

SECTION SIX
CHILDCARE NEEDS ASSESSMENT



COMMUNITY
CONDITIONS
ASSESSMENT

FEBRUARY 7, 2022



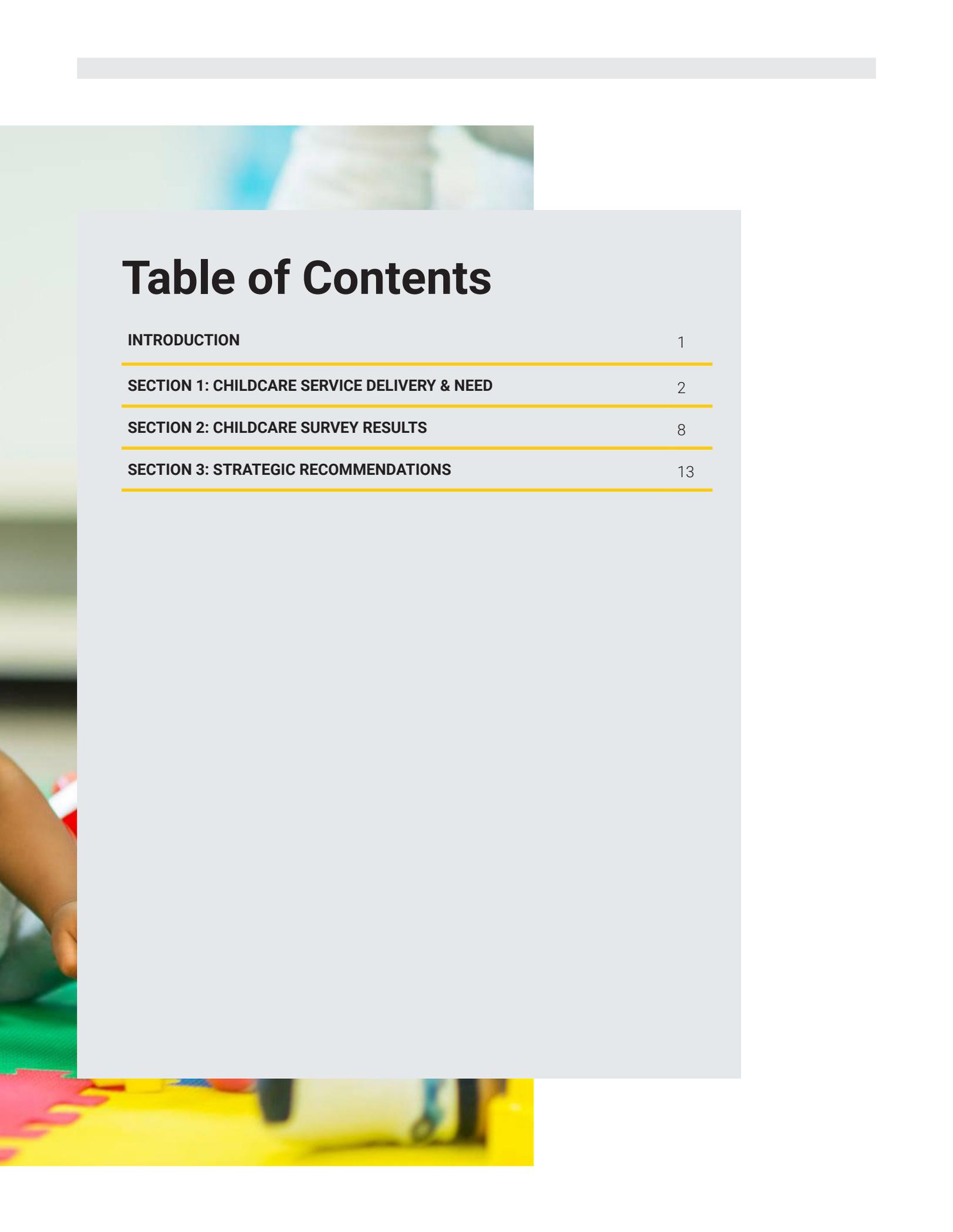


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Kosciusko County Kindergarten | United Way, Ink Free News





This report provides a summary of findings from a Childcare Needs Assessment conducted for Kosciusko County as part of the county's comprehensive planning efforts. Input gathered from stakeholders as part of the planning process identified a need and uncovered apparent deficiencies in the delivery of childcare services in portions of the county. Various agencies in the county have coalesced and taken pro-active steps to try to address these deficiencies, but there are opportunities to focus on key issues and strengthen those efforts both among public and private entities.

