

# briefly STATED

Research Summary

May 2007

No. 07-01

## Space to learn and grow: Early care and education capacity in Cuyahoga County

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Funding for this research was provided by the Cuyahoga Board of County Commissioners through Invest in Children/Office of Early Childhood. This study was conducted to inform Cuyahoga County's Universal Pre-kindergarten planning process, along with a study of the quality of early care and education for 3- to 5- year-olds now underway.

When driving the streets in Cleveland and throughout Cuyahoga County, it is impossible not to notice a recurring and hopeful part of the landscape: child care centers. Called variously preschool, nursery, Head Start, daycare, and child care, these many programs provide essential care and early learning opportunities for our youngest children. With names that include words like beginning, play, learning, bright, enrichment, discovery, steps, and future, these facilities all seek to improve the lives and futures of our community's children. Along with an array of home-based care, they make up the early care and education system in Cuyahoga County.

As part of an ongoing effort to enhance this system—led by a coalition of foundations, agencies, care-providers and the Cuyahoga County Commissioners—the Center on Urban Poverty and Community Development was asked to assess the system and determine its diversity and capacity to serve our children through 2010. This study asks the question “Are there enough slots for the right ages and types of needs to serve the children of the county into the future?” It takes stock of our current early care system by comparing where the child care slots are and where the demand is—all at the neighborhood level.

### Context for the Study

In 2005 the Cuyahoga County Office of Early Childhood/Invest in Children (IIC) and its community partners completed a strategic planning process, which included a focus on the early care and education system in Cuyahoga County. The planning centered on enhancing the quality of all care settings through a variety of strategies, such as technical assistance, professional development, and center expansion. In addition, one identified longer-term objective for this goal area was the pursuit of a voluntary universal pre-kindergarten (UPK) system that would meet the early care needs of all children in the county. In order to best plan and prepare for increased early care access (and ultimately UPK), a crucial first step was to understand the current and projected status of the early care system in the county. To this end, IIC funded a detailed study of Cuyahoga County's regulated early care system to evaluate its current and projected capacity and the current and projected use and demand.

The analysis considers care in five settings—Head Start, public preschool, private preschool, private childcare, and regulated home settings—and for four age categories of children: infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and school-age children (up to 10 years of age). The analysis also makes



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use of population estimates and projections to provide a sense of the potential demand for care. One aspect of this analysis looks explicitly at the system for serving preschool age children in the county and explores how a universal pre-kindergarten approach might build on the existing service system.

### Core Findings

#### How many preschoolers are there in Cuyahoga County?

The population of preschool age children in Cuyahoga County is projected to decline by 9.3% (from 37,225 to 33,755) between 2005 and 2010. This is a somewhat larger decline than for the total population of young children (zero to 10) in Cuyahoga County (6.7%).

#### What does child care look like in Cuyahoga County?

Child care varies in important ways in Cuyahoga County, including the quantity and type of slots,

the type of care setting, and the geographic location of the care. The care for preschoolers in the county is wonderfully diverse but in some areas the supply of slots lags behind measures of demand.

