point in time enrollment data captured through the Child Count shows an even more limited number of children (443) being served. This gap may be influenced by COVID, Hurricane Ida, and the change in resulting parent choices.

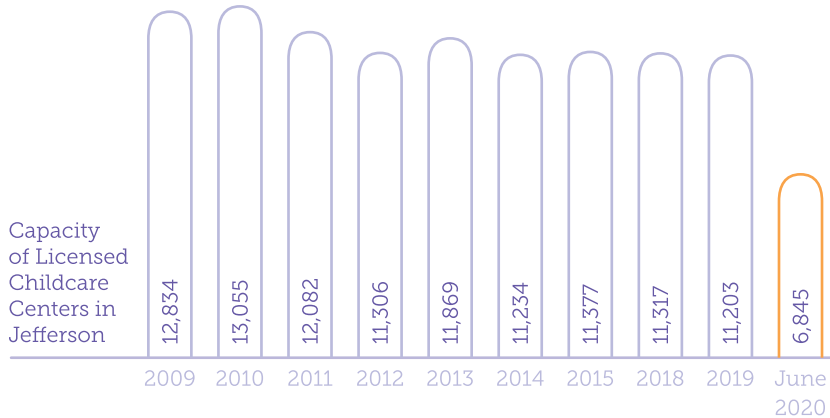
Just as Head Start data shows a limited number of very young children being served, overall Child Count data from October 2021 shows that 215 infants, 1,329 toddlers, 815 three-year-olds, and 2,532 four-year-olds were being served in publicly-funded programs. This is a fraction of the eligible children, particularly for infants and toddlers. This gap is largely driven by the robust supply of Pre-K seats that Jefferson Parish Public Schools provides for four-year-olds, as well as the supply of Head Start slots for three and four year olds, and the limited funding sources for infants and toddlers. It also follows a national trend that has only been exacerbated during COVID;<sup>66</sup> in other cities, expanded access to Pre-K has negatively impacted the supply of infant and toddler slots.<sup>67</sup>

However, as mentioned above, publicly-funded capacity only captures part of the overall supply. To get closer to understanding the universe of available childcare, we can examine licensing data, as mentioned previously. The total capacity of licensed childcare providers dropped significantly in 2020, presumably because of the COVID-19 pandemic, as only 6,845 slots were recorded. This is as compared to an average of 11,400 slots of the preceding four years.

“Our Head Start programs are committed to reaching parents across Jefferson Parish and work hard to ensure that we meet our funded enrollment. However, we have been significantly impacted by the twin challenges of COVID and Hurricane IDA. Many of our most vulnerable families have had difficult personal experiences with COVID, and are anxious about returning to center-based care. Still others are grappling with housing challenges related to the extreme weather. Finally, while we are fortunate to have a dedicated and passionate group of staff members, we are experiencing some of the same workforce challenges that other providers and other sectors are also facing.”

— ROCHELLE RABATHALY, HEAD START ADMINISTRATOR, JEFFERSON PARISH COMMUNITY ACTION PROGRAM

**TOTAL CAPACITY OF ALL LICENSED CHILDCARE<sup>68</sup>**



However, even prior to COVID, the capacity of licensed providers had been almost steadily dropping from a high of 13,055 slots in 2010. Note too that licensed capacity is the maximum number of children that providers may be able to serve; for a variety of reasons, including most notably space and staffing, they may choose to serve fewer. In some cases, this gap can be significant - one provider shared a difference of 62 slots or 23% between licensed capacity and the maximum number of children they typically choose to serve. Scaled across all providers, this could result in a dramatic drop in actual supply.

Another dimension to supply is the hours and days offered by childcare providers. Of the 144 licensed childcare providers in Jefferson Parish, only five currently offer childcare on Saturday and/or Sunday. Furthermore, only a few providers offer extended hours, with four opening before 6 a.m. and eight offering hours after 6 p.m.. The majority of providers open before 8 a.m. and close between 5 p.m. and 6 p.m. This schedule likely accommodates the needs of many families working traditional hours of 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., depending on the length of their commute, their access to reliable transportation, and other factors. For families working nontraditional hours, swing shifts, or late night hours – estimated to be approximately 1/5th of all workers<sup>69</sup> – finding accommodating

childcare is likely to present a significant challenge. Note that in some cases, providers have altered their hours due to the complex staffing and risk mitigation strategies related to COVID. For example, Paula Polito reports that Beary Cherry Tree Child Care is now open from 7 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.; prior to COVID, the center was open from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Quality is also a key factor in understanding both supply and demand; research is clear that perception and information about quality is a primary driver in parental choice. Where supply is not high quality – or not perceived as high quality – seats may go unused; by contrast, high quality programs may have waitlists. One measure of quality is captured through Louisiana’s Early Childhood Site Performance Profiles, which are released by the Department of Education for every publicly-funded early care and education setting in the state, including child care, Early Head Start, Head Start, public schools, and parochial schools with publicly-funded early learning classrooms.