Childcare is a concern for the comprehensive plan because some of the issues associated with current deficiencies relate to zoning and land use as well as to business recruitment and economic development.

Early Learning Indiana already assesses childcare delivery and need at the county and local level. Section 1 of this report summarizes data and findings on the existing needs identified through the Closing the Gap assessment of Kosciusko County by Early Learning Indiana. Also discussed is the current service delivery landscape and the efforts of area agencies to address needs. Issues identified by these agencies with respect to planning, zoning, and economic development are also discussed. Finally, employment growth trends are applied to current service delivery rates to assess gaps that may have occurred or are likely to expand in the future.

A survey was conducted of employers and workers in Kosciusko County in order to provide direct input to this assessment. Section 2 summarizes key findings from this survey as relevant to the overall needs assessment, economic development, and the comprehensive plan.

Several strategic recommendations are provided in Section 3 to address the key deficiencies and needs related to childcare service delivery, particularly those that can inform the comprehensive plan and business development efforts in the county.

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SERVICE DELIVERY & NEED

This section examines existing early education service delivery in Kosciusko County and apparent need, based on data and ratings generated in part by assessments conducted by Early Learning Indiana and also on input generated from key local agencies tracking childcare needs in the county. Employment and other factors are also considered in assessing needs and location of childcare services in the county.

Early Learning Indiana Assessment

Early Learning Indiana (ELI) is the state's oldest and largest early childhood education nonprofit organization. The organization's board includes prominent members of some of the state's high-profile companies including Eli Lilly and First Merchants Bank, along with representatives of the Indiana State Department of Health. Closing the Gap is ELI's overall assessment of early learning opportunities in the state. As an input to this assessment, ELI developed a "Early Learning Access Index" to "qualify and quantify" childcare services in each county and local community in Indiana. The index is meant to measure not only supply and demand but also communicate layers of quality, affordability, and choice.

The ELI index places Kosciusko County roughly half-way towards where it should be in terms of overall early education opportunities and accessibility, at a rating of 51.6 (out of 100). This rating falls below the state's overall average of 60.6.

