The Demand for Child Care

Not every family with working parents needs child care, but most do. Some families with two working parents on different shifts may care for their children at home. Some families with one or two working parents may have other adult relatives, either living in the household or nearby, who fill the parenting role while they work. The U.S. Census reports that 22% of children are with a parent while the other parent works, and 27% of children with working parents are in the care of other relatives while their parents work, or are at work with their working mother. These same national Census data indicate that about 38% of children with working parents are in an “organized facility” or in “other non-relative” care. In Missouri, this proportion estimates that 115,629 children under the age of six are in one of these programs while their parents work. Some 40,500 (35%) of those children are from low-income families and have their child care fees paid by the state’s Child Care Assistance program.

The low percentage of families using formal child care options may be low simply as a function of the accessibility of these programs. The maximum known capacity of our state’s 3,336 licensed facilities, at 146,411 spaces, is woefully inadequate to serve the 304,287 children whose parents are in the workforce. The current licensed capacity can serve only 48% of these children. Unfortunately, most licensed facilities serve fewer children than this maximum capacity, so the true availability of licensed spaces is even lower.

The Return on Investment is High

Every business in every industry sector in the Missouri economy owes some portion of its success and profitability to one high-performing, yet nearly-invisible, economic sector: child care. With economic output multipliers measured at $1.87 returned for every $1 invested, this economic sector in Missouri generates more additional spending than manufacturing ($1.44 return per $1), retail ($1.74 return) and transportation ($1.77 return).

In addition, employees in every sector of the state economy include parents with young children. Their child care arrangements enable them to be on the job and productive every day. According to the most current U.S. Census data, 304,287 Missouri children under the age of six years lived in households where all the available parents were in the labor force. This number represents the highest potential demand for child care. However, many of those families are not consumers in the “formal” child care market (typically thought of as licensed centers and family child care homes), and including those Missouri child care facilities that are less formal, by virtue of being legally exempt from licensing.
The Search for Child Care

Given how hard it can be to find licensed child care in Missouri, and the stress of choosing someone else to care for one's child, families need assistance. Child Care Aware® of Missouri offers no-fee referral and consumer education services to families searching for child care, early education, and after-school programs in the state. Of the more than 16,000 searches for referrals in 2013, 88% were through the online search option on our web site. Most families of children with special needs, who use the state’s Child Care Assistance program, or who are foster parents prefer to call for personalized assistance over the phone. Of the 1,964 phone calls to our Resource Center, 86% fell into these categories, as compared to 35% of online searchers.

Finding a Basic Match

Infant/Toddler Care: The demand for services for infants and toddlers is reflected in between one-third and one-half of the referral requests we receive. When families call our Referral Center, we record the age of the child(ren) needing care. In 2013, the 890 requests for children ages birth to two years of age comprised 34% of all calls. Not every parent who uses our online search shares the age of their child. Of the 840 online searches in 2013 that shared the child’s age, 55% were for children under two years of age. Yet, the state’s licensed capacity for this age group is 19,353, or just 13% of all licensed spaces.

Evening and Weekend Care: Another category of demand that stands out in 2013 searches for child care is the need for evening or weekend care. Of our 2,639 referral calls in 2013, 596 (22%) needed this “odd-hour” care. From online searches, in the 840 records that showed a schedule preference, 227 (27%) needed evening or weekend care. Yet, only 671 (20%) of the 3,336 licensed facilities in the state indicate that they offer evening and weekend services.

Finding Quality

More than any other piece of information to inform their child care choice, Missouri’s working families seek information on the variances in quality across programs for their child(ren). Unfortunately, families find there is little such information to be found. The quality of most programs and the outcomes they produce, relative to children’s school readiness, are simply unknowns in Missouri. The state conducts no objective, external measurement of the quality of programs, other than awarding state licensure (minimal health and safety standards met) or recognizing state/national accreditation (high-level best practices documented). Thousands of programs fall between or beyond these two points on the quality continuum, as do the License Exempt and Exempt programs that are not required to meet full licensing standards.
DATA SOURCES


State Child Care Assistance Data - Missouri Department of Social Services, Children's Division Early Childhood and Prevention Services Section, Block Grants Child Care Monthly Management Report – October 2013 Figure 4, Children Served by Provider 12-month average November 2012-October 2013

Number of LICENSED Facilities (WLS) - Providers who are active or inactive and licensed from the Work Life System (WLS) database at Child Care Aware® of Missouri, as of February 28, 2014.

Number of Referral Searches in 2013 (WLS) – Overall Demand for Child Care and Early Learning Services Referral Calls and Online Referral Searches from the Work Life System (WLS) database at Child Care Aware® of Missouri, as of February 28, 2014.

Types of Care Requested and Age of Children Needing Care for Referral Searches in 2013 (WLS) – MO Referral Services DSS Report from the Work Life System (WLS) database at Child Care Aware® of Missouri, as of February 28, 2014.

Licensed Capacity Under 2 Years of Age (WLS) – Licensed Programs with Total Licensed Capacity Under 2 Years from the Work Life System (WLS) database at Child Care Aware® of Missouri, as of February 28, 2014.

Licensed Programs with Evening and Weekend Services (WLS) – Licensed Programs with Evening, Weekend, Rotating, Overnight/24 Hour Care from the Work Life System (WLS) database at Child Care Aware® of Missouri, as of February 28, 2014.

ENDNOTES

1 In this report, the term “child care” is used broadly, to mean all child care, early learning, and after-school programs of all types, under all operating auspices.


3 See Child Care Aware® of Missouri’s August 2013 report, Support for Working Parents: The State of Missouri Child Care, on how many facilities in various categories (licensed, license exempt, and exempt) are operating in the state.


5 Organized facility is defined by the Census as, “Day care or child care centers, nursery schools, preschools, and Head Start programs,” and defines Other Nonrelative as, “In-home babysitters, neighbors, friends, and family child care homes.” In Missouri, some family child care homes are licensed; many are legally exempt from licensure.

6 The permitted child capacity of Licensed facilities provides the only data available on community capacity; permitted capacities at License Exempt and Exempt facilities are not established and, therefore, not recorded by any organization.


8 Accredited facilities have met standards for their programs, personnel and management that are significantly higher than those required for state licensing. In 94 Missouri counties (82% of the state), at least one accredited facility is operating; 21 counties contain no accredited facilities.

9 License Exempt programs in Missouri must meet the health and sanitation standards of the licensing regulations, but not the staffing standards, which require employees to be 18 years of age and limit the number of children per adult, according to the children’s ages.

Funding provided by the Missouri Department of Social Services, Early Childhood and Prevention Services Section.