

Ottawa and Allegan Area **REGIONAL CHILD CARE PLAN**

2024



A ROADMAP TO A
Child Care System that WORKS
for Families, Child Care Business Owners, and Employers



**LAKESHORE
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Ottawa Area ISD
Learn. Serve. Lead.



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Area ESA**

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Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	2
DEFINING CHILD CARE GAPS	10
FRAMING THE PROBLEM	22
CHARTING A COURSE OF ACTION	25
ENABLING SUCCESS	32
TRACKING PROGRESS	34
FINAL THOUGHTS AND CONCLUSION	40
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	41
APPENDIX FILES	42
Appendix A: Coalition Roster	42
Appendix B: Focus Group Discussion Template	43
Appendix C: Focus Group with Child Care Business Owners	44
Appendix D: New Child Care Subsidy Flier	45
Appendix E: Regional Child Care Flier	47

INTRODUCTION

Child care plays a crucial role in children's development and learning, providing a safe and stimulating environment where young minds can thrive. High-quality child care supports cognitive, emotional, and social growth, laying a strong foundation for future educational success and well-being. Additionally, accessible child care enables parents to work, pursue careers, and contribute to their family's financial stability, reducing stress and enhancing overall quality of life. Furthermore, robust child care systems drive local economic prosperity by creating jobs, supporting working families, and fostering a productive workforce. In essence, child care is a key component of a thriving society, promoting the well-being of children, families, and communities alike.

Despite its critical importance, the current child care landscape falls short of its promise as:

- **Families** have limited options and often cannot afford child care tuition.
- **Child care business owners** are trapped in an unsustainable business model where they struggle to cover operating expenses while maintaining affordable rates for families.
- **Child care teachers** are paid some of the lowest wages in the state, resulting in high turnover and difficulties attracting skilled professionals to the field.
- **Employers** are contending with reduced labor force participation, absenteeism, decreased productivity, and turnover due to child care issues experienced by families.

The ripple effects of an inadequate child care system extend beyond individual families, impacting the broader economy and society as a whole.

In 2023, the Ottawa Area Intermediate School District secured a Regional Child Care Planning Grant aimed at enhancing child care accessibility for families in Allegan and Ottawa County. The Grant seeks to accelerate community-level efforts to develop new partnerships and implement action plans to address the child care crisis. This funding was provided by the Early Childhood Investment Corporation (ECIC)-Child Care Innovation Fund to collaborate with national, state, regional, and community partners to design, pilot, and scale common-sense business, workforce, and financing solutions that expand equitable access to high quality, affordable child care for working families. The objectives of this plan are to accelerate community-level efforts to develop new partnerships and implement action plans to address the child care crisis.



In order to achieve this work, a Regional Child Care Planning Coalition was formed, which included representatives from intermediate school districts, economic development organizations, local governments, center and home-based child care business owners, health care, caregivers, and community partners. **Appendix A** contains a complete list of Coalition members.

This collaborative approach has laid the foundation for accelerating community-level initiatives, advancing progress, and implementing concrete enhancements to ensure that working families have equitable access to high-quality, affordable child care. One notable achievement of our Coalition is

the development of a Regional Child Care Data Dashboard. In partnership with Datawise Consulting, a user-friendly interface was developed to provide real-time data, empowering the public to discover child care solutions tailored to their needs. Data was gathered from various sources, including local child care programs (licensed centers, family homes, and group homes), subsidy programs, as well as transportation and employment hubs. For more details about the Data Dashboard, please visit regionalchildcarenetwork.com

Our Region

Geography and Industries

Our local region predominantly comprises small cities and rural regions spanning Ottawa and Allegan Counties. It provides a range of recreational options, farming, tourism, distinctive downtown areas, cultural events, renowned schools, and plentiful employment prospects.

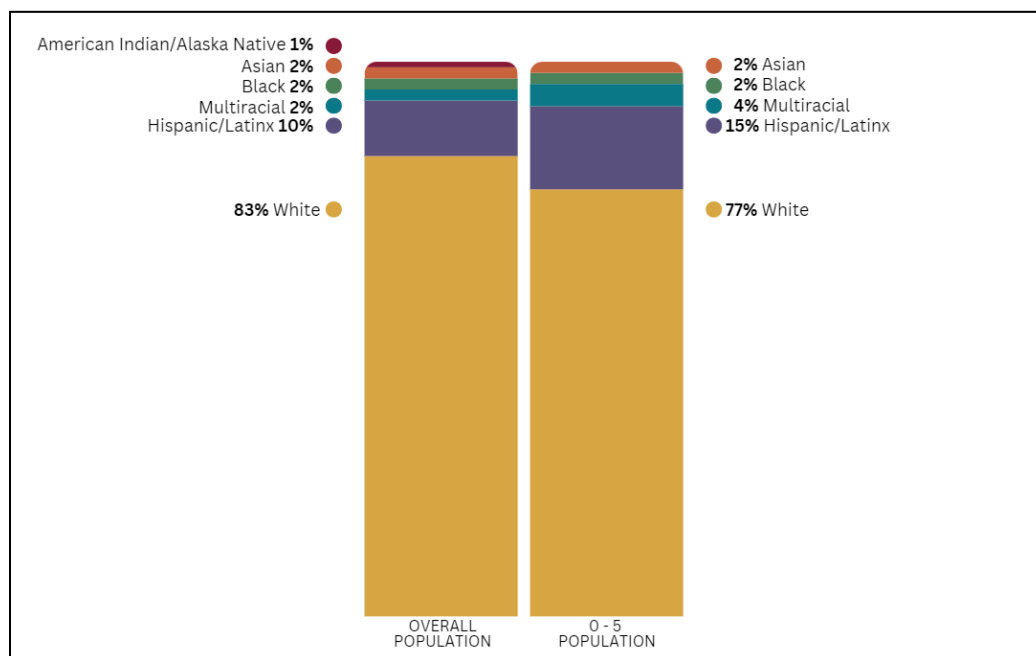
It is home to many large companies employing over 1000+ employees each, such as Perrigo, Gentex, MillerKnoll, Magna, Request Foods, Tyson, Haworth, LG Energy Solutions, Tiara Yachts, and YanFeng. This diverse economic landscape offers ample opportunities for growth, with expanding industries like healthcare, manufacturing, tourism, construction, and higher education institutions in the area.

In order to keep this robust economy moving, access to reliable child care services is crucial for families and plays a significant role in attracting and retaining employees to support the region's ongoing development and success.

Our Population and Demographics

The overall population in our region is nearly 500,000 and is predominantly White (83 percent across both counties combined). However, like other areas of our state and country, the demographics of our region are shifting to represent more diverse communities. As illustrated in **Figure 1**, a smaller proportion of children under 5 are White compared to the general population, with a greater concentration of Hispanic/Latinx and multiracial individuals. Consequently, child care and early learning programs are on the frontlines of our shifting demographics, emphasizing the need for more culturally and linguistically responsive services and care.

Figure 1. Regional demographics of the overall population compared to 0-5 population



Sources: US Census Bureau Quick Facts data aggregated across Allegan and Ottawa counties; Annie E. Casey KIDS COUNT Database, Population age birth to 5 by race aggregated across Allegan and Ottawa counties.

Our region boasts a vibrant economic landscape teeming with opportunities for growth and development. However, access to reliable child care services remains paramount in supporting the region's ongoing success and attracting and retaining a skilled workforce. Our purpose of this work, as we move forward, is to remain committed to addressing the challenges identified through our data collection efforts and working collaboratively to create a more accessible and inclusive child care system for all families in our community. This plan will identify the specific gaps in our region and develop a plan to address them.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

To fully understand the landscape of child care accessibility and needs within our community, we engaged in a multi-method data collection process (i.e., surveys, interviews, focus groups, secondary data sources) involving a diverse array of stakeholders (i.e., families, child care business owners, employers). A summary of our data collection efforts can be found in **Table 1**. Quantitative data from surveys and secondary data sources (e.g., Annie E. Casey KIDS COUNT, US Census Bureau, Great Start to Quality) were integrated with qualitative data gathered during interviews, focus groups, and open-ended prompts in surveys. Findings were presented at Regional Child Care Coalition meetings to gain additional perspectives interpreting the data and tailoring evidence-informed solutions.

Table 1. Summary of data collection and stakeholder engagement

Stakeholder Group	Engagement Method	Outreach/Sample	# of Participants	Total # of Touchpoints
Families	Survey Jun - Aug & Nov 2023 See LINK for survey text	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outreach through Michigan Early Childhood Connect (community eligibility and enrollment system; MiECC), Early On, GSRP, Parents as Teachers Home Visiting Program, Help Me Grow. • Offered in English and Spanish. • Reopened in Nov. to increase Allegan participation. 	170	209 FAMILIES
	Focus Groups See Appendix B for protocol	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offered virtually and at in-person Play n Learn Groups. • Included four parents with children with medical and/or special needs. 	39	
Child Care Business Owners	Survey Jun - Aug 2023 See LINK for survey text	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outreach through Great Start to Quality, email listservs, and social media. • Offered in English and Spanish. • Incentives included books and resources for child care programs. 	50	93 CHILD CARE BUSINESS OWNERS
	Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One-on-one phone interviews with child care business owners in both counties who were recently licensed (<3 years). • During these interviews, the survey was administered by phone. 	16	
	Focus Groups/ Meetings Oct 2022 & Feb 2024 See Appendix C for protocol	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25 child care business owners gathered to give feedback on supports needed, specifically around referrals, eligibility, and enrollment. • 45 individuals were invited to give feedback on the needs of those navigating the process of starting a child care business. Despite multiple educational resources offered as incentives for participation, turnout was low with only two individuals participating. 	27	
Employers	Survey Jun - Aug 2023 See LINK for survey text	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outreach through West Coast Chamber of Commerce and Lakeshore Advantage via weekly newsletters and social media. 	30	31 EMPLOYERS
	Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview with local business (Plascore) to gather information on employer perspective on supporting employee child care needs. 	1	

Note: There may be some overlap in participation (e.g., an individual who attended a focus group and completed a survey), but because surveys were anonymous, the exact number is unknown.

Representativeness of Data Samples

Although demographic information was not collected for interviews and focus groups, perspectives from both counties were included in all efforts. Data on the representativeness of the survey samples for families, child care business owners, and employers are presented below along with implications for data interpretation.

Family Survey Data

Out of 181 participants who took the family survey, 11 respondents did not complete items beyond the initial geographic questions and were therefore excluded from the sample. The remaining 170 respondents all provided some usable data, so they were retained in the sample. Given varying response patterns among participants (e.g., skipping questions or sections), sample sizes are specified for each analysis. To address representativeness, responses were weighted by the number of total family members reported (for county) and number of children (for race).¹

As shown in **Table 2**, despite fewer respondents from Allegan County in the survey sample, it is important to note that Allegan has a smaller population in general, making the sample composition less unbalanced than it initially appears. However, it is crucial to highlight that our sample still does not fully represent Allegan families despite efforts to boost participation in that area. This emphasizes the need for continued outreach and data collection as we implement our action plan. With regard to racial demographics, the sample aligns well with the general population of children in the region. However, it is important to note that this comparison was only possible for a sub-sample of children within the survey (see Footnote 1), thus it should be interpreted with care.

Table 2. Representativeness of sample compared to total regional population

	SURVEY SAMPLE	REGIONAL POPULATION
COUNTY	<i>n</i> = 753 household members REPORTED ACROSS 170 FAMILIES	<i>N</i> = 429,927 TOTAL POPULATION ²
Allegan	14%	29%
Ottawa	86%	71%
RACE	<i>n</i> = 322 children REPORTED ACROSS 98 FAMILIES	<i>N</i> = 96,428 CHILDREN AGES 0-18 ³
American Indian/Alaska Native Only	3%	<1%
Asian Only	1%	2%
Black Only	3%	2%
Hispanic/Latinx Only	16%	14%
White Only	74%	77%
Multiracial	2%	4%

¹ Participants indicated all racial backgrounds that applied to their family members. This approach takes into account diversity within the family unit rather than only considering the race/ethnicity of the survey respondent or child. Because it was not possible to determine the racial identity of children in the 23 families reporting multiple racial identities, data was used from 98 families reporting a single racial identity to examine the representativeness of the sample. 49 families did not provide demographic information.

² US Census Bureau Quick Facts data aggregated across Allegan and Ottawa counties

³ Annie E. Casey KIDS COUNT Database, Population age birth to 18 by race aggregated across Allegan and Ottawa counties

Child Care Business Owner Survey Data

Across both counties, 66 licensed child care business owners completed the survey (16 surveys were administered during phone interviews). To address representativeness, the survey sample was compared to the overall population of child care programs by county and program type (summarized in **Table 3**).