Existing Capacity & Need

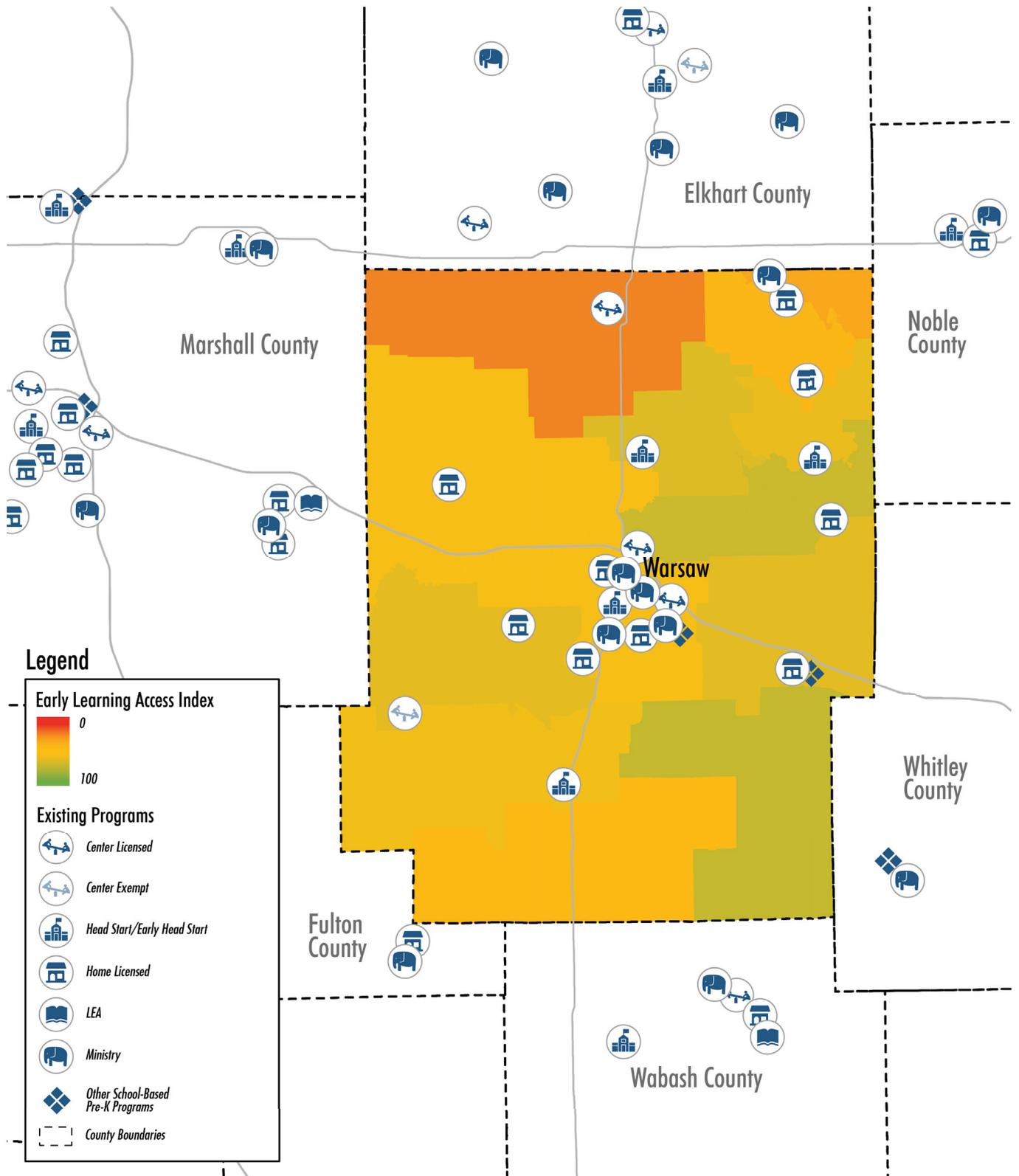
The assessment identified 49 early education programs in the county, with capacity for 1,245. Overall, the county has an estimated 3,679 children who may need childcare or access to early education programs, so the county has a "sufficiency rate" of 33.8 (out of 100), meaning that existing programs in the county only meet the needs of 33.8% of the children who might use these early education programs. ELI rated capacity as the "biggest challenge" for childcare in Kosciusko County. Given that 75.7% of the county's workers live in Kosciusko County, this issue affects a large share of the county's resident families with small children.

Quality

ELI also assessed the county's programs in terms of their quality vis-à-vis key standards. The assessment inventoried 601 "high-quality" program places out of the total 1,245, or 48.3%. The overall percentage of children in Kosciusko County that can be served by "high-quality" programs is therefore about 16.3%. The county's quality index was rated at 56.7.

Affordability

The county has an "affordability variable" rating of 68.9, according to the ELI assessment. With average early annual education costs of \$6,628 and a median annual family income of \$68,664, the county has a cost-to-income ratio of 9.7%. The county has 31 subsidized programs with a total capacity of 773 to serve the 531 children in the county whose family income falls below the federal poverty line.



Choice

The county's programs were also rated based on "choice," in terms of the availability of various programmatic options and of programs offering non-traditional hours. Based on this assessment, the county was rated below average, at 42.9 out of 100. About 55.1% of providers have infant & toddler program availability but only 32.7% have availability to serve the need for non-traditional hours.

Location & Accessibility

ELI assessed capacity at the local level and identified "early education deserts" where insufficient services exist to meet the likely demand. The various access levels were mapped, as shown below, with orange-shaded areas having low access index ratings, and green areas having higher access index ratings. Areas shaded in yellow fall in-between. It should be noted that the ratings are largely based on existing supply and on possible demand generated by the childhood population, but not necessarily on demand generated by employment within these areas.

Kosciusko County Early Learning Access Areas

Highest-Access Areas. The assessment identified the areas with the highest access for early-learning opportunities to include Southeast Kosciusko County (70.7), Kuhn Lake to Highbanks (67.8), Barbee Lakes Area (67.7), Chapman Lakes/Airport (67.0), Leesburg / Tippy Lake (61.6), and Pierceton / Jellystone (59.5).