These **profiles** include an overall quality rating (Excellent, High Proficient, Proficient, Approaching Proficient, and Unsatisfactory), information on key age-appropriate domains (e.g. emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support for Pre-K classrooms), ratings on completion of child assessments, student-teacher ratios, adoption of a quality curriculum, and staff qualifications. Note that these performance profiles are not available for all childcare providers, only those accepting public funds, meaning that family child care homes, Type I, and Type II settings are excluded. In Jefferson, that means that Performance Profiles are not available for 66 programs. It is also important to note that due to COVID, programs have been held harmless for the past two years. As a result, these performance levels are a very imperfect measure of current quality, though they still provide insight into historical trends and quality variance.

**PUBLICLY-FUNDED ENROLLMENT BY PERFORMANCE LEVEL**

| Performance Levels <sup>70</sup> | Number of Sites | Publicly-Funded Enrollment (Estimated) | % Enrolled at Each Quality Level |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|--|----------------------------------|
| Excellent                        | 5               | 157                                    | 4.4%                             |
| High Proficient                  | 61              | 2,111                                  | 59.5%                            |
| Proficient                       | 51              | 1,232                                  | 34.7%                            |
| Approaching Proficient           | 6               | 44                                     | 1.2%                             |
| Unsatisfactory                   | 1               | 5                                      | .1%                              |
| <b>Total</b>                     | <b>124</b>      | <b>3,549</b>                           | <b>99.9%</b>                     |

Note that in Jefferson, only seven providers serving publicly-funded children are below Proficient. This is promising and reflects the Ready Start Network’s continued focus on building and investing in quality. However, it is worth considering the quality ratings across the state as a reference point. Just as in Jefferson Parish, the majority of sites fall within the High Proficient and Proficient categories across Louisiana. In Louisiana overall, 285 sites are considered Excellent which represents 18% of all sites, as compared to just 5 sites (4%) in Jefferson Parish. Conversely, only 45 sites statewide are Approaching Proficient, representing 2.9% of the total, as compared to 4.8% in Jefferson. There is only one Unsatisfactory site in Louisiana and it falls within Jefferson.



“Transparency and education would help providers understand why a specific state regulation leads to quality. We need to focus on the impact those regulations have on [child] development. In my nonprofit, [Childcare Coalition, which is run by six Jefferson Parish providers], we work with providers to understand their concerns and the assistance that is needed. It’s run by providers, because we know the needs.”

— **MONIQUE ROUEGE, OWNER AND DIRECTOR OF CARLIE CARE KIDS ACADEMY**



“The research is clear that quality matters in early learning. It’s a critical factor in parents’ selection of programs and it impacts children’s outcomes. In Jefferson, we’ve been focused on improving quality for a long time, but we know there is more work to do to ensure that all children have access to high quality learning and care.”

— **JULIE PALEY, DIRECTOR OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, JEFFERSON EARLY CHILDHOOD NETWORK**

The Performance Profiles also include information on the staff at each early learning site, providing aggregated information about degree attainment. The relationship between the education of staff and overall performance level is clear, although we cannot draw any conclusions about the direction of the relationship. That is, we do not have evidence to suggest whether highly performing sites attract/seek out more credentialed staff, are highly performing because of their credentialed staff, support degree attainment, or some other dynamic. Note also the high level of staff members in the Excellent and High Proficient sites holding Louisiana Certification, particularly as compared to lower rated sites.

**UNDERSTANDING TEACHER CREDENTIALS BY SITES’ PERFORMANCE LEVEL**

| Performance Levels by Site <sup>71</sup> | Average % of Teachers without a Degree | Average % of Teachers with a CDA or Associates | Average % of Teachers with a Bachelors | Average % of Teachers with a Masters | Average % of Teachers with LA Certification <sup>72</sup> |
|--|--|--|--|--------------------------------------|---|
| Excellent                                | 0%                                     | 20%  | 80%                                    | 0%                                   | 100%  |
| High Proficient                          | 17.7%                                  | 29.8%  | 48.2%                                  | 4.3%                                 | 74.9%   |
| Proficient                               | 25.3%                                  | 24.4%  | 46.3%                                  | 4%                                   | 58.3%   |
| Approaching Proficient                   | 69.7%                                  | 13.7%  | 16.7%                                  | 0%                                   | 20.8%   |
| Unsatisfactory                           | 100%                                   | 0%   | 0%                                     | 0%                                   | 0%  |

Workforce and staffing are important in every element of childcare, from ensuring adequate ratios in order to maximize capacity to providing a high quality learning environment for children. Workforce is therefore a critical element impacting supply and the availability of seats. Given this, we must acknowledge some of the forces impacting the early learning workforce. The ongoing COVID crisis looms large here, with surveys finding that depression amongst educators has increased by 30-40% and many teachers report concern about losing their job due to the pandemic. Additional findings suggest decreased job commitment and a decrease in the percent of teachers who anticipate staying in their role or career long-term.<sup>73</sup> This is confirmed by the experiences of childcare leaders, 90% of whom report staffing challenges and half of whom report losing strong teachers during the pandemic.<sup>74</sup> There are other factors impacting educators as well. For example, a push to professionalize the workforce through requiring lead teachers to hold an Early Childhood Ancillary Certificate in 2019 appears to have positively impacted educator quality, retention, and satisfaction, although further study is necessary.<sup>75</sup> There is also some evidence that there may be center-level factors impacting staffing; research suggests that turnover rates vary significantly by center, with some experiencing high levels of turnover, while others experience minimal churn during the same time period.<sup>76</sup>

“The work of increasing access to high quality care is not simply about the availability of seats and information. It is about building trusting relationships with Latino families, and the organizations that have supported this community for decades. Only then can we develop a full understanding of what will meet families’ needs, and the work ahead.”