Table 3. Number of licensed child care programs by county and type

	Licensed Centers	Licensed Family Homes	Licensed Family Group Homes
ALLEGAN	68	54	21
OTTAWA	116	121	29

Source: Western Region Great Start to Quality

Note: Family home is a home-based child care setting with one educator and up to 6 children (up to 7 for experienced providers); family group homes have two educators and up to 12 children (up to 14 for experienced providers).

Table 4 compares our survey sample with the overall regional population of licensed child care providers. Just like the family survey, the child care programs in Allegan County are under-represented in our sample, emphasizing the importance of continuous outreach, data collection, and thoughtful analysis of our needs assessment findings. In terms of program type, our sample shows an under-representation of centers and an over-representation of licensed family homes. While this is important to note for data interpretation, home-based care is often overlooked in the child care landscape. Some studies intentionally oversample home-based care to shed light on this segment, where child care businesses are more commonly owned by women of color and utilized by families of color, non-English speakers, and immigrant communities. It should also be noted that no license-exempt or other informal child care providers participated in survey data collection. Given that this is another key part of our child care landscape, it will be an important focus of future efforts.

Table 4. Representativeness of sample compared to total regional population

	SURVEY SAMPLE	REGIONAL POPULATION
COUNTY	n = 66 LICENSED PROGRAMS	N = 409 LICENSED PROGRAMS ⁴
Allegan	23%	35%
Ottawa	77%	65%
PROGRAM TYPE	n = 66 LICENSED PROGRAMS	N = 409 LICENSED PROGRAMS ⁵
Licensed Centers	32%	45%
Licensed Family Homes	56%	43%
Licensed Family Group Homes	12%	12%

⁴ Great Start to Quality Data

⁵ Great Start to Quality Data

Employer Survey Data

Out of 33 participants who took the employer survey, 3 respondents did not complete items beyond the initial geographic questions and were therefore excluded from the sample. The remaining 30 respondents were retained in the sample. Although this is a small sample, the businesses that responded employ at least 2,750 people (and potentially upwards of 4,450) based on the low and high ends of the size ranges that were reported. Furthermore, as documented in **Table 5**, the sample was relatively representative across counties and woman-owned firms. There may have been over-sampling among BIPOC- and non-veteran owned firms, but these numbers were small in the general population and sample.

Table 5. Representativeness of sample compared to total regional population

	SURVEY SAMPLE	REGIONAL POPULATION
COUNTY	<i>n</i> = 30 EMPLOYERS	<i>N</i> = 9,341 TOTAL EMPLOYER ESTABLISHMENTS ⁶
Allegan	27%	28%
Ottawa	73%	72%
OWNERSHIP	<i>n</i> = 30 EMPLOYERS	<i>N</i> = 7,032 ALL EMPLOYER FIRMS ⁷
Woman-Owned Firms	13%	13%
Minority-/BIPOC-Owned Firms	6%	3%
Veteran-Owned Firms	0%	6%

⁶ US Census Bureau Quick Facts data aggregated across Allegan and Ottawa counties

⁷ US Census Bureau Quick Facts data aggregated across Allegan and Ottawa counties

Although in general, sample sizes were small within industry categories, our sample represents a wide range of industries in our region, as summarized in **Table 6**. Manufacturing had the most respondents ($n = 9$), consistent with the fact that this is the largest industry in West Michigan.⁸

Table 6. Number of respondents by industry sector

Industry	# Respondents	% of Sample
Manufacturing	9	30%
Construction	4	13%
Environment or agriculture	2	7%
Government	2	7%
Healthcare	2	7%
Marketing, advertising, or PR	2	7%
Accountancy, banking or finance	1	3%
Computing, IT, or data	1	3%
Education	1	3%
Energy and utilities	1	3%
Engineering or manufacturing	1	3%
Food services	1	3%
Non-profit	1	3%
Sales	1	3%
Other	1	3%

⁸ Gandhi, N. (2021). 2022 Annual planning information and workforce analysis reports: West Michigan. State of Michigan Department of Technology, Management & Budget Bureau of Labor Market Information and Strategic Initiatives

DEFINING CHILD CARE GAPS

We know that there are gaps between:

- Families' child care needs and what is accessible to them;
- Child care business owners' desires to increase capacity/quality and the resources available to them to do so; and
- Solutions that could effectively support working families' child care needs and employers' knowledge of and ability to implement them.

Key to closing these gaps is better understanding the specific underlying barriers. Accordingly, we analyzed survey data, qualitative insights from focus groups and interviews, and secondary population-level data to explore three key research questions:

1. What challenges are preventing **FAMILIES** from accessing the child care they want, when and where they need it?
2. What barriers do **CHILD CARE BUSINESS OWNERS** face that limit the supply and quality of child care options in our region?
3. What obstacles do **EMPLOYERS** encounter in terms of child care issues affecting their business and their capacity to support their employees' child care needs?

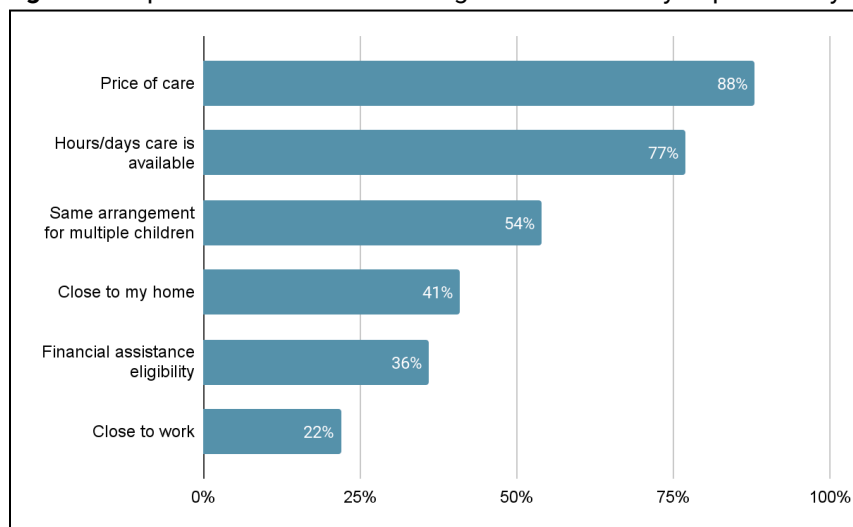
Key findings are summarized below.

FAMILIES

KEY CHALLENGES: Child Care Affordability, Availability, and Access

In the family survey, participants were asked to indicate how important various aspects of a child care arrangement were to them. **Figure 2** summarizes the percentage of respondents who indicated that a factor was “very important” to them.

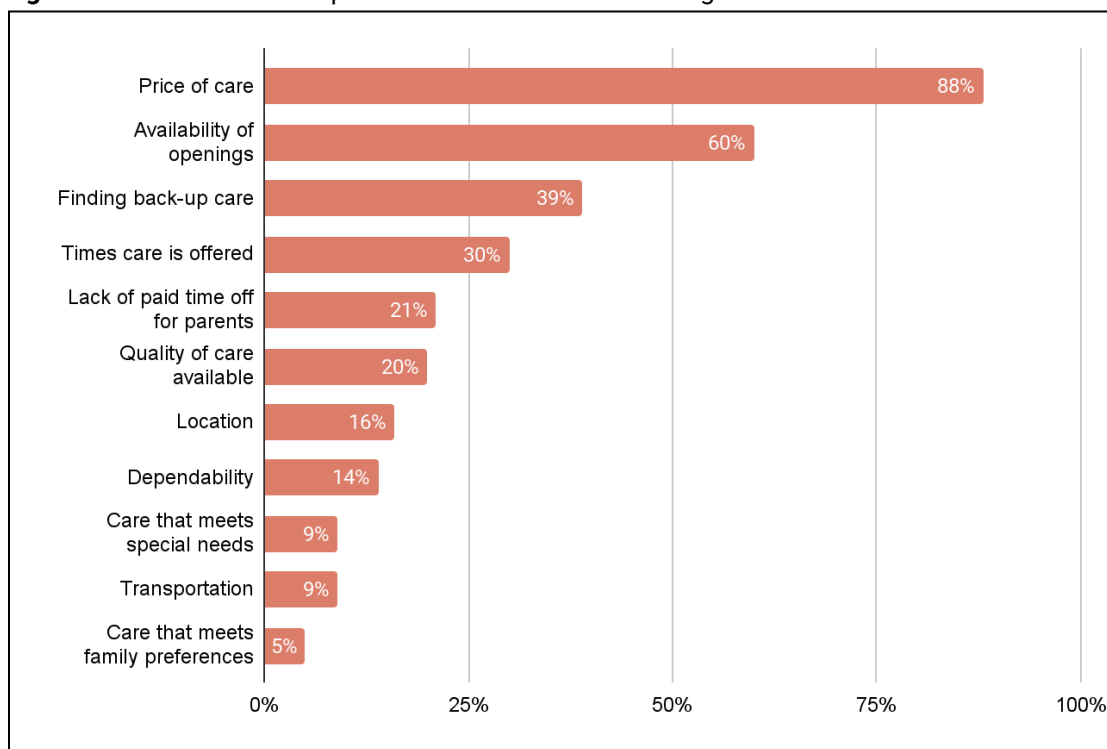
Figure 2. Aspects of a child care arrangement rated “very important” by families



Note: $n = 140$

These data provide important context for understanding families' needs and priorities. We know that families are navigating multiple demands at home and at work, involving multiple work and school schedules, commuting and transportation logistics, managing a household budget, and responding to unexpected events such as illness or school closures. To get a sense of how well child care needs are being met within this complex landscape, our survey asked, *"What has prevented you from accessing the child care that you need/want (now or ever)?"* As illustrated in **Figure 2**, the most commonly endorsed barrier was the price of child care, with nearly 90 percent of respondents reporting that this has prevented them from meeting their family's child care needs. The second most common barrier was the limited availability of child care options, as families struggle to find programs with current openings and often encounter long waitlists. Other top-ranked challenges pertain to child care being available *when* and *where* families need it. Finding child care that is affordable, accessible, and available when needed is a major obstacle for many families, contributing to increased stress and difficulties balancing work and family responsibilities.

Figure 3. Barriers that have prevented families from meeting child care needs



Note: $n = 164$; respondents could select multiple barriers.

The top themes that emerged from the survey data were echoed throughout our focus groups and interviews as illustrated in these quotes from participants:

"When it comes right down to it, there are not enough spaces available in the child care facilities in our area, not enough staffing and the cost is astronomical."

"Not enough child care center options in Holland for preschool age and younger."

"My children are in care but for my infant, I do not like the care he receives but have no choice but to keep him there, since there isn't availability elsewhere and I need to provide for my home. It's very hard."

"Currently, there are fewer options available, often long waitlists, and it's hard to attract & keep good child care staff because they don't get paid well or respected."

"My child is 3 and has been on a waitlist for 2 years-no care means I work third shift and care for my kids during the day."

Below we describe in greater detail the three central child care challenges families face: 1) affordability, 2) lack of available openings, and 3) lack of options that meet families' needs and preferences.

Problem #1: Child care is not affordable and financial assistance is not accessible for most families.

Child care expenses strain family budgets.

Child care expenses can be a significant financial burden for families across income levels. The term "affordable" child care is generally considered to be **no more than 7 percent** of a family's income, yet in reality, child care costs exceed this threshold for many families. In Allegan County, the average monthly rate for full-time care is \$646, while in Ottawa County, it is \$744, amounting to approximately **10 percent** of the median household income in both areas. For families earning minimum wage, child care expenses could consume **37 percent** of their budget in Allegan County and **43 percent** in Ottawa County.⁹ Families with infants, toddlers, multiple children, children with special needs, or requiring care during non-standard hours face even higher child care expenses. These high costs often force parents to explore alternative childcare options or forgo job opportunities.

Child care affordability for families was a recurring theme across the family and employer surveys and focus groups:

"It's both cost and availability. For most of us (we're all women), the cost of child care almost outweighs our salary."

"Affordability - would cost some of our employees up to 30-40% of their take home pay."

"As a family who have dedicated our careers to social services, it's sad that I can't keep working in the field because of child care costs. If I did this now I would only be taking home a couple hundred dollars a month, which isn't worth it."

"Child care needs to be more affordable, I am currently losing money working 40 hours a week because once taxes and insurance come out of my paycheck, daycare costs more than what I have left."

"After paying bills, there isn't enough money for child care because of the outrageous costs and I worked at a daycare. After deductions for my kids, driving, stress and hours missed at home it wasn't worth it."