Lowest-Access Areas. The areas with the lowest access to early-learning opportunities included Northwest Kosciusko County (26.7), followed by Northeast Kosciusko County (40.8), Wawasee MS/HS Areas (47.0), Silver Lake Area (47.8), Pine Lake Area (49.1), and Winona Lake / Grace College (52.4).

These ratings relate primarily to the supply of childcare services and local populations of early education-age children. But, they may not account for the location of employment activity in the county and the need for childcare services proximate to workplace locations.

Launchpad and Local Efforts

Kosciusko County United Way, Chamber of Commerce, and Community Foundation came together with 15 businesses in October 2018 to create Launchpad, a group focused on addressing childcare and early education needs in the county. The group established a 5-year strategic plan in 2020 to build capacity and address the issues identified by Early Learning Indiana and others in creating high-quality childcare “seats” (placements) in the county. Launchpad has “gained traction” with the participation of four local school districts and the addition of almost 160 seats in three years. Launchpad works directly with businesses to form partnerships and deliver seats. Companies like Instrumental Machine & Development and Polywood have attempted or succeeded in creating or partnering to create childcare resources to serve their employees.

Launchpad has inventoried 1,100 childcare seats in Kosciusko County and has identified a need for another 1,900 (for a total 3,000 children that could be served). While the total numbers are slightly different from the ELI data, this current coverage rate (36.7%) is fairly comparable to the overall 33.8% “sufficiency rate” that ELI has tracked for the county. Either way, more than 60% of potentially eligible children who may need childcare are not being served in the county.

Impacts on Business

The Chamber has tracked some of the impacts that businesses have experienced as a result of the deficiencies in overall childcare service capacity. Businesses have complained of a high rate of absenteeism, reduced hours, and employee recruitment and retention issues. At least one company that surveyed their employees found that nearly one-quarter of them or their spouses had left a job due to childcare issues. The Pandemic aggravated such issues, especially as schools were closed for weeks at a time. Some of these issues are further discussed through the results of the survey of employers and workers conducted for this plan.

Challenges to Building Capacity

There were various challenges identified as part of Launchpad’s strategic planning efforts to building capacity in the county, such as the cost of operations versus the fact that 42% of families in the county were considered “low-income” (earning less than \$41,560 for a family of three); low wages paid to childcare workers and the resulting challenges to recruiting those workers; closure of 7 childcare facilities since 2015 (prior to recent openings); and other issues. There are also planning-related issues particularly relevant to this comprehensive plan. Among these are zoning-related issues where home-based childcare has been ruled out of certain R1 and R2-3 residential neighborhoods within municipalities, even though home-based care is preferred by many families and is easier to staff when independently owned and operated. There is some confusion between licensing versus zoning, especially as it relates to residency requirements. There is a need to identify specific areas or vacant parcels in residential zones or “transition zones” that would be appropriate for construction of houses for childcare operations.

Launchpad Goals & Strategies

Launchpad set goals to improve family and community education, increase accessibility, increase affordability, grow the workforce and improve retention, and advocate for policy changes associated with childcare and early education. Strategies were developed to improve education by developing a communications plan, sharing personal stories, and partnering with organizations to help disseminate information. In order to increase accessibility, the strategy called for a network of cohesive programs, increasing the number of high-quality programs and seats, and expanding choice for families. Affordability was to be increased by implementing shared service models to decrease operational costs, launching scholarship programs, and completing a feasibility study for an innovative funding model.

To grow the workforce and improve retention, approaches included partnership development with high school-based career centers and Ivy Tech, scholarship programs for early learning professionals, piloting a financial stipend for new hired, hosting community award and recognition dinners, offering grants for early learning wellness programs and spaces, and determining the feasibility of a loan forgiveness program. Finally, a policy agenda would be developed and legislative events hosted to help advocate for policy changes.

Employment Nodes and Growth

Much of the county's employment is highly concentrated in the Warsaw area, with about 53% of Kosciusko's jobs located in zip codes 46580 and 46582. The North Warsaw area has also experienced some of the fastest employment growth in the county, increasing by about 78% between 2010 and 2019 compared with 22% countywide growth. Logic would suggest that early education and childcare opportunities be concentrated in the Warsaw area, which they currently are. Employment growth indicates continued demand for childcare and, if trends continue, growth in the number of children that will require early education seats in the Warsaw area.