— EMMY DACOSTA-GOMEZ, FOUNDER AND PRINCIPAL, ADVANCING COMMUNITIES FOR EQUITY

Compensation has also long been a factor impacting the early care and education workforce. Wages for child care workers in Louisiana average \$9.77 per hour, lower than the national average (\$12.27) and the Southern states average (\$10.97). Louisiana child care businesses struggle to find and retain talent. Child care workers tend to turn over quickly and leave the profession early, which negatively impacts the quality of care available to young children, as well as the sustainability and stability of providers.

Ultimately, each of these factors contributes to the challenges of supporting a high quality, stable, and diverse workforce. This, in turn, is a critical element impacting the supply and caliber of childcare seats available for Jefferson’s children and families.



# Jefferson's Childcare Gap

Because the supply and demand side of childcare have been dramatically impacted by COVID, understanding the gap in this context becomes an increasingly complex task. Nevertheless, data from previous years can still provide a window into the needs and resources in the parish. Based on the 2018-2019 academic year, Partners for Family Health Louisiana estimates that 90% of Jefferson Parish children aged 0-2 and 76% of three-year-olds from low-income households lacked access to publicly-funded childcare.<sup>77</sup> (Note that this trend is aligned with broader state-wide data; Louisiana's efforts to expand access for four-year olds have resulted in much greater access for the older age group, while access for infants and toddlers remains a significant challenge in spite of various layered state, federal, and local funding streams.) Further, given that we know that a significant proportion of families who aren't considered low income – for example ALICE® families – still struggle to afford childcare, the true accessible childcare gap may be even higher.



### ESTIMATED GAP IN AVAILABLE CHILDCARE SUPPLY BY AGE

| Age Group   | Birth Rate <sup>78</sup> | Estimated Number of Children with All Available Parents in the Workforce | Estimated Number of Children Served in Publicly-Funded Seats <sup>79</sup> | % Children with All Parents in the Workforce Served | % Estimated Gap |
|-------------|--------------------------|--|--|---|-----------------|
| Infants     | 5,468                    | 3,827  | 215  | 5.6%  | 94.4%           |
| 1 Year Olds | 5,475                    | 3,832  | 514  | 13.4%   | 86.5%           |
| 2 Year Olds | 5,469                    | 3,828  | 646  | 16.9%   | 83.1%           |
| 3 Year Olds | 5,574                    | 3,901  | 815  | 20.1%   | 79.1%           |
| 4 Year Olds | 5,714                    | 3,999  | 2,532  | 63.3%   | 36.7%           |

Above, we estimate the gap based on data available about the number of children with all available parents in the workforce. This estimate includes low-income families, those who are not low-income but who still struggle to afford childcare, but also middle-income and wealthy families for whom childcare may not be unaffordable. However, this does not include families who may have one parent out of the workforce because childcare is inaccessible; we know this is a significant issue.

Additionally, this also does not include families with one or both parents in school or training. While we do not have complete data on this, anecdotal data suggests that approximately 10% of applicants for publicly-funded seats are in some kind of school or training program.<sup>80</sup>

We can also consider specific communities where there appears to be a mismatch between supply and demand. According to the Center for American Progress (CAP) **child care desert interactive map**, the communities with insufficient child care are primarily in the suburban and rural parts of the Parish. Kenner, Lafitte and Waggaman are highlighted as having very little if any licensed child care. The reasons for this are complex and can only be fully understood within the local context. Parents in these communities may be commuting to jobs closer to the commercial center of the Parish. A review of child-care supply by city suggests similar patterns. Population centers such as Metairie, Marrero, and Gretna (including Terry Town) have larger percentages of the licensed supply than their share of Jefferson’s young children. Conversely, similar communities, such as Kenner, have a smaller percentage of licensed supply than their share of young children. Several smaller communities have either a more limited supply than their size would suggest (Waggaman, Bridge City) or no supply at all (Lafitte, Barataria).