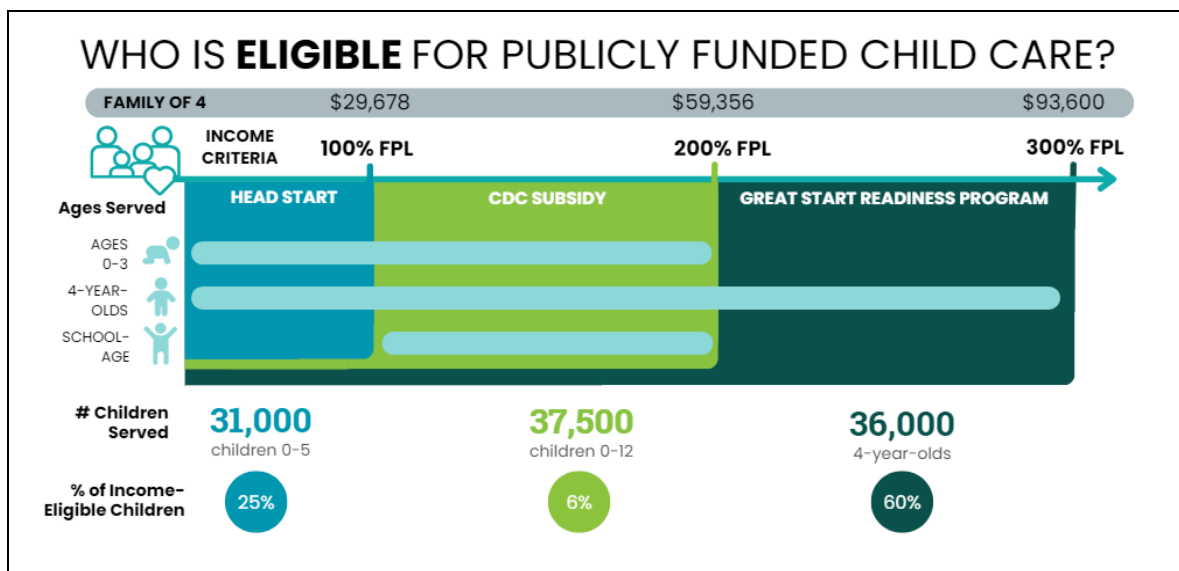
Limited utilization of subsidies and financial assistance programs.

There are various sources of financial assistance available to help mitigate the financial strain of child care on families. **Figure 4** summarizes three of the main financial assistance programs available in Michigan including Head Start/Early Head Start, Child Development and Care (CDC) subsidies, and the Great Start Readiness Program (state-funded public preschool). As noted in the last row, the percentage of eligible children who actually receive these supports varies widely.¹⁰

Figure 4. Eligibility and receipt of public assistance for child care

⁹ Annie E. Casey KIDS COUNT Database, Average cost of full-time child care per month in Allegan and Ottawa counties; The number is the weighted average monthly cost for infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and school-age children in child care centers, group homes and family homes in September 2023, as voluntarily reported by child care business owners. Average monthly prices of child care as percentages of median household income in each county and income from a full-time job (40 hrs/wk) at Michigan minimum wage.

¹⁰ Michigan is currently in the process of transitioning to a universal pre-K model in which all 4-year-olds will be eligible for tuition-free preschool services.



Adapted from: Policy Equity Group, Pulse, & Michigan Transformation Collective (2024). *The Child Care Crisis is a Labor Crisis*

Particularly notable is the small percentage of eligible children who receive CDC subsidies. Similar evidence of low-utilization rates is evident in our region. Although not calculated as percentage of eligible children or total applications received, data indicates that only 1,637 children ages birth to 12 in Allegan and Ottawa Counties were approved for CDC subsidies in 2023. Of these, only 816 children actually received subsidies, representing just **1 percent of all children ages birth to 12** across the two counties.¹¹ Families may not access subsidies for a number of reasons including awareness of the program, complex application processes and requirements, challenging interactions with subsidy agencies, difficulty proving eligibility, or finding approved child care programs that will accept subsidies.

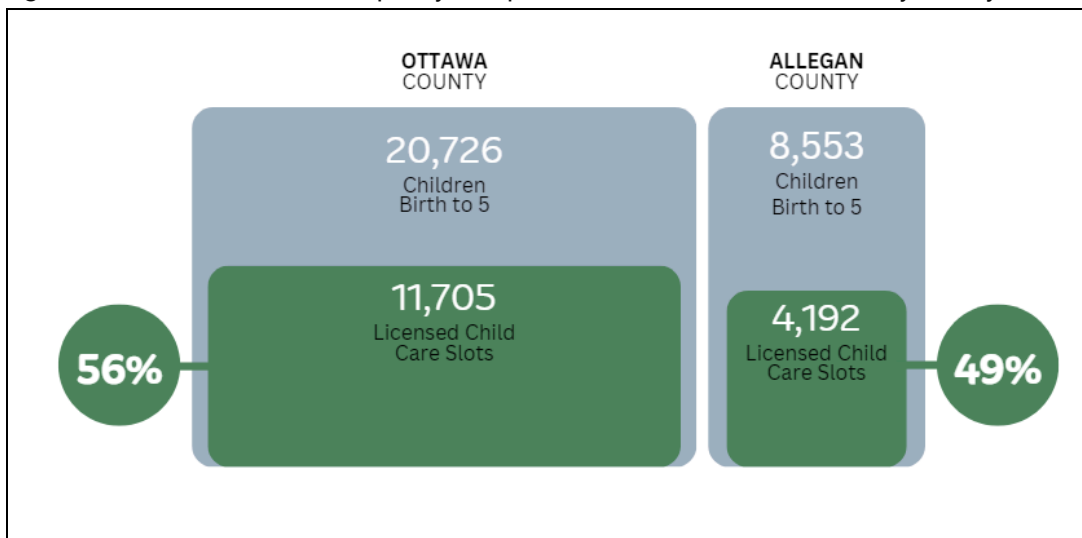
In addition, many families exist in the “child care gap” where their incomes are above the threshold to qualify for financial assistance, yet still insufficient to comfortably afford child care. Further research should be conducted in our region to better understand the specific barriers that families face in accessing financial support.

Problem #2: There are only enough licensed child care slots for about half of children 0-5 in Ottawa and Allegan Counties.

Despite the growing need for dependable child care options, there is a significant gap between supply and demand. Across the two counties, there are 15,866 slots in licensed child care programs—enough to accommodate only 54 percent of the total 29,279 children ages 0 to 5. **Figure 5** illustrates these disparities at the county level.

¹¹ Annie E. Casey KIDS COUNT Database, Children ages birth to 12 approved for and receiving subsidized child care, aggregated across Allegan and Ottawa Counties.

Figure 5. Licensed child care capacity compared to total children birth to 5 by county



Source: Western Region Great Start to Quality

Problem #3: There is a lack of available care that meets families' unique needs and preferences

Need for care to accommodate non-traditional and flexible schedules. Within our 24/7 economy, a variety of industries—including retail, restaurants, health care, warehousing, security, customer service, and transportation—require jobs that do not have predictable 9-to-5 schedules.¹² Many workers also have unpredictable schedules, where their hours might fluctuate by week, time of day, and/or length of shift. Workers may be given very little advance notice of their schedules and may also experience last-minute mandatory overtime or involuntary reductions in their work hours, and therefore wages. Nontraditional and unpredictable work hours affect working parents at all income levels, including doctors, lawyers, investment bankers, and highly paid sales jobs. However, these working conditions are disproportionately experienced by low-income workers and women, many of whom are responsible for young children.

Figure 3 shows that **40 percent of families** in our sample reported a need for child care during either non-traditional hours, flexible/drop-in care, or a combination of both. Furthermore, although a smaller sample, 33 percent of the employers we surveyed reported that at least some of their employees work non-traditional hours and 40 percent reported that employee schedules are inconsistent and/or unpredictable ahead of time.

On the supply-side of the equation, **Figure 6** shows that only **22 percent of licensed child care providers** in our region offer care during non-traditional hours and/or on a flexible basis. Most of these providers (82 percent)¹³ are home-based providers, meaning that though they may be more flexible, their capacity is more limited than center-based care.

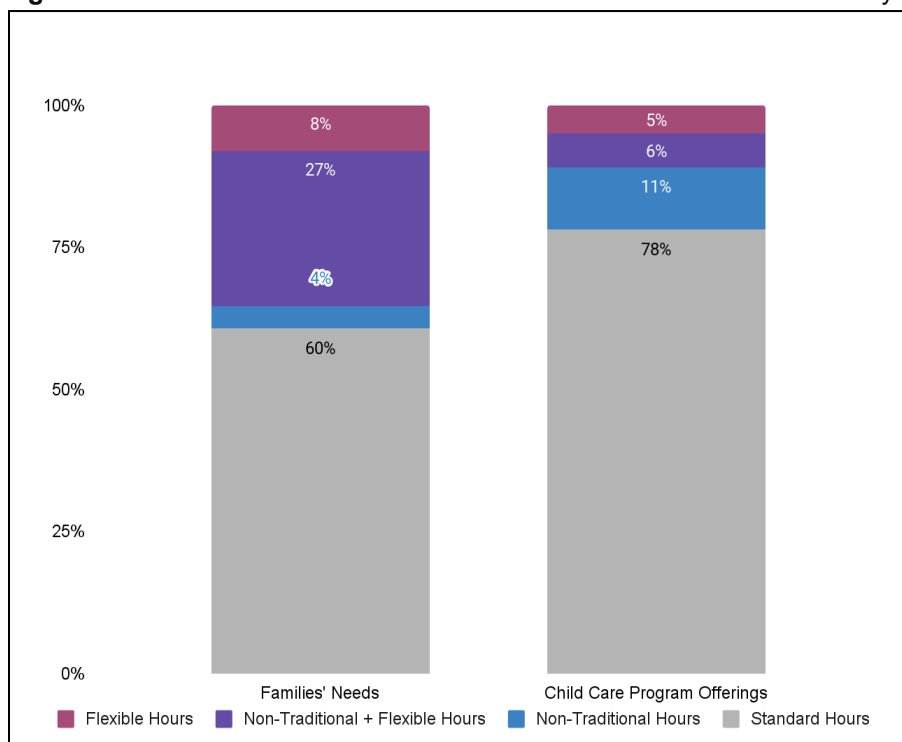
One of the largest gaps for families appears to be the need for more care offered on a drop-in/flexible basis. This is related to the finding reported earlier (**Figure 3**) that nearly 40 percent of surveyed families reported that they had difficulty finding back up child care. Even when families do have predictable work schedules and regular child care arrangements, there will inevitably be times when their child is ill and cannot attend the child care program, planned or unexpected school/center closures or half-days, or when an in-home provider is unable to provide care. When child care arrangements fall through, parents must scramble to find alternative options or miss work to care for their children. However, most licensed child care providers cannot accommodate variable schedules

¹² Sosinsky, L. (n.d.). *Child care challenges when parents' work schedules are unpredictable and not 9-to-5*. Philadelphia, PA: Early Childhood Action Collective, Public Health Management Corporation.

¹³ LARA licensing data

or drop-in care because they need consistent revenue to cover fixed costs and need predictable attendance to stay in compliance with staff–child ratios and group size regulations.

Figure 6. Child care for non-traditional hours and flexible schedules: Family needs and program supply



Note: $n = 135$ family survey respondents; $N = 378$ licensed providers from LARA database.

Addressing the diverse scheduling needs of families and employees is crucial in the child care sector. Our research underscores the significance of accommodating non-traditional and flexible hours in both child care offerings and employee schedules to meet the evolving demands of modern families and workplaces. These themes were echoed in our focus group sessions and open-ended survey responses.

“Not everyone works 9-5”

“My child is 3 and has been on a waitlist for 2 years-no care means I work third shift and care for my kids during the day.”

“Child care needs to be more flexible -not many part time daycare options without having to pay full time. We do not work regular 9-5. Husband works 6-3, I work 7-7. There isn't a child care option that we know of”

“Unconventional hours/days. We need longer hours and flexible days”

“I have had a lot of moms complain about not having adequate before and after school option when they need to be at work at 7”

Care that supports the diverse needs of all children and families. A clear theme that emerged from the survey results was existing care arrangements are not supporting the breadth of diverse needs families have in the region. These include support for children with special needs or medical needs, as well as child care that affirms and supports the cultural and linguistic diversity within the community.

As shown in **Figure 3**, **9 percent** of families indicated challenges in accessing care that meets their child’s special needs and **5 percent** indicated challenges accessing care that meets their family’s preferences (e.g., language, faith-based, nature-based). Of surveyed child care business owners, **56 percent** indicated that children within their care were experiencing social-emotion and/or behavioral challenges, a figure likely heightened due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on young children. Racial demographics are shifting within the youngest population of children in Ottawa and Allegan Counties (see **Figure 1**), and a total of **18 percent** of families reported a home-language other than English, with Spanish being the most commonly reported language. At the same time, a professional within Ottawa County’s child care field noted, *“Child care doesn’t account for cultural differences. A daycare center seems to be a white family choice, while other cultures pay family members to provide care. The system seems built for middle-class white families.”* With increasing diversity in the demographics of families and developmental supports needed for children, the region must be intentional in providing professional development and other supports and resources to new and existing child care businesses owners who support these populations.