Northwest Kosciusko County, which was identified as an "early education desert," has relatively few jobs but there are about 7,000 jobs located across the county line in the Nappanee area of Elkhart County. Despite the presence of a large and rapidly-growing employment base, Nappanee itself is also a childcare desert. ELI assigned a score of just 26.6 to the Nappanee area, making it the lowest early education access area in Elkhart County. So, residents of northwest Kosciusko County have few options nearby for childcare either near their residence, nor proximate to jobs in nearby Nappanee. Employment growth at Nappanee could have also exacerbated the issue in recent years.

Northeastern portions of the county have also experienced below-average childcare coverage access, but employment is fairly stagnant in the Syracuse area, so pressures may not be as great on early education programs. Claypool and Silver Lake, however, are both experiencing some job growth but have below-average childcare access, according to the ELI data.

EMPLOYMENT TRENDS, KOSCIUSKO COUNTY AREAS, 2010-2019

Category	2010	2019	Change (%)	Share
S Warsaw	15,858	17,370	9.5%	33.7%
N Warsaw	5,528	9,846	78.1%	19.1%
Pierceton/Sidney	1,174	1,435	22.2%	2.8%
Wlnona Lake	1,383	1,406	1.7%	2.7%
W Warsaw	124	28	-77.4%	0.1%
Etna Green	653	390	-40.3%	0.8%
Mentone	613	619	1.0%	1.2%
Burket	22	52	136.4%	0.1%
Claypool	159	285	79.2%	0.6%
Silver Lake	464	523	12.7%	1.0%
SW/Akron (Fulton)	733	815	11.2%	1.6%
SE/N Man. (Wabash)	3,287	3,778	14.9%	7.3%
North Webster	696	929	33.5%	1.8%
Leesburg/Pot.	520	837	61.0%	1.6%
Syracuse	4,166	4,097	-1.7%	8.0%
NE/Crom. (Noble)	216	296	37.0%	0.6%
Milford	1,699	1,663	-2.1%	3.2%
NW/Nap. (Elkhart)	3,863	7,098	83.7%	13.8%
County	32,961	40,164	21.9%	

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau and Randall Gross / Development Economics.

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SURVEY RESULTS

A survey was conducted both online and via hard copy distribution to employers and workers in Kosciusko County. A total of 44 individuals participated in the survey, which yields a somewhat low participation rate but does provide an “indication” of preferences and possible needs among those who responded. The demographics of the respondent group is discussed below, followed by information on their existing childcare utilization and the needs that the respondents expressed as input to the survey

Demographics

Information was collected on the respondents, in order to provide an indication of the demographics of those who responded to the survey as well as a measure of how representative the survey sample may be of the general working population in Kosciusko County. It should be noted that the survey represents people who work in Kosciusko County, regardless of whether they live in the county.

Residency

Roughly 50% of the survey respondents live in Zip Code 46580 which corresponds to most of Warsaw (south of Lake City Highway (U.S. Route 30)). Another 16% reside in Zip Code 46962, the area of north Wabash County centered around North Manchester.

About 11% of the respondents live in Zip Code 46582, the area of Warsaw north of U.S. Route 30 and south of Leesburg. A fair number of respondents live in 46910 (the Akron area of northern Fulton County), and in 46555 (North Webster, around Webster Lake). Other respondents live throughout the county and elsewhere, including Wawasee & Enchanted Hills, Claypool, Kimmell (Noble County), Bourbon (Marshall County), Columbia City (Whitley County), and other parts of the Kosciusko commuter shed.

Occupation & Employment

Nearly all (98%) of the respondents are employed full-time. Because of how the survey was distributed and/or collected, it appears that nearly all of the respondents (96%) work in manufacturing industries, with only a handful in other sectors including non-profit organizations. As a result, the sample is not representative of the economic base, where 39.4% of Kosciusko County jobs are in manufacturing. Furthermore, nearly all of the respondents work at manufacturing jobs in the Warsaw area, again because of the way the survey was distributed or collected.

On the other hand, the survey did capture a fairly diverse sample of workers in different occupations and working at various levels: About one-half (45%) are skilled production workers, 18% are employed in professional & technical jobs, 16% are managers or executives, 9% are unskilled production workers, and 5% work in administrative jobs or as assistants. Some of the respondents work in other types of occupations such as in purchasing or inventory.