**SHARE OF LICENSED CAPACITY BY CITY** (Includes all child care centers, family childcare, and in-home providers, including those not accepting public subsidies)<sup>81</sup>

| City Name           | Total Population <sup>82</sup> | Estimated Population Under 5 | Percent of Jefferson’s Under 5 Population | Number of Providers | Licensed Capacity | Percent of Jefferson’s Licensed Capacity |
|---------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|---|---------------------|-------------------|--|
| Avondale            | 5,321                          | 393                          | 1%  | 3                   | 57                | 0%                                       |
| Bridge City         | 6,602                          | 435                          | 2%  | 1                   | 53                | 0%                                       |
| Gretna & Terry Town | 42,727                         | 2,918                        | 10%                                       | 19                  | 1,919             | 16%                                      |
| Harahan             | 9,116                          | 310                          | 1%  | 3                   | 151               | 1%                                       |
| Harvey              | 21,054                         | 1,757                        | 6%  | 9                   | 579               | 5%                                       |
| Jefferson           | 10,501                         | 332                          | 1%  | 4                   | 514               | 4%                                       |
| Kenner              | 66,355                         | 3,308                        | 12%                                       | 15                  | 1,078             | 9%                                       |
| Marrero             | 30,894                         | 2,340                        | 8%  | 28                  | 1,803             | 15%                                      |
| Metairie            | 130,427                        | 8,057                        | 28%                                       | 50                  | 4,853             | 41%                                      |
| River Ridge         | 13,337                         | 634                          | 2%  | 4                   | 409               | 3%                                       |
| Waggaman            | 10,017                         | 558                          | 2%  | 1                   | 6                 | 0%                                       |
| Westwego            | 8,568                          | 694                          | 2%  | 7                   | 296               | 3%                                       |
| <b>Total</b>        | <b>440,781<sup>83</sup></b>    | <b>28,508</b>                | <b>76%<sup>84</sup></b>                   | <b>144</b>          | <b>11,724</b>     | <b>100%</b>                              |



“Before the pandemic, I was keeping children in my home. And [as others have said], lots of people just babysit. But I focused so much on the children. We painted, we learned numbers and letters. Parents still tell me thank you.”

— **FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT**



Location can be a critical factor in parental childcare preferences; in some cases, parents may choose a setting closer to their home, while others may prefer an option closer to work. There may also be existing perceptions about the safety or quality of providers in certain communities; this may be driven by a number of factors including demographics. Some of the perceived imbalances between childcare supply and population may be the result of those perceptions, or of employment and commuting patterns. Other communities, particularly in rural areas like Lafitte, may lack either an adequate workforce or face other infrastructure barriers, such as the regional impact of hurricanes which can make finding, insuring, and maintaining an adequate childcare facility unaffordable or impossible. Whatever the cause, the data suggests the existence of childcare deserts where families may have relative difficulty accessing childcare.

| COMMUNITY PROFILES  |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| Avondale  | Metairie   | Kenner   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» <b>Area:</b> 6 square miles</li> <li>» <b>Race/Ethnicity:</b> 40.3% White, 35.4% Black, 9% Hispanic/Latino, 15.9% Asian</li> <li>» <b>Language:</b> 26.9% Speak Language Other Than English At Home</li> <li>» <b>Education:</b> 25.3% Less Than High School Graduate</li> <li>» <b>Median Income:</b> \$22,407</li> <li>» <b>35.7% below 150 percent of the poverty level</b></li> <li>» <b>Population Under 5:</b> 393</li> <li>» <b>Enrolled in LA 4 Preschool:</b> 20<sup>85</sup></li> <li>» <b>Licensed Childcare Providers:</b> 3                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 Family Child Care Providers</li> <li>• 1 Early Learning Center III (suspended due to damage from Hurricane Ida)</li> <li>• <b>Total licensed capacity: 57</b></li> </ul> </li> <li>» <b>Earliest Hours Available:</b> 6:00am</li> <li>» <b>Latest Hours Available:</b> 6:00pm</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» <b>Area:</b> 23.3 square miles</li> <li>» <b>Race/Ethnicity:</b> 69.2% White, 10.2% Black, 15.5% Hispanic/Latino, 4% Asian</li> <li>» <b>Language:</b> 18.2% Speak Language Other Than English At Home</li> <li>» <b>Education:</b> 9% Less Than High School Graduate</li> <li>» <b>Median Income:</b> \$56,421</li> <li>» <b>28.7% below 200 percent of the poverty level</b></li> <li>» <b>Population Under 5:</b> 8,057</li> <li>» <b>Enrolled in LA 4 Preschool:</b> 442</li> <li>» <b>Licensed Childcare Providers:</b> 50                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 26 Early Learning Center I</li> <li>• 7 Early Learning Center II</li> <li>• 10 Early Learning Center III</li> <li>• <b>Total licensed capacity: 4,853</b></li> </ul> </li> <li>» <b>Earliest Hours Available:</b> 6:00am</li> <li>» <b>Latest Hours Available:</b> 6:00pm</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» <b>Area:</b> 14.9 square miles</li> <li>» <b>Race/Ethnicity:</b> 45% White, 23.8% Black, 25.6% Hispanic/Latino, 3.7% Asian</li> <li>» <b>Language:</b> 26.4% Speak Language Other Than English At Home:</li> <li>» <b>Education:</b> 15.3% Less Than High School Graduate</li> <li>» <b>Median Income:</b> \$58,283</li> <li>» <b>36.7% below 200 percent of the poverty level</b></li> <li>» <b>Population Under 5:</b> 3,308</li> <li>» <b>Enrolled in LA 4 Preschool:</b> 321</li> <li>» <b>Licensed Childcare Providers:</b> 15                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 Family Child Care Providers</li> <li>• 1 Early Learning Center I</li> <li>• 10 Early Learning Center III</li> <li>• <b>Total licensed capacity: 1,078</b></li> </ul> </li> <li>» <b>Earliest Hours Available:</b> 6:00am</li> <li>» <b>Latest Hours Available:</b> 7:00pm</li> </ul> |