CHILD CARE BUSINESSES

KEY CHALLENGES: Child Care Program Staffing, Funding, and Regulations

Many of the challenges reported by families are directly linked to the supply side of the child care equation. Within our child care business owner survey, most respondents reported that if given the appropriate resources and support, they would be interested in and willing to expand their licensed capacity, thus increasing the total number of child care slots in our region. Indeed, as **Figure 7** illustrates 75 percent of center-/school-based programs would be interested in expanding in their current and/or a new location. **Figure 8** shows that 81 percent of home-based child care business owners either have already or are interested in pursuing special licensure status to serve more children (increasing from 6 to 7 children in family child care homes and from 12 to 14 in family group homes).¹⁴ However, it should be noted that the majority (73 percent) of family child care home business owners were not interested in taking the step to become licensed as family group homes.

Figure 7. Center-/school-based programs interested in expanding

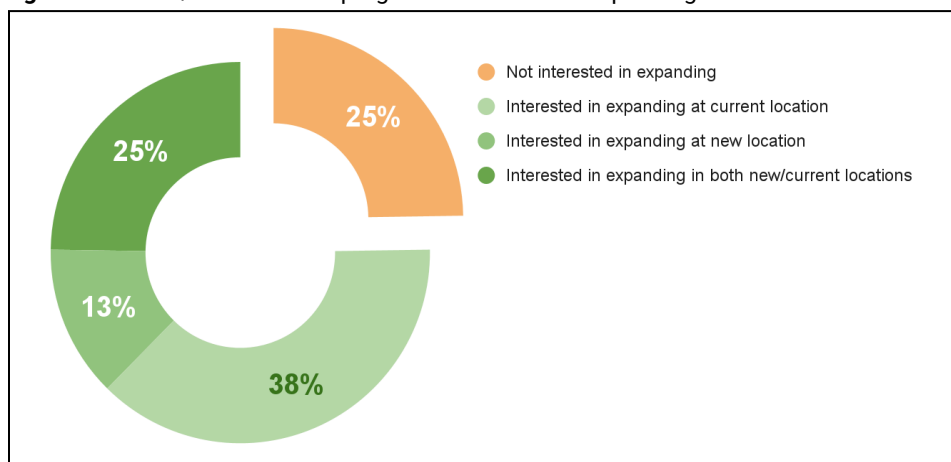
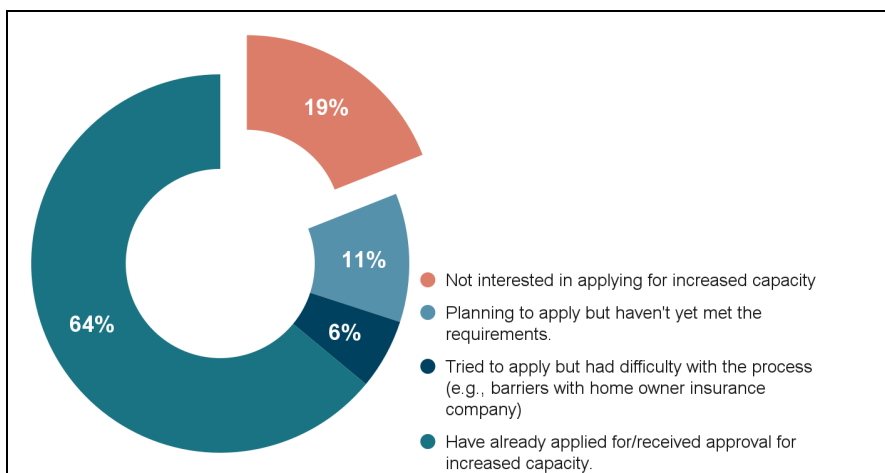


Figure 8. Home-based child care business owners interest and participation in expansion

¹⁴ Programs can be approved for increased licensed capacity if they meet certain requirements (e.g., have been licensed for at least 29 consecutive months, serving at least one unrelated minor child).



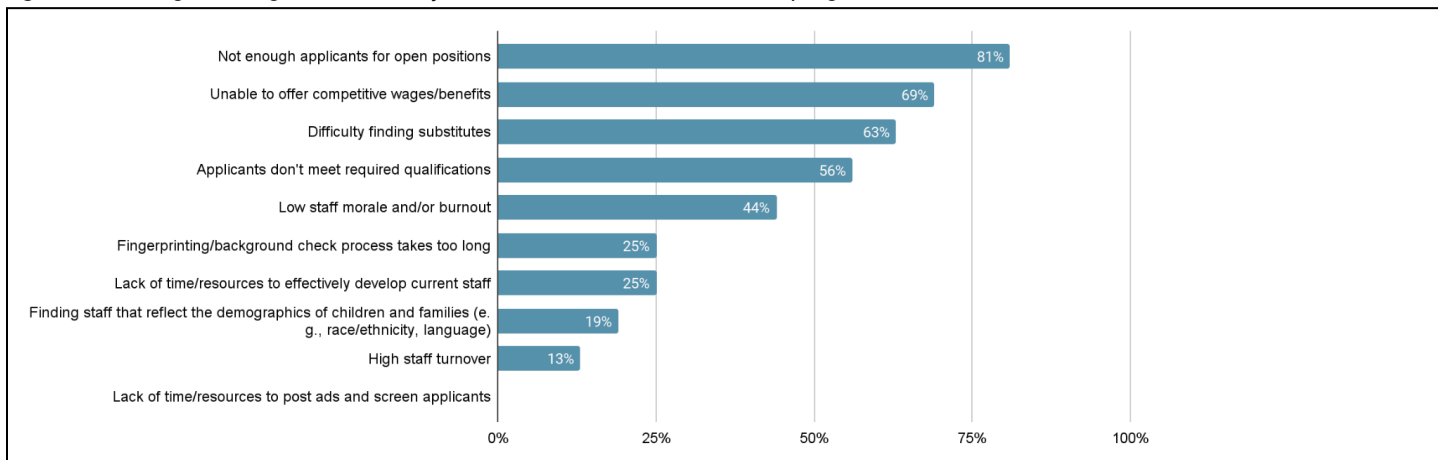
Despite child care business owners' interest in expanding their capacity to serve children and families, our data revealed three key barriers they face: staffing, funding, and regulations.

Problem #4: Staffing is the primary barrier to serving more children and families, particularly for center- and school-based programs.

Of survey respondents operating center- or school-based child care programs, **63 percent** reported that they do not have enough staff to even operate at their current capacity, much less expand to serve more children. When asked what they would need to expand, the top-rated item was "Additional staff," with **69 percent** of center-/school-based programs indicating interest in expansion reporting this need.

The prevalence of specific staffing challenges endorsed by center-/school-based program respondents are presented in **Figure 9**. The scarcity of applicants (especially those that meet qualification requirements) and available substitutes speak to one of the core challenges of the child care sector: despite high tuition prices for families, child care business owners struggle to make ends meet and offer competitive wages and benefits to their employees. Child care is labor intensive, requiring low staff-to-child ratios as young children require a high degree of individual attention to support their safety, learning, and development. For example, one teacher is required for every four infants in care. Although these ratios are justified to provide optimal care for children, they present a unique business dilemma. Unlike other industries where staff can serve many clients in a day, this is not practical or feasible within child care settings.

Figure 9. Staffing challenges endorsed by center-/school-based child care programs



Note: n = 16 center-/school-based child care business owners

Staffing is less of an issue in home-based settings given that only one staff member is needed for family child care homes and two are required for family group homes. However, concerns about wages/benefits and finding substitutes were endorsed by nearly one-third of home-based child care business owners ($N = 37$) and of the eight home-based programs interested in expanding, half indicated that they would need support finding and paying assistant teachers.

Problem #5: Time- and resource-intensive regulations and lack of capital can be barriers to start-up, expansion, and sustainability of child care businesses.

When asked an open-ended question about the biggest challenges for the start-up and expansion of child care businesses, over 40 percent of survey respondents identified zoning and/or licensing hurdles ($N = 37$). Strict zoning policies limiting the location of programs, lack of alignment between local and state policies, and high costs, all present significant barriers for programs, further limiting the availability of care for families. While the specifics of which zoning policies present a barrier to child care business owners were not explored, identifying opportunities to streamline and modify policies is a key focus of future research. This theme was also apparent in the interviews we did with new and current child care business owners. Select quotes from the survey and interviews are presented below.

We would absolutely LOVE to expand our building and make our capacity bigger. We have looked into it in the past but have encountered issues with the township and/or the cost was too great for our company

I didn't meet the start up qualifications because we don't own our home, it is being willed to us so we couldn't supply the requirement for expansion. I would need a grant to expand and hire staff to be open [during the] 2nd shift which is a big demand right now and well as being open on weekends.

Receiving a special use permit from [the] township to increase capacity with requirements met including fencing height, driveway capacity, fees for application to name a few. Also, hiring adequate and qualified staff. Staffing is a tremendous headache and the earnings are not sufficient to make this worthwhile.

Most unlicensed people don't want to pay the fees or jump through the hoops.

Licensing paperwork takes way too much time and takes away quality time with the kids in my care.

Licensing can be very frustrating. I had to open a new license and it took much longer than last time. So much paperwork to fill out.

Rules are a hurdle we need to overcome. This is the reason why so many providers are quitting. Too much paperwork. Too many regulations. Licensing consultants need to have child care experience to understand the challenges providers are dealing with. State does not penalize unlicensed providers so many people choose not to jump through all the hoops of licensing and frees up money for the provider. There is only one navigator for all of West Michigan so their services are hard to connect with.

State site not helpful, checklist is inaccurate, no next steps, no communication for months, confusing process.

In addition, start-up and expansion often require a substantial outlay of capital to obtain and/or modify spaces that meet zoning and licensing requirements. A third of child care business owners surveyed indicated cost as a prohibitive factor to start-up and expansion in the open-ended question. Ninety percent of center-based programs interested in expanding said they would need a grant or a loan to cover remodeling costs of an existing building and/or purchase property or build a new facility. Similarly, 75 percent of home-based child care programs indicated they would need a grant or loan for remodeling their space.

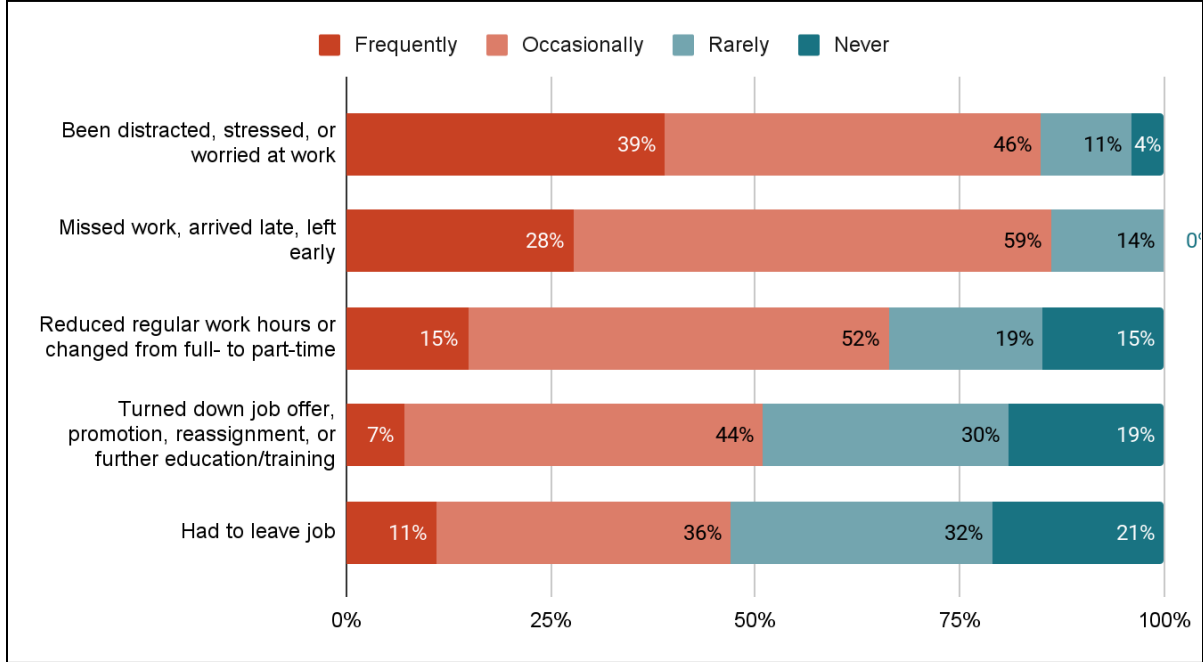
In summary, child care business owners face challenges in startup and sustainability. To begin, they need grants or loans, business planning assistance, startup navigation, and staff recruitment support. However, sustaining the business is threatened by the inability to offer competitive wages, hindering staff retention. Licensing and paperwork further strain child care business owners' resources. Addressing these challenges requires financial support, regulatory reform, and workforce development initiatives to ensure the accessibility and sustainability of child care services.