About two-thirds of respondents have a partner or spouse who is also working full-time. Ten percent of the respondents have a partner or spouse who works part-time and 8% have a partner or spouse who does not work. About 18% of respondents do not have a partner or spouse at present.

Children

About 36% of the respondents currently have children under the age of 12, while another 25% anticipate having children in the near future. Among the children in existing families, 39% are between the ages of 6 and 12, 32% are aged 3 to 5, and 29% are under the age of 3.

Household Income

Household incomes among the survey respondents correspond fairly closely to a “bell curve,” with the largest number having incomes in the \$50,000 to \$70,000 range, followed by those with incomes slightly higher or slightly lower than that.

Current Childcare Context

Several questions on the survey inquired about the current childcare services received by the respondents and their level of satisfaction with those services.

Type of Services Received

About 61% of the workers with children responded that they are receiving some type of childcare. (The other 39% have children aged 6 through 12 enrolled in Pre-k or school programs). Among those workers with the younger (0-5 year-old) children, 58% are dependent on childcare provided directly from their partner or spouse and another 11% provide their own childcare in between shifts or when their work hours allow. About 5% of the working parents stated that they receive no childcare services from anyone.

Thus, just about 26% of the working parents who responded to the survey receive some kind of childcare services. The vast majority (21% of these children) are enrolled in childcare services near their place of employment and 5% receive childcare from a provider operating out of a private home. None of the responding workers have children enrolled at childcare centers at work, near their home, or in faith-based institutions. None of the workers employ a nanny or other in-home provider.

Employer-Provided Services

None of the respondents said that their employer currently provides childcare services on-site or off-site; or financial assistance and flexibility to find childcare services on their own.

Level of Satisfaction

About 26% of the survey respondents who have children under the age of 12 noted that they are completely satisfied with their current childcare situation. The other 74% gave a variety of reasons that they are not satisfied.

Perhaps the most important factor affecting these parents' satisfaction with childcare is affordability, which was listed by 30% of the respondents as the reason that their childcare needs are not being met. Another 20% said that childcare services are either not available or there are long waiting lists.

Interestingly, one in five respondents also noted that they are distracted at work due to the time they are spending finding, arranging, or managing childcare. About 15% of respondents are working fewer hours than they otherwise would because they are having to find, arrange, provide, or manage childcare.

Thus, childcare issues appear to be directly affecting the work or productivity of more than one-third of the workers who responded to this survey.

About 10% suggested that childcare services are located too far away from their work or home, and 5% said that their employer did not offer any flexibility in managing childcare issues during the COVID Pandemic.

Service Needs & Preferences

Some of the childcare service needs and preferences were identified among those who responded to the survey.

Age & Program Needs

Survey respondents indicated that 55% of their children are zero to one year old, 31% are two years old, and 10% are three years old. The remaining 3-4% are four or five years old. Thus, infant care is of paramount concern.

Not surprisingly given the age of the children, the plurality of families (nearly 40%) need full-day childcare services. About 30% need after-school services. The remainder need services either before-school (14%), half-day (10%), or on an as-needed basis (10%).

Location & Type of Service Preferences

About 38% of the working parents responded that they are satisfied with the location of their current childcare services. Among the others, 30% would like to have childcare services located closer to their place of work and another 22% would like to have childcare services located at their place of employment. Another 22% would like childcare services closer to their home. About 13% have a preference for childcare to be provided by their partner or spouse and 9% would like access to childcare services in a private home. Another 4% would prefer to utilize services provided by a faith-based organization.

Ranking of Childcare Selection Factors

Survey respondents were asked to rank the factors that they use in selecting childcare services, in terms of importance. The highest-ranked factor is the quality of childcare services that is provided, followed closely by the quality of childcare facilities.

Third in importance is the type of educational programming offered by the service provider, followed by cost. The fact that cost was only ranked fourth among selection factors is interesting, given that affordability was the factor most commonly identified by parents as an issue affecting their satisfaction with existing childcare services.

Other factors that were ranked somewhat lower to respondents included the location of childcare services (although being close to work ranked higher than locations closer to home), licensing, and some others.

Types of Assistance Preferred

Respondents were also asked if they had a need and a preference for financial or other assistance provided either by their employers or others for childcare services. About 35% stated that they would like assistance in locating low-cost childcare services near their place of work, while another 23% would appreciate assistance with locating low-cost childcare services near their home.