## Key Findings & Aligned Recommendations

The childcare landscape in Jefferson Parish is complex and multi-faceted, with factors as diverse as geography, economics, COVID, language, and workforce impacting both supply and demand. One of the key goals of the Jefferson Ready Start Network is to make high quality early care and education available to all children in Jefferson Parish and to ensure that all children enter kindergarten healthy and ready for success. With only 12.4% of Jefferson children considered ready to learn when entering Kindergarten,<sup>86</sup> based on the kindergarten entry assessment, this work is urgent. Changing these outcomes requires ensuring an adequate supply of affordable, accessible, and high-quality childcare, as well as building robust demand from families. Based on our comprehensive review of data about Jefferson Parish's population, economic conditions, and childcare supply/demand data, combined with qualitative and anecdotal data gathered from focus groups, surveys, and interviews, we identify several key findings and suggest a number of aligned recommendations:



### » **Finding #1: Cost is a Key Barrier to Accessing Childcare Supply**

*Based on the median income, median cost of childcare, and data about ALICE® families in Jefferson Parish, it is clear that cost is a key barrier to high quality early care and learning. This was echoed by focus group participants, several of whom indicated that cost was prohibitive, and further supported by reports that 50% of parents in southeastern Louisiana have concerns about being unable to afford child care due to the high cost. There are many resources that are fully leveraged, although there are also currently unclaimed CCAP subsidies available to Jefferson Parish families. While the eligibility criteria may prevent some families from accessing subsidies, there is evidence that additional families are likely to qualify if provided additional support and/or resources to address barriers to eligibility.*

“As a mother I want the best for my child, making sure she feels secure and happy in the place she is. How are teachers in school? What is the child learning? What is the school’s focus? Art? Religion? Anything appropriate for the child. Prices for school sometimes are very expensive. I do not have funds to pay for school, but I want the best for my child.”

— FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

» **Recommendation #1: Expand Access by Increasing Subsidies and Increasing Subsidy Participation**

*Subsidies are a key resource for families. The following strategies can help improve access:*

- **Explore allocating funding to raise eligibility thresholds:** *Many families live below the ALICE® threshold but above the 65% median income threshold required to be eligible for CCAP. Jefferson Parish RSN could create a mechanism that directly subsidizes those families, building on the progress made in setting somewhat more flexible eligibility criteria for the B-3 seats. (Note that there are similar state-wide efforts underway that may impact or complement this recommendation.)<sup>87</sup>*
- **Identify local revenue:** *Identify resources and partnerships that can help generate local recurring revenue that is sustainable. A stable funding source, such as a new millage, would allow Jefferson to augment the numbers of seats offered through federal and state subsidy programs.*
- **Expand the EC Guide program:** *Adding additional personnel to this role, ideally in tandem with the outreach/marketing plan, could help encourage more families to apply with greater success.*
- **Reduce Barriers to Access:** *A key obstacle for families is work verification and other needed documentation. Jefferson Parish RSN could form a partnership with local businesses to encourage increased support for families needing documentation from their employer. The RSN could also develop partnerships with other state departments for direct access to needed documents (e.g., vital records for birth certificates for consenting families) to streamline verification, similar to the direct access for immunization records.*

» **Finding #2: Accessible Infant and Toddler Seats are in Short Supply**

*Much of the supply/demand data is complex and it is not easy to identify the total number of slots available for each age group. However, it is evident that there is a lack of infant and toddler slots, particularly those accessible through public funding. This is clear in every data source available. Given that 90% of low-income 0-2 year olds are estimated to lack access to affordable care, this is a critical need for families in Jefferson Parish.*

» **Recommendation #2: Explore Opportunities to Increase Infant and Toddler Seats**

*There are multiple strategies that can be explored to increase the supply of infant and toddler seats. We include several below, but recommend further investigation to determine which options may be practicable for Jefferson:*

- **Convert Existing Supply into Infant and Toddler Slots:** *Review existing sources of three and four-year-old seats, such as Head Start, and determine whether some slots may be able to be converted. This may be a particularly viable strategy in communities with small populations, where a reduction in three and/or four-year-old slots may be tolerable.*
- **Incentivize New Infant and Toddler Supply:** *Seek funding to incentivize the creation of additional infant and toddler slots, basing those incentives on community-level cost modeling.*
- **Develop Public-Private Partnerships to Increase Supply:** *Pursue innovative learning models that blend funding and resources from private and public sources. For example, identify unused public facilities or properties that could be leveraged*



for the use of private providers. In a co-location model, it might also be possible to extend or share resources related to nutritional services, technology, and other overhead costs. National models — and even local examples — may serve as a guide.