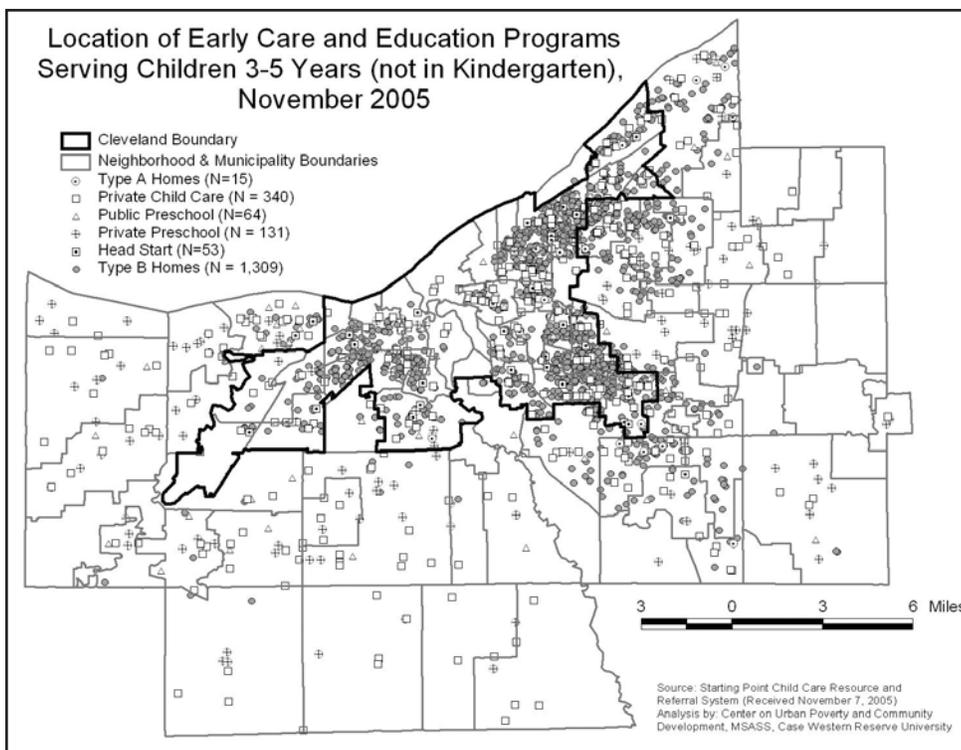
**Lots of slots exist:** In total, nearly 27,000 slots are available for preschool age children in Cuyahoga County (combining full-day and part-day). Across all settings and ages, there are approximately 60,000 slots available in morning care and nearly 50,000 in afternoon care. Substantially fewer slots were available in the evening and overnight, largely reflecting the relevant demand.

**Care settings are diverse:** Among the 1,918 programs serving children in Cuyahoga County, 399 were center-based (Head Start, private child care), 195 were school-based (public preschool, private preschool) and 1,324 were home-based providers.

**Use of slots varies by type:** County-wide, slot use as a proportion of existing capacity for preschoolers as of fall 2005 was 70% of full day slots, 88% of morning-only slots, 86% of afternoon-only slots, 29% of evening slots, and 9% of overnight slots. The slot capacity and enrollment varies for preschoolers in full-day slots, part-day slots and nontraditional slots. Collectively programs had a county-wide licensed capacity

for preschoolers of 19,739 full-day slots, 8,510 morning-only slots, and 5,691 afternoon-only slots. Approximately one-third of the existing capacity (and one-fourth of the population of children) comes from public preschool, private preschool, and Head Start. Most of the current capacity exists within private child care centers, as do most of the current vacancies.

**Location matters:** Geographically, there is substantial variation across the county in regard to the ratio of current use of slots to the capacity, depending on the child age group and the type of slot (part vs. full day and by setting type). A standard in the field is that when more than 70% of slots are full in a specific area,