About one in five would benefit from more flexibility in work hours or shifts from their employers, in order to accommodate childcare. Another 15% did not need financial assistance or flexibility but would appreciate the ability to reserve spaces at childcare facilities. In other words, they are just seeking the availability of childcare that is otherwise lacking.

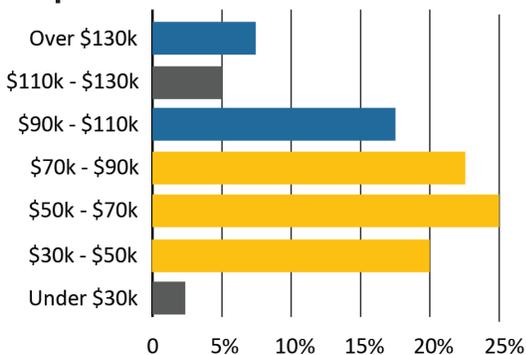
Childcare was rated as an important incentive for recruitment and retention, among the workers surveyed. Among respondents, nearly one-half – 48% - said that they would consider taking a job at another company that offered a comparable salary plus childcare benefits beyond what they receive at present.

Only 2% saw the benefit of direct financial assistance, such as vouchers that could help write down the cost of childcare, and 4% felt that they do not need any assistance of any kind with childcare. Overall, survey respondents indicated a level of dissatisfaction with existing childcare services and a need for affordable childcare near places of employment. This issue was so important to parents that many would consider working at another company in Kosciusko County or elsewhere that provided better childcare benefits.