- **Review Additional Supply-Building Strategies:** Explore strategies used by other communities to determine if any lessons resonate with members of Jefferson Parish community. One resource capturing a number of these strategies is **Start Early's January 2020 report on Expanding High-Quality Child Care for Infants and Toddlers**.<sup>88</sup>

### » **Finding #3: Childcare Supply Varies by Neighborhood**

There is evidence of a gap in the supply of childcare in some communities, particularly those that are smaller and/or more rural. However, we do not have data on how this supply interacts with demand. In some cases, traditional childcare models may not always match existing demand. This can be due to the hours, cost, quality, or location of existing supply. It may also be the result of a limited number of children of any particular age in smaller

communities resulting in limited supply, as was suggested by the review of licensed capacity by city. This may result in empty seats in communities that appear to be childcare deserts or families in need of childcare who can't access existing supply.

### » **Recommendation #3: Develop a Community-Targeted Approach to Supply**

There are many approaches that may be considered to narrowing childcare gaps; gathering further qualitative information may be helpful. One consideration for large childcare providers, particularly Jefferson Parish Schools, is how to navigate providing adequate supply in low density or low enrollment communities. We recommend a multi-faceted approach:

- **Pilot Quality Improvement Models:** Launch a model to rapidly increase quality in existing programs in under-enrolled communities. This could look like intensive coaching and support, mentorship from other providers, allocation of additional resources, investment in workforce, or beyond.
- **Conduct Outreach and Engagement:** Focus intensive and systematic engagement efforts in low-enrollment high-density communities, seeking to increase awareness about offerings and address administrative barriers.
- **Balance Sure-to-Fill Sites with Hard-to-Fill Sites:** Make a strategic decision to increase publicly-funded seats in communities that are hard to fill but have a high level of need. Compensate these sites financially to ensure quality meets parent expectations, while continuing to maintain adequate high-quality supply in communities where minimal effort is required to fill seats.
- **Consider Alternative Early Learning Models:** In some communities, traditional early learning programs may not be the best fit. Instead, caregiver-and-child models or mobile offerings may be more impactful. (See, for example: **Tutu and me**, the **YMCA Early Learning Readiness** model, or **Mobile Preschool**.) Note that each of these models requires additional study to determine funding options, licensing needs, and more.

» **Finding #4: Quality of Supply Influences Demand**

*Quality matters to parents; both research and the qualitative data from the focus groups supports this. In Jefferson, quality is measured by the Performance Profiles, but it is also a matter of perception. While there are relatively few providers performing below Proficient, there are also relatively few providers performing at the level of Excellent, particularly as compared to the state. Furthermore, quality ratings have been held harmless for several years due to COVID, possibly resulting in an inflation of scores, given that scores can only increase. We do not have robust data to suggest that parents are considering these factors, but must reasonably consider quality to be a key in decision-making, as well as children's outcomes.*

» **Recommendation #4: Targeted Quality Study and Improvement**

*Further exploration with providers who have not attained high levels of quality is needed to better understand and address barriers. These barriers may be related to those already articulated, such as workforce, infrastructure, resources, or other factors. However, developing a more complete picture of the needs of these providers, and learning more about their unique contexts, will help the Parish align resources to support improvement. It will also encourage development of trust between providers, funders, policymakers, and other stakeholders. Given that the data suggests an inequitable distribution of supply, this quality improvement initiative should be focused on targeted communities with a lack of quality seats and/or a high level of community need.*

*“We need to invest in our children.... No child should be in a center without a curriculum, without a developmental screener, without well-qualified and appropriately compensated staffing. Invest in the staff and they will invest in the children. I would be nothing without staff, but it costs money to have quality.”*

— **MONIQUE ROUEGE, OWNER AND DIRECTOR OF  
CARLIE CARE KIDS ACADEMY**

» **Finding #5: Early Learning Educators are a Key Factor in Both Supply and Demand**

*The role of the workforce in child care is clear, impacting everything from capacity to quality and beyond. Compensation and benefits are critical factors in recruiting a high quality early care and education workforce. Retention of staff also tends to be a challenge, both at specific centers and in the profession more broadly. This impacts the quality of care available to young children. Additionally, parents in the focus groups referred to language and cultural responsiveness as important characteristics of the child care workforce, highlighting the importance of having early educators who shared their language or elements of their cultural identity. Strengthening the early care and education workforce by focusing on pipelines for new educators and opportunities to support existing educators is key.*

» **Recommendation #5: Build a Diverse, Supported, and Sustainable Workforce**

*To create a strong, supported, and diverse workforce that reflects the unique needs and characteristics of the community, we encourage several specific actions:*