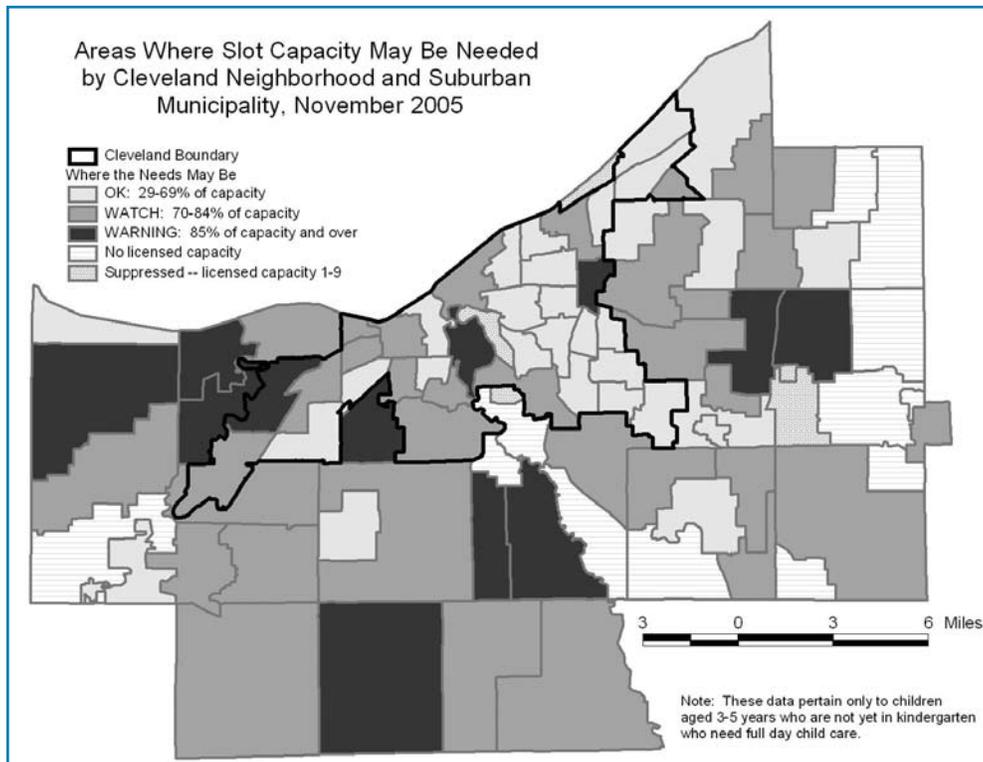


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additional slot development may be needed in the short-term. Western and southern portions of Cuyahoga County and parts of Cleveland's east side and inner-ring suburbs have high ratios of slot use to capacity. The current study shows that for preschoolers 57% of neighborhoods and suburbs offering full-day care exceed 70% enrollment, and 83% of the neighborhoods and suburbs offering part-day care exceed this standard. In total, 1,912 programs have capacity to serve this age cohort, including 340 private child care centers, 131 private preschools, 64 public preschools, 53 Head Starts, 15 large family homes and 1,309 small family homes (serving up to 6 children).

### Do we have enough child care slots in Cuyahoga County?

A basic question involves how to accurately estimate the potential demand for care for 3- to 5-year olds through 2010 for the purposes of planning for UPK. The current levels of capacity and enrollment in full-day equivalents is a first method for consideration. A second approach involves projecting demand based on applying UPK participation rates from other regions to the Cuyahoga County population. Lastly, demand can be projected based on Census-based data on the work/school status of the primary caregiver(s). These Census-based projections are provided for full-time slots only and for full-day equivalents, wherein every family is projected to need either a full-day or part-day slot.



**Need based on what families now use:** One way of understanding this issue is to look at the ratio of current demand to current supply. Current demand reflects the “expressed” demand of consumers in the present marketplace for early care. Areas in which enrollment exceeds 70% of capacity can be considered to be at risk of reaching capacity and are put on a watch list by local child care authorities. When an area’s enrollment consistently exceeds 85% of existing capacity, the area is considered to be in need of immediate slot capacity development. Across

the county, the demand for full-day preschool care exceeds 85% in 12 neighborhoods and municipalities and is between 70 and 84% in 34 additional areas.