EMPLOYERS

KEY CHALLENGES: Knowledge and Resources to Support Employee Child Care Needs

Of employers in the region who completed the survey (n = 29), **69 percent** agreed with the statement, “Child care issues experienced by my employees are negatively impacting my business.” Additionally, **90 percent** said that the lack of child care availability at least “somewhat” affects their ability to recruit and retain employees. **Figure 10** highlights some of the specific ways employers see child care issues affecting their businesses. Eighty-six percent of employers reported that child care at least occasionally has a negative effect on their employees’ productivity (e.g., being distracted or absent) and approximately half reported at least occasionally having workers reduce hours, turn down opportunities, or quit.

Figure 10. Employer perspectives on the impact of child care issues on employee productivity, absenteeism, and turnover



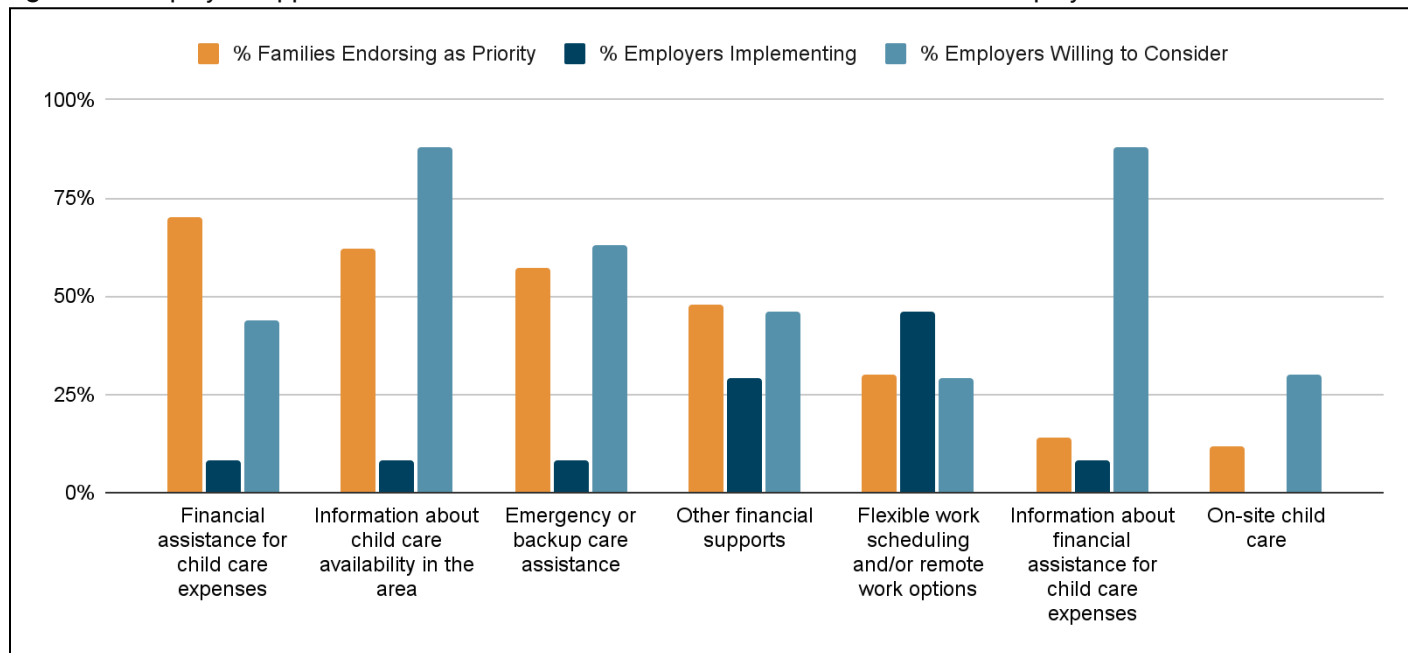
Note: n = 29 business owners

Problem #6: There is a mismatch between what supports families want from employers and supports currently offered.

Within the family survey, respondents were asked to endorse the top three supports from employers they would find most valuable. **Figure 11** shows families’ priorities (first column) juxtaposed with the percentage of surveyed employers that currently offer the support (second column), and the percentage of employers reporting that they would consider implementation. Within our sample of employers and families, there are disparities between families’ priorities and the practices currently being implemented by employers. For instance, families’ top three most endorsed priorities—financial assistance, information about available child care, and back-up care assistance—are offered by fewer

than 10 percent of surveyed employers. However, it is promising that overall, employers seem willing to consider implementing many of the strategies. Continued exploration of families' specific needs will be imperative to avoid misalignment of priorities. For example, flexible and remote work options is currently the support offered most frequently by surveyed employers (46 percent), but is relatively low on the list of family priorities (30 percent). Individual employers should also carefully consider whether solutions like on-site child care would be utilized by their employees, or if alternatives such as providing vouchers to families' programs of choice would be more beneficial.

Figure 11. Employer supports for child care needs that families most value vs. what employers offer



Note: Families: $n = 115$; Employers: $n = 24$

Additionally, although families were not asked specifically about TriShare, 4 percent of employers surveyed in Ottawa County currently participate in the model with an additional 75 percent expressing a willingness to consider participation.¹⁵

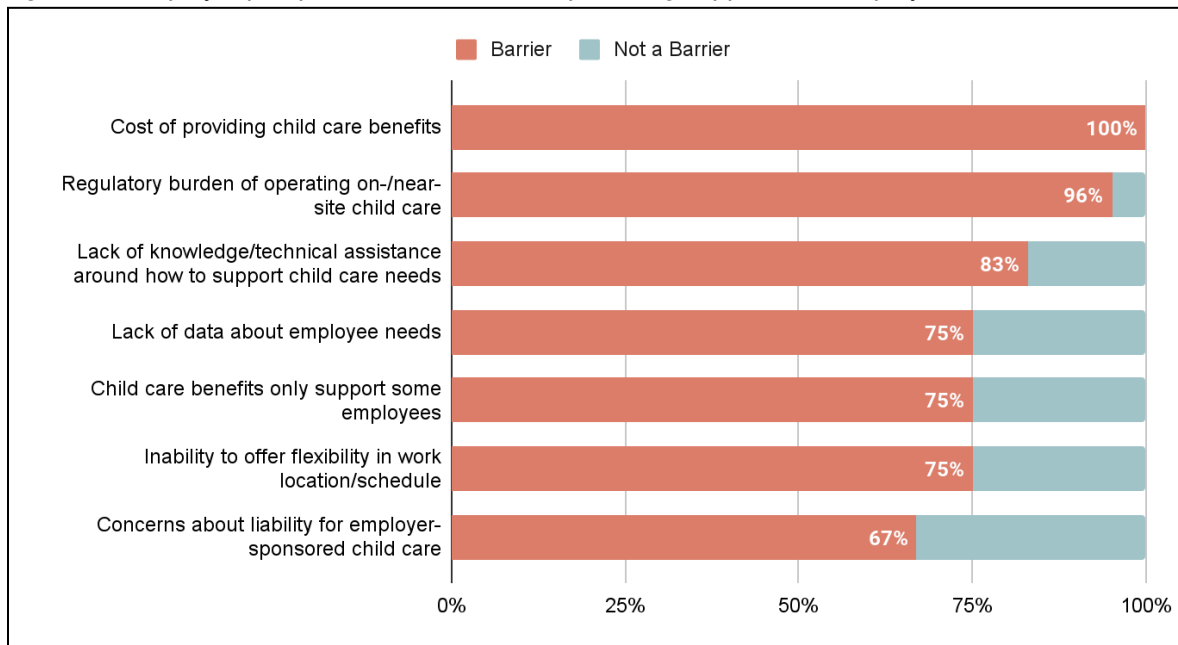
Problem #7: Employers want to support employee child care needs but lack sufficient information and resources.

All 24 employers surveyed who responded to the question discussed above are either currently implementing or would be willing to consider at least one child care-supportive practice.¹⁶ Despite this level of interest and support, employers face many challenges. As shown in **Figure 12**, all employer respondents identified the cost of providing child care benefits. Another notable finding is that most employers reported that lack of knowledge of how to support child care needs (83 percent) and a lack of data about their employees' specific needs (75 percent) as barriers, suggesting that strategies targeted toward enhancing awareness and resources among local employers are warranted.

¹⁵ TriShare is a program in which the cost of an employee's child care is shared equally among the employer, the employee and the State of Michigan — a three-way split — with coordination being provided regionally by a MI Tri-Share facilitator hub. TriShare is not currently available in Allegan County.

¹⁶ It should be noted that respondents to the survey are a self-selecting group that may already be more responsive to and knowledgeable about their employees' child care needs and thus may not fully represent the region's business community at-large.

Figure 12. Employer perspectives on barriers to providing supports for employee child care needs



Note: Employers: $n = 24$

FRAMING THE PROBLEM

The seven problem statements which emerged from the needs assessment analysis are linked to three key root causes. These include: child care workforce gap, market failure, and limited supply. These root causes are fundamental factors that underlie and drive the child care crisis in Ottawa and Allegan Counties. By understanding and tackling root causes, this plan seeks to address core issues within the child care field, rather than treating symptoms of the crisis.

Child Care Workforce Gap

Insufficient workforce to meet the demand for child care services in our county.

Through coalition meetings, discussions including local child care business owners as well as through interviews with both new and existing child care business owners, the recruitment and retention of high-quality early childhood professionals surfaced. Some of the key contributors to the workforce turnover and limited supply which emerged from the needs assessment work includes:

- The lack of adequate backup care and substitutes exacerbates the burnout rate, as workers often find themselves without essential support.
- The absence of competitive wages and comprehensive health, dental, and vision insurance benefits.
- Not having applicants for open positions or not meeting qualifications
- The limited awareness surrounding child care as a viable career option hinders the recruitment and retention of qualified professionals.
- Persistent issue of low wages, as many child care workers struggle to make a livable income despite the demanding nature of their roles and long working hours.
- In the case of in-home child care business owners, the potential liabilities associated with bringing in substitutes can create additional challenges.
- PreK for All has potential impact on workforce availability and may create competition for workers.

Market Failure

Child care start-up and operations are not profitable or sustainable

As we dive into the multifaceted reasons behind the struggle for profitability and sustainability in child care startups and operations, it becomes evident that a comprehensive understanding of these challenges is essential for addressing the pressing issues within this sector. The following themes surfaced from the needs assessment work:

- Dealing with licensing and paperwork can be incredibly exasperating, as child care business owners find themselves stretched thin without the additional time required.
- The financial strain of launching a new child care business, acquiring necessary supplies, and simultaneously ensuring affordability for parents adds to the challenges.
- In-home child care business owners and child care businesses, in general, face a low profit margin, making sustainability a considerable concern.
- Employers may not be familiar with MI Tri-Share as a viable option to alleviate child care-related challenges in Ottawa County. MI Tri-Share is not available in Allegan County as an

option. There may be a lack of awareness or financial capability among businesses about the benefits associated with offering child care or participating in TriShare programs.

- Employers indicate a reluctance to consider financial assistance for child care, reflecting a broader misunderstanding of the crucial role child care plays in supporting a thriving workforce.

Limited support for employers regarding how to address child care needs within the community.

The lack of employer knowledge on how to support child care needs in the community stems from various reasons, including:

- **Prioritization Issues:** Some employers do not recognize the importance of addressing child care needs as a part of their employee support initiatives, leading to a lack of prioritization in acquiring the necessary knowledge.
- **Limited Awareness:** Many employers lack awareness of the available resources, programs, and support mechanisms related to child care needs within the community.
- **Complexity of Child Care Systems:** The intricacies of child care systems, including subsidies, programs, and local resources, can be complex. Employers struggle to navigate these systems without proper guidance and knowledge.
- **Changing Landscape:** The child care landscape is continually evolving, with new policies, programs, and community resources emerging. Employers find it challenging to stay informed and updated on the latest developments in child care support.
- **Limited Networking:** Lack of engagement with local Child care business owners, community organizations, and support networks can contribute to a scarcity of information on how employers can effectively support their employees' child care needs.

Limited Supply:

There are a lack of options for parents who work hours outside of 9am-5pm.

Most care arrangements within the region catered for families working traditional 9-5 positions, leaving families with non-traditional hours struggling to access care that meets their needs. The following themes surfaced from the needs assessment work.

- **Inadequate provision of child care services for non 9-5 workforces,** necessitating more flexible hours to accommodate diverse work schedules.
- **Child care business owners mainly operate during standard business hours** to meet the needs of most working parents, resulting in fewer options available during evenings, weekends, or overnight hours due to lower demand.
- **Providing child care during hours outside of the “norm”** may require additional resources, such as increased staffing and security measures, which can drive up operating costs for child care business owners. These added expenses may not be feasible for some child care businesses.