- **Workforce Supports:** *Explore pathways to ensure the economic well-being of the early care and education workforce, such as appropriate compensation, health care benefits, and paid leave. While this is a complex set of challenges, one strategy might be to pilot a menu of compensation and benefit options to determine strategies most beneficial for the early care and education workforce (e.g., offer healthcare benefit cost-sharing models that could make care for educators less expensive, provide stipends to cover health care premiums for teachers who access the Insurance Marketplace).*
- **Diversification:** *Continue efforts to strengthen the diversification of the early care and education workforce pipeline. A first step would be developing a robust strategy of recruitment and development for additional Latino educators, though additional diversification strategies to target other populations could follow.*

» **Finding #6: Language Is at the Center of Parent Decision-Making**

*More than thirty-one thousand Jefferson families speak a home language other than English, approximately 60% of whom are Spanish-speaking. While accessibility and supply are multi-faceted, it is worth underscoring the critical importance of language in Latino parents' considerations of childcare. At least five participants in the focus groups specifically referred to language as a barrier to access, expressing both concerns about their children's ability to participate in the classroom learning and their own struggles to communicate with childcare providers and staff. It seems clear that language is a critical factor in building a more accessible and equitable early learning ecosystem.*

» **Recommendation #6: Expand Access by Reducing Language Barriers**

*While many of the challenges, such as cost, transportation and beyond, are structural, language surfaced as a key point for Latino families. Eliminating or reducing this communication barrier could have significant impacts for families and providers. We recommend several next steps:*

- **Targeted Recruitment:** *As mentioned previously, but underscored here, we recommend the immediate recruitment of Spanish-speaking child care providers and staff, and development of a long-term strategy to build the pipeline of Spanish speaking early care and education providers.*
- **Translation Supports:** *Identify and implement strategies to support robust translation services for child care providers to support communication with families, identifying strategies that are not a significant expense for providers (e.g., use a shared services model funded by RSN grant funds).*
- **Continued Study:** *This landscape analysis scratches the surface of some of the specific needs and assets of Jefferson Parish's Latino community. Further review of the resources identified and recommendations developed by Advancing Communities for Equity will be helpful.*



“We just arrived 3 months ago to this country. We come from El Salvador. I don’t have help with my children. My son is 4 years old and has autism. He is on the high range of social skills but he doesn’t communicate well. I don’t have any support. We just got here. I struggle with him because he can sometimes be reactive and physical so it’s hard. My other child is one year old. I have been knocking on doors to find therapies and help with him” — **FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT**

» **Finding #7a: There is Untapped Demand for Childcare**

*There is ample evidence that Latino families are underrepresented among early care and education families. Emerging data suggest multiple causes for this gap, including lack of knowledge, access challenges, and safety concerns. Latino families who participated in the childcare survey and focus groups expressed interest in navigating the enrollment process and suggested a trusted church serve as a provider. Additionally, concerns were raised about safety, quality, and staff engagement. One parent wrote that the most important quality in a caregiver was that they be “a loving and respectful person with my girl.” This confirms that increasing demand will require high quality early care and education to be accessible and meet families’ definitions of quality. While we only have robust qualitative data for the Latino community, there may be additional untapped demand for other communities with specific needs or challenges, such as families of children with disabilities.*

» **Finding #7b: Engagement Requires Trust**

*Several focus groups and outreach initiatives were planned, but only two events with Latino families proved to be fruitful. In one case, several parents had confirmed that they would participate before ultimately not attending. While a number of factors contributed to these challenges, the successful engagements relied on strong existing relationships between community organizations and parents. Further engagement with Latino families will be most successful if focused on established networks and structures where trust has already been established. This is likely to hold true with other communities of interest as well.*

» **Recommendation #7: Develop an Outreach and Marketing Plan for Target Families**

*The importance of building trust and relationships with underrepresented families can not be over-emphasized. Jefferson Parish can seek to strengthen relationships with the Latino community, increase outreach to families in low-enrollment areas, and build communications with families of children with diagnosed or suspected disabilities. This may take many forms:*

- **Build a Stronger Network:** Build new connections and cultivate existing relationships with community organizations and advocacy groups.
- **Outreach Campaign:** Develop and implement an outreach campaign focused on key neighborhoods and demographics, informed by the partnership with community organizations and advocacy groups. This might include recruiting and compensating community members to serve as trusted ambassadors for the early care and education system in Jefferson. There are several national models that can serve as a resource, including the **GEEARS Early Ambassador program**, the **Families First Ambassador program**, and others.
- **Dig Deeper:** Explore additional strategies to build relationships with underrepresented communities to identify the most fruitful pathways for engagement.

## Opportunities for Future Exploration and Data Gathering

While we uncovered several key findings through the landscaping process, deeper questions also emerged. In addition, the current early learning ecosystem is in a significant period of transition, as we await the potential passage of potential federal legislation that would impact every area addressed above. We encourage further study and investigation to explore these, specifically:



“The most important learning for my child is “respect and values. [It is also important] to teach children that their body belongs only to them and no one can touch it.”

— FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

- **Impacts of Potential Federal Legislation:** There is currently strong momentum for federal legislation aimed at impacting childcare. If any bill of significance passes, we encourage a thorough review of the potential changes and how those interact with the data, findings, and recommendations above. In some cases, new resources may allow implementation of some of the strategies identified, in other cases the strategies may no longer be needed because of a dramatic expansion of available funding.
- **Interdependence with Regional Area:** We’ve referred throughout this document to the complexity of understanding the supply and demand of childcare in Jefferson Parish with limited consideration of the larger regional context. This merits further investigation with specific attention to the choices that lead families to reside in Jefferson Parish, their preferences for seeking care and learning options inside or outside of the Parish, and their connections to resources and assets in neighboring parishes.
- **Expanded Community Engagement Efforts:** We felt fortunate to be able to include the voices of Jefferson Parish families, with a specific focus on Latino parents, through a series of focus groups led by Emmy O’Dwyer, Founder and Principal of Advancing Communities for Equity. However, several additional attempts at gathering input through additional focus groups and online surveys were less fruitful. This suggests that additional attempts to conduct outreach to the Latino community are necessary, as well as study to identify additional potential strategies to reduce barriers or increase access. Further, it would be valuable to engage additional subgroups to identify other gaps in childcare supply and demands, as well as unique challenges faced by



those communities. For example, the data clearly suggests a possible gap in early identification and intervention for students with special needs; this warrants further investigation.

• **Deepening Engagement with the Business Community:** The ties between early childhood and the economic sector are indisputable. While some information about the economic impact of childcare on businesses in Jefferson Parish has been gathered, further investigation is warranted. The Jefferson RSN should collaborate with the Chamber, JEDCO, and GNO, Inc to survey Jefferson businesses to better understand the unique perspectives of stakeholders from the business community about:

- The impact of child care challenges on their employees and their business as a whole
- The most frequent and impactful child care-related workforce challenges
- Their interest in providing child care benefits,
- The kind of child care benefits they would be interested in providing or learning more about, and
- Their views on early learning.

It will be beneficial to continue to develop a deeper understanding of the many factors impacting childcare, the views and interests of stakeholders across the region, and the ever-changing context that contributes to the overall ecosystem. The work of continued learning can be balanced with the urgency of immediate change to continue to strengthen the early learning and care system in Jefferson Parish.



## Conclusion

For years, Jefferson Parish has worked to build a strong foundation of early care and learning, supported by a broad range of stakeholders. The Jefferson Parish Ready Start Network continues work to build a more equitable and accessible early learning ecosystem for the children and families it serves. This landscape analysis serves as the next step in that endeavour.



Jefferson Parish has a robust set of assets and resources that can be leveraged, but also important gaps and inequities that need to be addressed in order to create an equitable systems that achieves the outcomes desired. It is important to note that the data captured here illustrate the Parish at a point in time. Continued investigation will be necessary as generational events, such as COVID-19, hurricanes, and potential impending legislation, impact the people and places in the parish.

The findings captured here also reflect — in addition to the data reviewed — the perspectives and beliefs of the stakeholders engaged. It is our opinion that additional perspectives, particularly from those communities and groups whose voices were not included in this study, would be valuable. Nevertheless, while we know the work is ongoing, we hope that the recommendations included may serve as a series of helpful guideposts as the Ready Start Network pursues its mission to ensure that all children birth to age five in Jefferson Parish have access to quality early childhood experiences that will prepare them to succeed.

# Endnotes

- Note that throughout this report, we will use Latino/a rather than Hispanic at the recommendation of Advancing Communities for Equity. Per their recommendation, "Hispanic connotes only those who are from European ancestry and not the many multi-ethnic and indigenous people from Latin American countries." The only exceptions will be when we are using data from a source that specifies Hispanic or Hispanic/Latino, in which case we will use the terms specified by the data source.
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83. Note that this value represents the total number of residents in Jefferson Parish, not the total sum of population in the listed towns. More than 85,000 Jefferson Parish residents, and almost six thousand children under 5, live in towns without a licensed childcare setting.
84. The municipalities with licensed childcare providers contain 76% of Jefferson's overall Under 5 population; the remaining 24% of the Under 5 population resides in other communities.
85. Note that families can apply to any Jefferson Parish school for Pre-K, but can only receive transportation to their zoned school. In many ways, this therefore mirrors the dynamics of other providers; families can choose to leave their community in pursuit of more affordable or higher quality seats, but transportation may be a limitation.
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**Start Early (formerly known as the Ounce of Prevention)** is a nonprofit public-private partnership advancing quality early learning and care for families with children, before birth through their earliest years, to help close the opportunity gap. For nearly 40 years, Start Early has delivered best-in-class doula, home visiting and Early Head Start and Head Start programs. Bringing expertise in program delivery, research and evaluation, professional development and policy and advocacy, Start Early works in partnership with communities and other experts to drive systemic change so that millions more children, families and educators can thrive. **Learn more at [StartEarly.org](https://www.startearly.org).**



Under the authority of Jefferson Parish Schools, the **Jefferson Ready Start Network** works to increase access to and improve the quality of early care and education for children birth to 5 years through engagement and partnerships with families, educators and community members. **For more information, visit [jeffersonreadystartnetwork.com](https://www.jeffersonreadystartnetwork.com).**