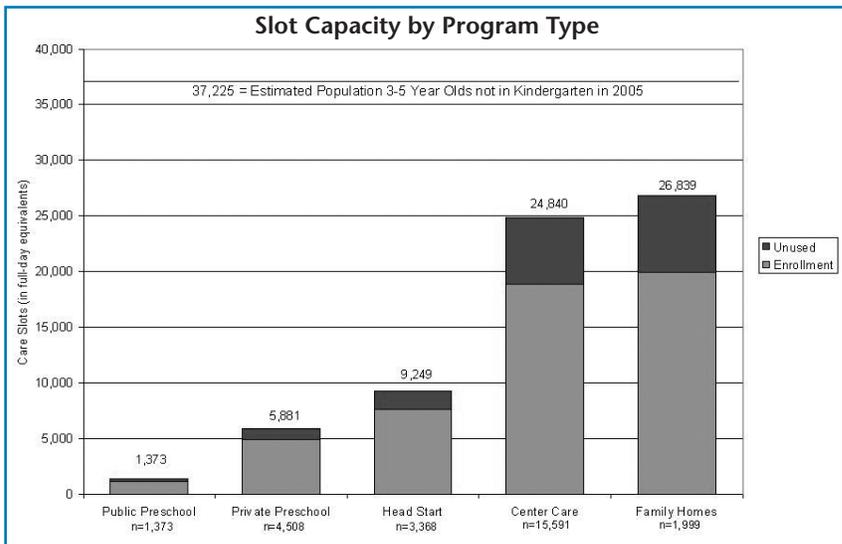
**Need based on experience in other regions:**

One final way to assess need is to look at what has actually happened in other regions where UPK was implemented. Using data on participation rates in UPK among families in other locales, the projected slot demand among 3- to 5-year olds county-wide could range from a slot surplus of approximately 300 to a slot gap of approximately 6,300 (assuming that all existing slots for this age group are considered to be eligible for UPK). Reported rates of participation from studies of UPK provide a sense of what levels of participation from families of preschoolers might be expected in Cuyahoga County. In particular, data from state-wide efforts in Georgia, Oklahoma, and New Jersey, offer a range of experiences. For example, state-wide UPK in Georgia and Oklahoma showed take-up rates of 55-63% among eligible 4-year-olds. In New Jersey the take-up rate in the 30 highest poverty districts was 73% among 3- and 4-year-olds, according to a 2004 U.S. Government Accountability Office report. In Florida a state-wide survey conducted that same year by the Policy Group for Florida's Families and Children of parents of 2- and 3-year-olds showed that 67% planned to enroll their child in UPK. In addition, data from the National Household Education Survey show that in 2001, 61% of children age 3 and 4 with employed mothers were enrolled in preschool and 87% were enrolled in any regular child care arrangement. Comparatively, 44% of children age 3 and 4 with unemployed mothers were enrolled in preschool and 51% were enrolled in any regular child care arrangement. Among these examples, the New Jersey experience (73%) may well be the best lesson for Cuyahoga County, given similar rates of poverty and urbanization. The variation in take-up rate by the age of the child relates directly to issue of targeting. Most UPK initiatives either have begun with or exclusively serve 4-year-olds, while the present analysis includes 3- to 4-year-olds and 5-year-olds who are not yet in kindergarten.

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**Need based on whether families are working:**

Another method for assessing need is to link it to whether a child's caregiver is working. This approach makes a judgment that families where a caregiver is working or in school should have access to a child care slot. Using current slot-use data and Census-based estimates of need for early care slots (using family structure and work/school status of caregiver(s)), the projected slots needed vary substantially. For preschoolers county-wide there are 6,875 slots currently vacant; yet, as many as 2,600 additional slots are projected to be needed based on Census data. This method is limited in that it does not consider such factors as the availability of alternative caregivers (e.g., grandparent or other relative) and/or the family's ability to pay for alternative care. Using this approach, the projected need for preschooler care (full-day equivalent slots) in 2005 was 29,957 slots countywide. In 2005, the existing capacity for preschoolers in full-day equivalents was 26,840. Thus, the projected need based on caregiver work/school status is slightly higher than the capacity.



The need was greatest in on Cleveland's west side and the near west side, both having projected demand nearly double the current capacity.

Comparatively, the far eastern suburbs showed the least need, having projected demand at only half the current capacity. The projected changes in demand through 2010 are modest and reflect population declines and an assumption that supply will continue at 2005 levels.