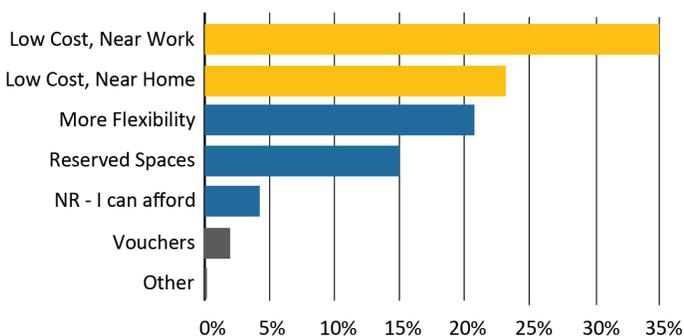
96%

Of respondents work in the manufacturing industry

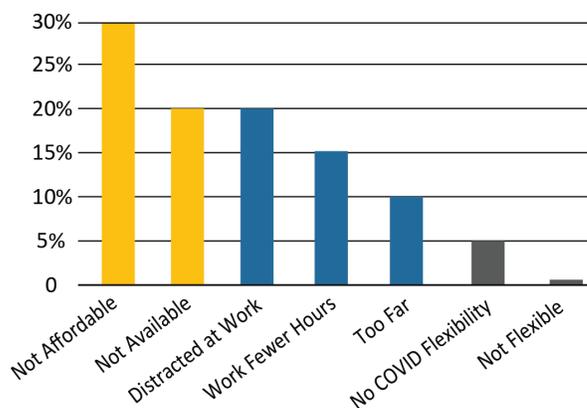
Respondent Household Income



Preferred Childcare Assistance



Reason for Dissatisfaction with Childcare



Income and Poverty

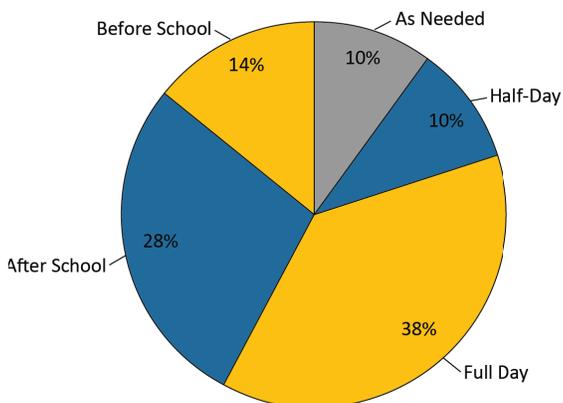


61% Receive some form of childcare

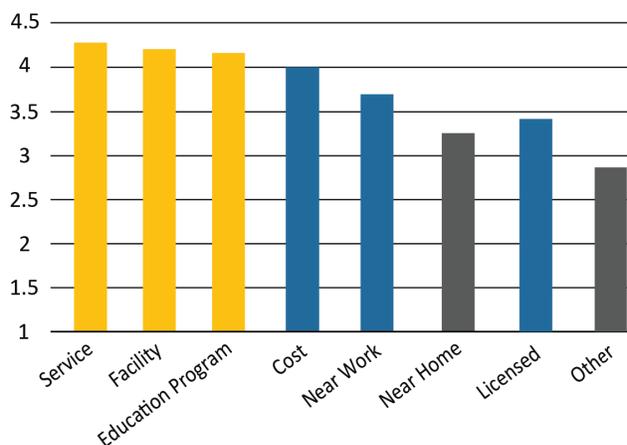


74% Not satisfied with currently available services

Specific Childcare Needs of Workers



Childcare Factors, Ranked





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STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Strategic recommendations are provided based on the aforementioned survey results and needs assessment data presented in this report. As noted before, Launchpad already has a Strategic Plan in place to address many of the early education issues and needs identified for Kosciusko County. The recommendations contained herein are meant to help supplement those efforts and to address several specific issues associated with planning, zoning, transportation and funding that are particularly relevant to the comprehensive plan.

Identify and Map Prospective Sites

The County should work with local municipalities, service providers, businesses, and nonprofit agencies to assist in identifying and mapping prospective districts and locations that should be targeted to accommodate childcare services. Such services could be provided in licensed, high-quality centers, homes, business settings, or faith-based institutions. Geographic Information Systems (GIS) mapping could help planners determine prospective locations and boundaries for special zones or districts targeted for childcare services. Factors to consider would be existing zoning, land use, and densities; employment nodes and growth trends; existing childcare and early education services; commutation routes; childcare deserts; local schools; and other factors.

Create Residential Childcare Zoning Overlay Model

There is a need to assist local municipalities not only in identifying prospective locations for childcare facilities but also designing appropriate zoning tools or overlay models to accommodate home-based childcare facilities use while minimizing the impact on neighboring residential uses. There is likely to be a stakeholder engagement component to this process, to ensure that local residents are heard and their views expressed. One concept is to encourage the creation or expansion of “transition zones” between pure commercial and residential areas. Often such areas are zoned for office conversion of residential dwellings, which could also allow for childcare operations in houses.

Kosciusko County Pre School | InkFree News



Capture Available Federal Funding

Now is the time to capture available Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSAA) and American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding for local education agencies (ESSER II, III). These acts provide agencies with \$176.3 billion in flexible education funding. Funds can be used not only to meet short-term needs but also to make longer-term investments that help to reduce gaps in access, opportunities, and achievement. Early Childhood Education (ECE) programs are known to provide high returns on investment, by enhancing readiness to learn. The federal recovery funds can be used to fund various ECE programs including childcare uses described below by The Learning Policy Institute:

- Classroom-based instructional programs
- Salaries and benefits for teachers and other staff
- Extended-day programs in Head Start or community-based childcare programs
- Professional development for early childhood professionals who serve Title I–eligible children, including providers in non-school settings
- Summer enrichment programs for young children and their families
- Support services, such as nutrition, vision, dental, and counseling services
- Screening and diagnostic assessments
- Transition programs
- Parental involvement initiatives and home visiting programs
- Transportation
- Data collection and sharing

The funding can be used countywide so long as at least 40% of children are from low-income families.

Communicate with Employers

The structure already exists to communicate the importance of childcare to employers in the county. The results of this survey and needs assessment may provide additional input to assist in that effort. Perhaps there also needs to be a structured communicate vehicle that brings together employers and employees to discuss the opportunities and constraints to broader childcare service provision.

Develop Incentives

Childcare is clearly an employee recruitment and retention issue, especially among employees that have children aged 12 and under. Given the national competition underway for labor resources, economic development is very much driven by the availability of talent and the ability to advertise the local workforce asset. Thus, there are multiple reasons to advocate for childcare incentives for employers and employees. Partnerships with employers to provide access to childcare services clearly benefits employers who are otherwise struggling to access a high-quality workforce. Incentives for attracting and retaining workers might include cash grants and tax credits for childcare services, tax abatements for childcare providers, insurance and supplier co-operatives and pools, and use of County land or assets to recruit providers.



Early Head Start Program | Kosciusko County Head Start