There is a shortage of child care to meet the needs and preferences of families.

Through this work, the need for child care options that meet the cultural and linguistic diversity of our community has become increasingly apparent. There is also a clear need for care options that support children with special and medical needs. The following themes surfaced from the needs assessment work:

- Child care business owners need support accessing training related to supporting children with special needs or behavioral needs. The lack of specialization and training has led to caregivers being reluctant to enroll children in child care programs.
- There is limited diversity in care options within both in-home and center-based child care, with many programs catering to white, middle class families.
- Additional support is needed for relative care options, which is often the preference for culturally and racially diverse families.
- Additional outreach is necessary to understand and amplify the needs and preferences of diverse families.

CHARTING A COURSE OF ACTION

To prepare for action planning we brought our data to our Coalition through a series of meetings that allowed us to review and find the themes that continued to show up in our data and conversations with local stakeholders. Between Coalition meetings, our data review team persistently explored the data, refining themes and pinpointing root causes to make sure we remained on track.

On August 16, 2023, our Coalition convened to initiate the review of our data. During this session, we identified and prioritized several key themes warranting further exploration. These themes include the need for clarification of survey data, increased availability of child care options across both counties, enhanced legislative advocacy to address this crisis, heightened engagement with businesses, and the demand for non-traditional child care solutions.

On October 24, 2024, the coalition reconvened to revisit themes and organize work groups tasked with reviewing the data. The workgroups composed of Business/Employer, Legislative, In-Home child care, Center-Based Child Care, and Parent Voice representatives, analyzed the data to identify root causes and outline proposed actions to move this work forward. We also identified any stakeholders missing from our discussions and reached out to various parties who could provide additional perspectives to enrich our coalition's feedback.

On January 23, 2024, our coalition initiated the strategy design phase. As a collaborative, we addressed the recurring themes that had emerged, namely Workforce, Start-up and Operations, Non-traditional Care, and Shortage of Facilities. Through a collaborative brainstorming session, we generated numerous options to address these challenges. Our group condensed these ideas into five primary strategies considered feasible by our coalition. This process also enabled us to categorize our strategies into the appropriate Regional and State strategy frameworks.

Focus Group Feedback: throughout the month of February we gathered input from several different parent focus groups. These groups were given our strategies and asked to provide feedback that was directly considered in the Action Planning process, prioritizing the needs and well-being of their families. We utilized this data to align our strategies with the needs of families. *See Appendix C*

On February 23, 2024, we convened to discuss the implications of PreK for All and its alignment with our regional plan. Additionally, we shared insights from our focus group data. The group then assessed our strategies to ensure alignment with our intended direction. This feedback helped us avoid duplicating efforts and identify existing processes within the community.

Our efforts, spanning across meetings and collaborative sessions, enabled us to refine our focus and pinpoint root causes, ultimately guiding us towards six actionable strategies.

April/May 2024 In addition, Part of our Project Management Team attended the Family Engagement Symposium to glean insights on engaging families in our communities. The Childcare Aware Symposium was also attended in Washington DC where we were able to sit down with the offices of US Representatives Scholten and Huizenga, and Senators Peters and Stabenow, to discuss child care needs in our region and trends in Michigan.

Strategy 1: Initiate awareness campaign to highlight the significance of child care workers as small business owners, early childhood educators, and entrepreneurs; and the influence of their work on children's development and the community.

Root Causes Addressed		Problem Statement	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Workforce Gap• Limited Supply		Problem #4: Staffing is the primary barrier to serving more children and families, particularly for center- and school-based programs.	
Anticipated Costs: \$\$ \$ = low or no additional financial resources anticipated, \$\$ = moderate financial resources anticipated, \$\$\$ = significant financial resources anticipated.			
Activities	Support Needed	Potential Collaboration	Progress
Collect and share testimonials from child care workers, parents, and children about their experiences and the impact of child care services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Connect with local child care business owners/families and get their stories• Continued funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Video and storytelling experts to craft testimonials.• Help Me Grow• Great Start Collaborative• Licensing and Regulatory Affairs• MDHHS	<div></div>
Create materials aimed at showcasing child care businesses as a respected profession and celebrating the dedication of child care professionals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continued funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Great Start Collaborative• Great Start to Quality• Coalition workgroup• Licensing and Regulatory Affairs• OAISD Career Ed/ MTEC• AAESA	<div></div>
Distribute these materials in community centers, libraries, schools, and online.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Coordination with local organizations/business to pass along information• Website• Continued funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Child care Media Series -local news/radio Lakeshore Second Wave, WHTC, JOY• Great Start to Quality• Child Care Licensing• Regional Resource• Help Me Grow• Mi Works	<div></div>
Engage with local schools, community organizations, and colleges to integrate information about child care careers into their career counseling services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continued funding• Free Child Development Associate options	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Caring for MIFuture• MTEC-Roberto M• Careerline Tech Center-Jacquie R• Vendor/career fairs• GSC	<div></div>
Create a centralized system for qualified substitutes that child care providers can access when needed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continued funding• Great Start to Quality• EduStaff	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• GSQ- sub list• GSC• EduStaff• MiECC	<div></div>
Work with PreK programs to create shared workforce resources and avoid competition.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continued funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• LAUP• MiLEAP• GSQ• GSC	<div></div>

Strategy 2: Organize a mentorship program aimed at supporting new child care business owners in establishing their businesses.

Root Causes Addressed		Problem Statement	
Market Failure Workforce Gap		Problem #2: There are only enough licensed child care slots for about half of children 0-5 in Ottawa and Allegan Counties. Problem #5: Time- and resource-intensive regulations and lack of capital can be barriers to start-up, expansion, and sustainability of child care businesses.	
Anticipated Costs: \$\$ \$ = low or no additional financial resources anticipated, \$\$ = moderate financial resources anticipated, \$\$\$ = significant financial resources anticipated.			
Activities	Support Needed	Potential Collaboration	Progress
Work with experienced child care business owners and state level licensing to create a startup and operations checklist	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Partnerships with highly effective child care business owners and state licensing officials.Continued funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">LicensingGreat Start to QualityRCsOutdoor Discovery Center	<div></div>
Pair new child care business owners with experienced mentors who can offer guidance, advice, and support as they navigate the early stages of their business.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Continued funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Great Start to QualityChild care business ownersLAUP	<div></div>
Create regional orientation and training workshops: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Cover the basics of starting and operating a child care business, including licensing requirements, health and safety standards, and best practices in early childhood educationOffer workshops on business planning, financial management, marketing, and customer service specifically tailored to the child care industry.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Continued funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Regional Resource CenterMiRegistryGreat Start to QualityMI WorksLAUP	<div></div>

Strategy 3: Develop child care to meet the needs of all families.

Root Causes Addressed		Problem Statement	
Market Failure Limited Supply		Problem #3: There is a lack of available care that meets families' unique needs and preferences.	
Anticipated Costs: \$ \$ = low or no additional financial resources anticipated, \$\$ = moderate financial resources anticipated, \$\$\$ = significant financial resources anticipated			
Activities	Support Needed	Potential Collaboration	Progress
Work with local employers to identify and promote child care needs for employees working non-traditional hours, potentially leading to increased demand and support for these services	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Continued funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">CaregiversCrisis Intervention Team/ Sheriffs DeptChamber of CommerceLocal business ownersGreat Start CollaborativeLocal Birthing Centers/Hospitals/DoulasMDHHS	<div></div>
Review additional data employers identified as child care needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Continued funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Coalition work groupGreat Start Collaborative	<div></div>
In light of PreK For All, continue conversations with others around expansion and implementation in home based child care settings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Continued funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Great Start to QualityRegional Resource CenterGreat Start CollaborativeCoalitionMiLEAP	<div></div>
Determine how many child care business owners are bicultural and bilingual	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Great Start to Quality data	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Great Start to QualityRegional Resource CenterLAUP	<div></div>
Utilize website and data dashboard to map community data and identify gaps	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Continued funding for updates as needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">DatawiseDivergent DaydreamsOAISD tech support	<div></div>
Create support programs for relatives providing child care, offering them resources, training, and financial assistance to enhance the quality of care	<ul style="list-style-type: none">GSQ	<ul style="list-style-type: none">GSQMiRegistryMDHHS	<div></div>

Strategy 4: Expand access to children who need individualized care (*Special Needs, Medical Needs, Behavioral, Trauma*)

Root Causes Addressed		Problem Statement	
Workforce Gap		Problem #3: There is a lack of available care that meets families’ unique needs and preferences.	
Anticipated Costs: \$\$ \$ = low or no additional financial resources anticipated, \$\$ = moderate financial resources anticipated, \$\$\$ = significant financial resources anticipated			
Activities	Support Needed	Potential Collaboration	Progress
Collect additional data from Child care business owners on types of needs they are trained and comfortable caring for	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Data from Regional Resource Center• Continued funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Regional Resource Center• Great Start Collaborative• Great Start to Quality	☒
Partner with local healthcare child care business owners, special education professionals, and advocacy groups to share trainings in our region	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Coordination of trainings with local entities• Communication of trainings• Continued funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Caregivers• Regional Resource Center• Coalition• Adoption/Foster Care Agencies• Help Me Grow	☒
Implement a local certification system for Child care business owners who complete specialized training programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continued funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Great Start to Quality Website• MiRegistry• Coalition workgroup• MIECC	☒
Support the establishment or expansion of child care centers that are fully accessible and equipped to serve children with individual needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continued funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Regional Resource Center• OAISD/AAESA support• Great Start Collaborative• Infant Mental Health Team	☒
Work with Great Start to Quality and MiRegistry to offer training opportunities bundled into modules around supporting children who are experiencing challenging behaviors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continued funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Great Start to Quality• MiRegistry• Behavior Specialists• Great Start Collaborative	☒

Regional Strategy 5: Implement targeted activities to address the shortage of child care in our community.

Root Causes Addressed		Problem Statement	
Market Failure Limited Supply Workforce Gap		Problem #2: There are only enough licensed child care slots for about half of children 0-5 in Ottawa and Allegan Counties. Problem #6: There is a mismatch between what support families want from employers and support currently offered.	
Anticipated Costs: \$\$ \$ = low or no additional financial resources anticipated, \$\$ = moderate financial resources anticipated, \$\$\$ = significant financial resources anticipated			
Activities	Support Needed	Potential Collaboration	Progress
Explore the success/struggles of center-based child care models of child care for employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Continued funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">CaregiversOutdoor Discovery CenterGentex-Share their modelsHope CollegeRapid Bus Station/Local Transportation	<div><div></div></div>
Onboard additional child care business owners into MiECC	<ul style="list-style-type: none">OAISDContinued funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">MiECCChild care business ownersHelp Me GrowGreat Start Collaborative	<div><div></div></div>
Collaborate with local businesses to fund or provide space and staff for child care facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Continued funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">TrishareOAISDAAESA	<div><div></div></div>
Conduct an available space assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Continued funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Great Start CollaborativeData Driven Decisions	<div><div></div></div>

Strategy 6: Provide child care resources to local community members and partners.

Root Causes Addressed		Problem Statement	
Market Failure		Problem #6: There is a mismatch between what supports families want from employers and supports currently offered. Problem #7: Employers want to support employee child care needs but lack sufficient information and resources.	
Anticipated Costs: \$\$\$ \$ = low or no additional financial resources anticipated, \$\$ = moderate financial resources anticipated, \$\$\$ = significant financial resources anticipated			
Activities	Support Needed	Potential Collaboration	Progress
Create folders for community members and partners to share child care resources which would inform where families can find community resources and subsidy See Appendix D & E	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Community to share folders	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Community partners across regionCoalition workgroupGreat Start to QualityLocal EmployersLakeshore Advantage	<div></div>
Create a regional child care website	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Continued funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Divergent DaydreamsDatawiseOAISD Technology Team	<div></div>
House folder contents electronically on website	<ul style="list-style-type: none">OAISD Technology TeamOAISD/AAESA Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Divergent DaydreamsOAISDAAESA	<div></div>
Build relationships/connections with local businesses/nonprofits Share Website and Data Dashboard with community partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Continued fundingWebsite updatesData updates	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Share existing resources -Awareness to prof like LHRMA, WCC, LSA, LNA. Employee assistance programsWest Coast ChamberLakeshore AdvantageThe Source211	<div></div>
Meet with MI Tri-Share: Launch local campaigns to raise awareness about the benefits of the MI Tri-Share program among employers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Acquire current Tri Share handout for folders and website	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Trishare Coordinator-OttawaWest Coast ChamberReady for School	<div></div>
Work with local government and business leaders to advocate for the expansion of MI Tri-Share into Allegan County.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Continued funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">MiLEAPTri-Share	<div></div>

ENABLING SUCCESS

Regional-Level Enabling Factors:

Accountability: By establishing metrics and benchmarks, progress can be tracked toward goals and hold stakeholders accountable for implementing promised reforms. Regular evaluation ensures that efforts are effective and informs adjustments as needed.