Using this approach, the projected need for preschooler care is nearly equivalent to the actual capacity for this age group county-wide. However, while the aggregate projected need is similar to the existing quantity of care, there is no way of confirming that the families accessing the slots are the families with the need based on work/school status. It is likely that many families have available and satisfactory alternative care arrangements through informal networks. In addition, in 2005 among existing capacity for preschoolers approximately 5,300 full-time slots were vacant. This suggests that within the current economic context and given other available options, many families choose not to use available licensed care.

### **Future Directions**

In specific regard to UPK planning, the existing capacity to meet the needs of 3- to 5-year olds could provide slots for approximately 70% of all children. However, as in any market there are two key dimensions—supply and demand. On the supply side, the discussion of care capacity quickly moves to a discussion of the quality of care across settings—all slots are not created equal in regard to quality. Certainly not all existing slots would be eligible for participation in a UPK system, nor would all child care programs choose to participate. Based on the program criteria that are ultimately adopted for UPK and the ability to recruit programs to join the system, the availability of quality care slots would shrink accordingly. On the demand side, the program participation rate among families could vary markedly and will shift over time, though most estimates would place the rate around 60-80% participation. Any change in assumptions about child care program participation rates and parental participation rates, however, greatly influence the projections regarding the need for and availability of slots. Ongoing reassessment

and consideration of these factors is merited as UPK planning advances and further evidence from other states and locales emerges.

The Center on Urban Poverty and Community Development is pursuing additional research in the area of preschool and UPK. First, on the issue of the quality of early care and education, the Center is now concluding a study that specifically assesses the quality of care settings in Cuyahoga County. In collaboration with researchers at the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina, the Center will be reporting data on the quality of care in over 170 preschool classrooms in center-based

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programs in Cuyahoga County. Collected using standardized measures, these data will speak to the overall quality of care for preschoolers in the county, particular areas of strength and weakness, and program and staffing factors associated with higher quality. Second, the Center is planning to evaluate the county's pilot UPK program, slated to take place during the 2007-2008 term. The research will collect data on the status and development of participant children, as well as parent feedback on the UPK program. The school readiness of the children will also be assessed to examine what factors are associated with better preparedness among children. Collectively, these studies aim to advance our knowledge about how best to ensure a high quality pre-kindergarten experience for our community's children. Ultimately, this work will inform efforts to effectively prepare our children for success in their educational experiences and throughout life.

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Research summaries from  
the Center on Urban Poverty  
and Community Development

Founded in 1988 as the Center on Urban Poverty and Social Change, the Center changed its name in 2006 to the Center on Urban Poverty and Community Development. The Center's commitment to addressing the issues of urban poverty remains at the core of its work, as does a commitment to social change. The new name emphasizes the means through which such change must take place.

The Center on Urban Poverty and Community Development seeks to address the problems of persistent and concentrated urban poverty and is dedicated to understanding how social and economic changes affect low-income communities and their residents. Based in Cleveland at Case Western Reserve University's Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences, the Center views the city as both a laboratory for building communities and producing change locally, and as a representative urban center from which nationally relevant research and policy implications can be drawn.

A community resource for expertise and data analysis for nearly 20 years, the Center on Urban Poverty and Community Development created the groundbreaking community data system NEO CANDO (Northeast Ohio Community and Neighborhood Data for Organizing), a web-based tool that centralizes a broad array of indicators, making it easier to overlay and analyze disparate data. Community development corporations, foundation program officers, local governments, neighborhood activists and residents, students at the Mandel School and other institutions, the media, community reinvestment professionals and academic researchers are among those who have found NEO CANDO invaluable in their work. The Center conducts extensive training and maintains a listserv so NEO CANDO users can get the most out of its vast data collection. You can visit the NEO CANDO webpage at <http://neocando.case.edu>.



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