Advocacy: Advocate for policies and funding at local, state, and national levels to support affordable, accessible, and high-quality child care. By uniting voices, we can amplify our message and influence decision-makers.

Community Engagement: Engaging parents, employers, and other community members is crucial for raising awareness of the importance of child care and garnering support for solutions. Organize community forums, outreach events, and media campaigns to educate and mobilize the public.

Continued Research and Data: Conduct more research to gather data on the current state of child care, including specific gaps in availability and quality. This information can inform policy recommendations and program development.

Diversity: Maintaining diversity involves actively seeking representation from a broad spectrum of backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences. This can be achieved through outreach efforts targeting underrepresented communities, ensuring inclusivity in decision-making processes, and providing resources for capacity building among diverse members.

Funding: Securing additional funding is vital to sustain and continue the collaborative efforts that have begun through this initiative. It would ensure sustainable progress and drive positive change within our community.

Professional Development: Supporting the professional development of Child care business owners and those seeking to become child care business owners through training, mentorship, and credentialing programs can improve the quality of care and retention within the workforce. Collaborate with educational institutions and industry associations to offer these resources.

Resource Collaboration: Collaborating to ensure that our efforts are streamlined and avoid duplicating services already provided elsewhere.

State-Level Enabling Factors

Workforce Pipeline: State-level initiatives can establish and maintain a robust pipeline of qualified child care professionals by:

- **Training Programs:** Investing in training programs and scholarships to attract more individuals to the child care profession.
- **Credentialing and Licensing:** Streamlining credentialing processes and providing incentives for child care professionals to obtain necessary qualifications.
- **Career Development:** Creating pathways for career advancement and professional development within the child care sector.
- **Workforce Retention:** Implementing policies that improve job satisfaction, such as competitive wages, benefits, and supportive work environments.

Mindset & Perceptions: Changing perceptions and attitudes towards child care is crucial. State-level efforts might include:

- **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Launching campaigns to promote the importance of quality child care and early childhood education.
- **Parent Education:** Providing resources to help parents understand the benefits of high-quality child care.
- **Cultural Competency:** Ensuring that child care services are culturally sensitive and responsive to the diverse needs of families within the community.

Advocacy: State-level advocacy efforts can influence policy changes and secure funding to support regional child care plans by:

- **Legislative Advocacy:** Lobbying for legislation that supports increased funding for child care subsidies, infrastructure development, and workforce training.
- **Public Testimony:** Providing opportunities for stakeholders to testify at legislative hearings and public forums to highlight the importance of child care issues.

Infrastructure & Zoning: Creating supportive infrastructure and zoning regulations can facilitate the establishment and expansion of child care facilities by:

- **Zoning Policies:** Reviewing and revising zoning regulations to make it easier to establish child care centers in residential and commercial areas.
- **Facility Funding:** Providing grants or low-interest loans to support the construction or renovation of child care facilities.
- **Public-Private Partnerships:** Collaborating with private developers to include child care facilities in mixed-use developments or community centers.
- **Technical Assistance:** Offering technical assistance and resources to help Child care business owners navigate the regulatory and licensing process

TRACKING PROGRESS

Key Action Strategy #1: Initiate awareness campaign to highlight the significance of child care workers as small business owners, early childhood educators, and entrepreneurs; and the influence of their work on children's development and the community.

Desired "ends" of the strategy to address root causes:

- **Awareness and Appreciation:** Build broader awareness and appreciation of child care workers as essential professionals who contribute significantly to early childhood development and the community.
- **Professional Recognition and Support:** Establish child care workers as respected small business owners, early childhood educators, and entrepreneurs, deserving of support, adequate resources, and professional development opportunities.
- **Positive Impact on Child Development:** Acknowledge and promote the understanding that these professionals play a crucial role in children's developmental outcomes, setting the foundation for lifelong learning and success.
- **Community and Economic Development:** Highlight the contribution of child care services to community and economic development, illustrating how they enable parents to participate in the workforce and support local economies.

To measure the success of this strategy, use the following metrics:

- **Enrollment in Professional Development:** Numbers and trends in child care workers enrolling in and completing professional development programs. (% of Child care business owners attended x PD in x program year) This data can be gathered from Mi Registry and Great Start to Quality
- **Business Growth and Sustainability:** Data on the start-up, growth, and sustainability of child care businesses.
- **Child Outcome Improvements:** Reports showing the positive effects of qualified child care workers on children's cognitive, emotional, and social development. Would need to expand the online Ages and Stages Questionnaire System in additional child care settings.
- **Gain More Employees** in the Early Childhood Field to meet the demand for insufficient workforce. Metrics include number of employees each year, staff turnover, vacancies.

To evaluate the effectiveness of the coalition driving these campaigns:

- **Campaign Outreach Metrics:** Analyze reach, frequency, and engagement levels of the campaigns through various channels like social media analytics, website traffic, and event attendance.
- **Collaboration and Partnership Effectiveness:** Track the growth and diversity of partnerships and collaborations with other organizations, stakeholders, and the community by looking at rosters and sign in sheets.
- **Implementation and Activity Success:** Monitor the completion rate and impact of planned campaign activities, workshops, and advocacy efforts.
- **Stakeholder Feedback and Satisfaction:** Collect and assess feedback from child care workers, families, and community members regarding the campaigns' relevance, effectiveness, and impact.

Key Action Strategy #2: Organize a mentorship program aimed at supporting new child care business owners in establishing their businesses.

Desired "ends" of the strategy to address root causes:

- **Empowerment of new Child care business owners:** The mentorship program aims to empower new Child care business owners by providing them with guidance, resources, and support to establish their businesses successfully. By addressing the root cause of lack of knowledge and experience, the program seeks to enable these child care business owners to navigate the complexities of starting a child care business with confidence and competence.
- **Increase in Business Sustainability** By offering mentorship and guidance, the program aims to reduce the likelihood of business failures, ensuring that new child care business owners have the necessary tools and knowledge to build sustainable and successful child care businesses.

Metrics to quantify achievement of the result:

- **Business Survival Rate:** Measure the percentage of new child care businesses that remain operational after a certain period (one year) following participation in the mentorship program. A higher survival rate indicates the effectiveness of the program in supporting child care business owners to establish sustainable businesses.
- **Client Satisfaction:** Conduct surveys or interviews with program participants to assess their satisfaction levels with the mentorship received. Positive feedback indicates that the program is effectively meeting the needs of new Child care business owners and contributing to their success.

Metrics to measure how well the coalition is doing:

- **Participation Rate:** Track the number of new Child care business owners engaging with the mentorship program. A higher participation rate indicates greater awareness and interest in the program within the child care provider community, suggesting effective outreach and promotion efforts by the coalition.
- **Retention of Mentors:** Monitor the retention rate of mentors involved in the program over time. A high retention rate indicates that mentors find the program valuable and fulfilling, contributing to the sustainability of the mentorship initiative within the coalition.

Key Action Strategy #3: Develop child care to meet the needs of all families.

Desired "Ends" of the Strategy:

- **Accessible and Affordable child care:** Ensure that child care services are readily available and affordable for working families, addressing the root cause of child care shortages due to lack of accessibility and high costs.
- **Flexible Hours and Locations:** Offer child care options with flexible hours and locations to accommodate the diverse needs of working families, including those with non-traditional work schedules.

Metrics to Quantify Achievement:

- **Child care Enrollment Rates:** Measure the percentage of children from working families enrolled in child care programs compared to the total number of children in the community.

Metrics to Measure Coalition Performance:

- **Number of New Child Care Programs:** Measure the establishment of new child care programs tailored to meet the needs of working families as a result of coalition initiatives.
- **Partnerships with Employers:** Track the number of partnerships established between Child care business owners and employers to develop child care options that align with employees' needs.
- **Policy Advocacy Impact:** Assess the coalition's effectiveness in advocating for policies that support the development of child care infrastructure and affordability at local, state, and federal levels.

Key Action Strategy #4: Expand access to children who need individualized care (*Special Needs, Medical Needs, Behavioral, Trauma*)

Desired "Ends" of the Strategy

- **Inclusivity and Equality of Opportunity:** Ensuring that children with diverse needs have the same access to quality child care as other children, promoting equality and reducing discrimination or exclusion based on disabilities.
- **Improved Developmental Outcomes:** Enhancing cognitive, emotional, and social development of children with special needs through tailored care and education that meet their specific requirements.
- **Support for Families:** Assisting families of children with special needs by providing reliable and specialized child care, thereby reducing family stress and improving the overall family well-being.
- **Awareness and Sensitivity:** Raising awareness about the needs and potential of children with special needs, thereby fostering a more understanding and accommodating society.
- **Professional Development:** To equip child care business owners with skills necessary to confidently care for children with diverse needs

Metrics to Quantify Achievement of the Result

- **Access and Enrollment Rates:** The number of child care facilities that offer services for children with special needs compared to total child care facilities, and the enrollment rate of children with special needs in these facilities.
- **Family Satisfaction Surveys:** Regular surveys of families to assess their satisfaction with the child care services provided for their children with special needs. These can include aspects of care quality, impact on child development, and overall family stress reduction.
- **Training and Development:** The number of child care professionals who have undergone specialized training to care for children with special needs, and the frequency and depth of such training.

Metrics to Measure Coalition Performance

- **Partnership and Collaboration:** The extent of collaboration between Child care business owners, special education professionals, healthcare child care business owners, and community organizations. This can be quantified by the number of partnerships and joint initiatives
- **Public Awareness Campaigns:** The reach and impact of campaigns designed to increase public awareness about the importance of accessible child care for children with special needs. Metrics might include audience reach, engagement rates, and changes in public attitudes.

Key Action Strategy #5: Implement targeted activities to address the shortage of child care in our community.

Desired "Ends" of the Strategy:

- **Increased Accessibility:** Ensure that every family in the community has access to affordable, quality child care options.
- **Expanded Capacity:** Increase the number of Child care business owners and facilities to meet the growing demand in the community.
- **Support for child care business owners:** Provide support and resources for Child care business owners to improve their skills, sustainability, and overall quality of service.
- **MIECC:** Increase in the number of child care business owners in the data system

Metrics to Quantify Achievement

- **Percentage Increase in child care Enrollment:** Measure the growth in the number of children enrolled in child care programs compared to the previous year.
- **Number of New child care Facilities:** Monitor the establishment of new child care facilities in the community, indicating an expansion in capacity.
- **Quality Ratings:** Utilize quality rating systems to assess and monitor the quality of child care facilities, aiming for an increase in the number of high-quality child care business owners.

Metrics to Measure Coalition Performance:

- **Community Engagement:** Measure the level of community engagement in child care initiatives through attendance at events, participation in surveys, and feedback provided.
- **Policy Advocacy Impact:** Track the coalition's effectiveness in advocating for policy changes related to child care at local, state, and federal levels, measuring the number of policies influenced or enacted.
- **Resource Allocation Efficiency:** Evaluate how efficiently resources are allocated within the coalition, including funding, time, and manpower, to achieve set objectives.

Key Action Strategy #6: Provide child care resources to local community members and partners.

Desired "Ends" of the Strategy:

- **Support for Parents:** Providing access to child care resources demonstrates a commitment to supporting working parents
- **Productivity and Morale:** Access to convenient care leads to better focus on work, leading to increased productivity and higher morale in the workplace..
- **Community Impact:** Businesses contributing to child care resources positively impact the community by addressing a critical need and fostering economic stability.
- **Increase Understanding:** Community Members will have the resource they need to assist families finding the closest convenient child care for their needs

Metrics to Quantify Achievement:

- **Employee Satisfaction Surveys:** Conduct pre/post surveys to gauge employee satisfaction with the availability and quality of child care resources provided by the company.
- **Number of Participating Businesses:** Measure the number of businesses/organizations that have implemented or expanded child care resource sharing programs as a result of coalition initiatives.

Metrics to Measure Coalition Performance:

- **Number of Participating Organizations:** Measure the number of business/organizations that have implemented or expanded child care resource sharing programs as a result of coalition initiatives.
- **Engagement:** Assess the level of engagement and commitment from businesses through participation in coalition meetings, events, and resource-sharing efforts.

FINAL THOUGHTS AND CONCLUSION

The Regional Child Care Plan provides an in-depth analysis of the child care landscape in Ottawa and Allegan Counties, Michigan. Here is a summary of its key findings and strategies:

Key Findings:

Problem #1: Child care is not affordable and financial assistance is not accessible for most families.

Problem #2: There are only enough licensed child care slots for about half of children 0-5 in Ottawa and Allegan Counties.

Problem #3: There is a lack of available care that meets families' unique needs and preferences.

Problem #4: Staffing is the primary barrier to serving more children and families, particularly for center- and school-based programs.

Problem #5: Time- and resource-intensive regulations and lack of capital can be barriers to start-up, expansion, and sustainability of child care businesses.

Problem #6: There is a mismatch between what supports families want from employers and supports currently offered.

Problem #7: Employers want to support employee child care needs but lack sufficient information and resources.

Strategies:

1. **Awareness Campaign:** Launch campaigns to highlight the significance of child care workers as small business owners and their impact on children's development and the community.
2. **Mentorship Program:** Establish a mentorship program to support new child care business owners in setting up their businesses.
3. **Develop Child Care for All Families:** Develop child care services to meet the diverse needs of all families, including those working non-traditional hours.
4. **Expand Access for Diverse Needs:** Create programs to expand access to children with special needs, medical needs, and ensure behavioral and trauma-informed care.
5. **Address Child Care Shortage:** Implement targeted activities to address the shortage of child care in the community, including expanding the number of child care business owners and facilities.
6. **Provide Resources:** Offer child care resources to local community members and partners, enhancing employer engagement and support.

This plan is a comprehensive effort to improve the child care landscape in Ottawa and Allegan Counties by addressing workforce, sustainability, diversity, and affordability issues, with a strong focus on community and employer engagement.

What's Next?

Given additional funding opportunities, as we move forward with implementation, our coalition will convene quarterly meetings to ensure sustained progress and collaboration. These gatherings will provide a platform for members to share updates, assess ongoing strategies, and plan future initiatives. We will convene workgroups to focus specifically on the workforce gap, market failure, and limited child care supply. By maintaining a regular meeting schedule and convening workgroups with targeted areas of focus, we can address emerging challenges promptly, celebrate successes, and realign our efforts with the community's evolving needs.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We gratefully acknowledge the contributions of all who have supported the development of the Regional Child Care Plan.

- Guidance and Financial Support: Early Childhood Investment Corporation (ECIC) & Policy Equity Group.
- Local Communities: For their insights and ongoing support in understanding the needs of families.
- Child care business owners: For their dedication to delivering quality care and their invaluable feedback on operational challenges.
- Local Organizations: For their advocacy and assistance in implementing community programs.
- Data Support: Thank you Datawise for your specialized contributions and expertise building our data dashboard.
- Website Support: Thank you Divergent Daydreamers for your design and development of our regional website.
- Coalition: For their insight, contributions, time and dedication to finding child care solutions in our communities.
- Collaborative Efforts: Thank you Allegan AESA and Lakeshore Advantage for their crucial roles in shaping the plan.

Your dedication and hard work have not gone unnoticed, and we are deeply grateful for your contributions. We look forward to the positive changes that this plan will bring to our communities and the lasting impact it will have on the lives of children and families in our region.

APPENDIX FILES

Appendix A: Coalition Roster

Regional Child Care Coalition		
Child Care	Licensed Child care business owners Western Region Great Start to Quality	Deanna Johnson Crystal Park April Goodwin
Economic Development	Lakeshore Advantage The Source West Michigan Hispanic Chamber of Commerce West Michigan Works Talent First	Angela Huesman/Mandy Cooper Amber Smith/Abigail Medina Maria Marquez Karrie Brown Lisa Hungerford
Education and Innovation	Allegan Area Educational Services Agency Great Start Collaborative GSC Family Liaison Head Start Help Me Grow Ottawa Help Me Grow Allegan Ottawa Area Intermediate School District Outdoor Discovery Center Ready for School	Lindsay Sichta Heather Eizenga Keny Ozuna Sarah See Lisa Evans Tami Mannes Maureen Schmidt Dave Tebo Tami Schippers David Nitray Angela DeLost
Health & Human Services	Community Mental Health Holland Pediatrics Michigan Department of Health and Human Services	Lynne Doyle Kate Davis Sandra Lake Derel Glashower
Local Business	Gentex HYK Consulting Perrigo	Seth Bushouse Har Ye Kan Kolene Miller
Local Government	Ottawa County Director of Strategic Impact County of Allegan	Paul Sachs Lyn Holoway Dan Wedge
Caregivers	Representing both counties and ages 0-12	Azaria Luce Thompson Whitney Ehresman Tara Beckman Diana Coulter Ashleigh Nesmith Cara Mazure

Appendix B: Focus Group Discussion Template

Ottawa Area ISD and Allegan Area ESA are collaborating on child care needs in our community. This work included collecting information from businesses, child care business owners and you, our parents & caregivers! Asking the following questions ensures that your feedback is directly considered in the Action Planning process, prioritizing the needs and well-being of your children and family.

For your participation today, you will receive \$30 by mail. Please complete the W9 form to ensure payment. You can email these to Maureen Schmidt, OAISD at mschmidt@oaisd.org

Please review the **DRAFT Regional strategies** we have identified through local surveys, conversations with stakeholders and regional child care coalition meetings with Ottawa and Allegan counties. These were emailed to you prior to meeting today and will help in our discussion around the following questions:

- 1 .Which of these regional strategies do you think would most benefit your family and why?
2. Are there specific needs or goals for your family that you feel are not addressed in our plan?
3. Do you see any strategies that might not be as relevant or beneficial for your family or child? Why?
4. What are the biggest challenges your family faces that our regional child care coalition could help address?
5. Looking ahead, what changes or developments in regional child care would make the biggest difference for your family in the next 5 years?
6. What haven't we asked that is important for us to know and understand?
7. How would you prefer to receive information and updates about child care in our region?
8. Are you interested in joining our Regional Child Care Coalition meetings? If yes...

Your name:

Email address:

Appendix C: Focus Group with Child Care Business Owners

Open House 6-8pm

Ottawa Area ISD and Outdoor Discovery Center are collaborating on child care needs in our community. We wanted to take a moment to express our deepest gratitude for the incredible dedication and care you bring to your role as a child care provider. Please know that your work is truly invaluable, and you are recognized as a cornerstone of early childhood education. Your passion and professionalism do not go unnoticed. Thank you for everything you do each day to make a difference.

Your input is valued and we respect their expertise and experience!

Discussion Questions:

1. What were the most challenging aspects of setting up your child care business, and how can we assist new child care business owners facing similar challenges?
2. Are there specific areas of professional development or training you feel are lacking but crucial for your success as a child care provider?
3. What financial management challenges have you encountered, and what types of resources or support would help address these?
4. What challenges have you faced in marketing your child care business and filling your enrollment? How can we assist in improving your visibility and engagement with the community?
5. Can you share your experiences with funding or subsidy programs? Are there gaps in financial support that need to be addressed for Child care business owners?
6. How valuable have networking opportunities with other Child care business owners been for you? What can be done to enhance these connections?
7. Would a mentorship program for new Child care business owners be something you would be interested in?
8. Would a free data system to receive child care referrals, show how many openings you have, house family information and notes be beneficial for your business?
9. Have you faced difficulties in accessing high-quality resources and materials for your child care program? What resources would you like more access to?
10. Do you feel equipped to care for children with special needs? What additional support or training would be beneficial in this area?
11. How familiar are you with the Ages and Stages developmental Questionnaire?
12. Did you feel you had sufficient information and resources about licensing, regulations, and compliance when you started? If not, what would you like more information on?



Childcare Can Be **Expensive!**

If you are struggling to pay for childcare,
there might be extra money available for
you from the state of Michigan.

Help with covering childcare costs might be available if
you or someone in your household is currently:

- » Working on a GED, ABE or ESL
- » Enrolled in post-secondary education
- » Training for employment
- » Working or has proof of a job offer
- » Self-employed



Find out if you qualify by using this 2 minute online
eligibility calculator from Great Start to Quality:
greatstarttoquality.org/calculator

*Eligibility
Calculator*



Then visit Michigan.gov/mibridges to apply.

Application



**Still unsure or
have questions?**

If you live in Ottawa County call or text
Help Me Grow - Ottawa
1-844-233-2244 • hmgOttawa.org

If you live in Allegan County call or text
Help Me Grow - Allegan
269-512-7775 • hmgAllegan.org

¡El Cuidado de Niños Puede Ser Costoso!

Si tiene dificultades para pagar el cuidado de los niños, es posible que haya dinero adicional disponible para usted en el estado de Michigan.

Es posible que haya ayuda disponible para cubrir los costos del cuidado infantil si usted o alguien en su hogar se encuentra actualmente:

- » Trabajando en un GED, ABE o ESL
- » Inscrito en educación postsecundaria
- » Formación para el empleo
- » Trabajando o tiene oferta de trabajo
- » Trabajadores por cuenta propia



Descubra si califica utilizando esta calculadora de elegibilidad en línea de 2 minutos de **Great Start to Quality**: greatstarttoquality.org/calculator

Calculadora de elegibilidad



Luego visite Michigan.gov/mibridges para presentar la solicitud.

Solicitud



¿Todavía no esta seguro o tiene preguntas?

Si vive en el condado de Ottawa, llame o envíe un mensaje de texto.

Help Me Grow - Ottawa
1-844-233-2244 • hmgOttawa.org

Si vive en el condado de Allegan, llame o envíe un mensaje de texto.

Help Me Grow - Allegan
269-512-7775 • hmgAllegan.org



Regional Childcare Plan: **Working Together for Children**



A Community Project

Government agencies, nonprofits, employers, community groups, childcare providers, and families are working together to create and put into action, plans that address our region's childcare needs and make quality services more accessible.

Regional Childcare Plan Focus Areas:

Increase Availability: Insufficient number of childcare facilities and providers to meet the demand results in waiting lists and reduced accessibility for families.

Affordability: High costs of childcare services make it financially burdensome for many families, especially those with lower incomes.

Workforce Challenges: Difficulty in attracting and retaining qualified childcare professionals due to low wages and demanding work conditions.

Accessibility and Inclusion: Disparities in access to quality childcare services based on factors such as income, geography, race and special needs.

High Quality: Increase awareness of quality and standards of childcare services, including required staff qualifications, safety and educational components.

Increase Sustainable Partnerships: Foster long-term partnerships with local organizations, businesses and educational institutions to support and sustain child care services in the region.

Public Awareness and Perception: Educate public on the importance of quality child care and early education as well as upgrade public perceptions and attitudes towards child care services and providers.

What is the Regional Childcare Plan?

The Ottawa Area Intermediate School District secured a grant to enhance childcare accessibility for families in Allegan and Ottawa County. This grant will allow our region to identify gaps in current childcare services, advocate for policy changes, and promote initiatives that improve the overall accessibility, quality and affordability of childcare.



Plan Regional de Atención Infantil:

Trabajando Juntos para los Niños



Un Proyecto Comunitario

Agencias gubernamentales, organizaciones sin fines de lucro, empleadores, grupos comunitarios, proveedores de cuidado infantil y familias están trabajando juntos para crear y poner en práctica planes que aborden las necesidades de cuidado infantil de nuestra región y hagan que los servicios de calidad sean más accesibles.

Áreas de enfoque del Plan Regional de Cuidado Infantil:

Aumentar la Disponibilidad: Un número insuficiente de instalaciones y proveedores de cuidado infantil para satisfacer la demanda genera listas de espera y una accesibilidad reducida para las familias.

Asequibilidad: Los altos costos de los servicios de cuidado infantil los hacen económicamente onerosos para muchas familias, especialmente aquellas con ingresos más bajos.

Desafíos de la Fuerza Laboral: Dificultad para atraer y retener profesionales calificados en el cuidado infantil debido a los bajos salarios y las exigentes condiciones laborales.

Accesibilidad e Inclusión: disparidades en el acceso a servicios de cuidado infantil de calidad según factores como ingresos, geografía, raza y necesidades especiales.

Alta Calidad: Aumentar la conciencia sobre la calidad y los estándares de los servicios de cuidado infantil, incluidas las calificaciones requeridas del personal, la seguridad y los componentes educativos.

Incrementar las Alianzas Sostenibles: Fomentar alianzas a largo plazo con organizaciones, empresas e instituciones educativas locales para apoyar y sostener los servicios de cuidado infantil en la región.

Conciencia y Percepción Pública: Educar al público sobre la importancia del cuidado infantil y la educación temprana de calidad, así como mejorar las percepciones y actitudes del público hacia los servicios y proveedores de cuidado infantil.

¿Qué es el Plan Regional de Atención Infantil?

El Distrito Escolar Intermedio del Área de Ottawa obtuvo una subvención para mejorar la accesibilidad del cuidado infantil para las familias de Allegan y el condado de Ottawa. Esta subvención permitirá a nuestra región identificar brechas en los servicios de cuidado infantil actuales, abogar por cambios de políticas y promover iniciativas que mejoren la accesibilidad, la calidad y la asequibilidad generales del cuidado infantil.



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