

# Cook County Parents, Non-Standard Work and Child Care 2022 Update



sylvia cotton  
center for research  
& policy innovation

powered by illinois **action** for children

**Non-standard work schedules** have become almost standard in the Illinois economy, particularly for low-wage workers.<sup>1</sup> Low-income families needing child care for their young ones are challenged by both the cost of care and lack of programs available during their non-standard work hours. The Illinois Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) attempts to address these challenges by 1) subsidizing child care costs for families earning up to 200 percent of the federal poverty level and 2) allowing parents the flexibility to choose child care that meets their needs—including informal care providers. This is an important policy for families needing care during hours when most formal child care programs are closed.

This brief discusses the prevalence of non-standard work schedules among Cook County families using CCAP and the types of child care they use. It addresses the following questions:

1. How common is it for parents with child care assistance to work in the evening, early morning or on the weekends, hours when licensed child care is hard to find?
2. What types of child care do parents with non-standard hours use and how does this compare with parents working standard hours?

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## Research Approach

To answer these questions Illinois Action for Children research staff examined a representative sample of 490 Cook County families in CCAP in May 2018, our study period.<sup>2</sup> That month more than 41,000 Cook County families and 72,000 children, infant through age 13, participated in CCAP.

We examined data from parents' initial or renewal applications to the CCAP program. To receive child care assistance while they work, parents must report their typical weekly work schedules, their child care providers, and the hours when their children are in care. We transferred this information from scanned documents to electronic form for analysis.

### What is CCAP?

The Illinois Department of Human Services administers the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) to assist parents with low incomes in paying for child care while they are at work or in training or school. Employed parents make up over 95 percent of those served.

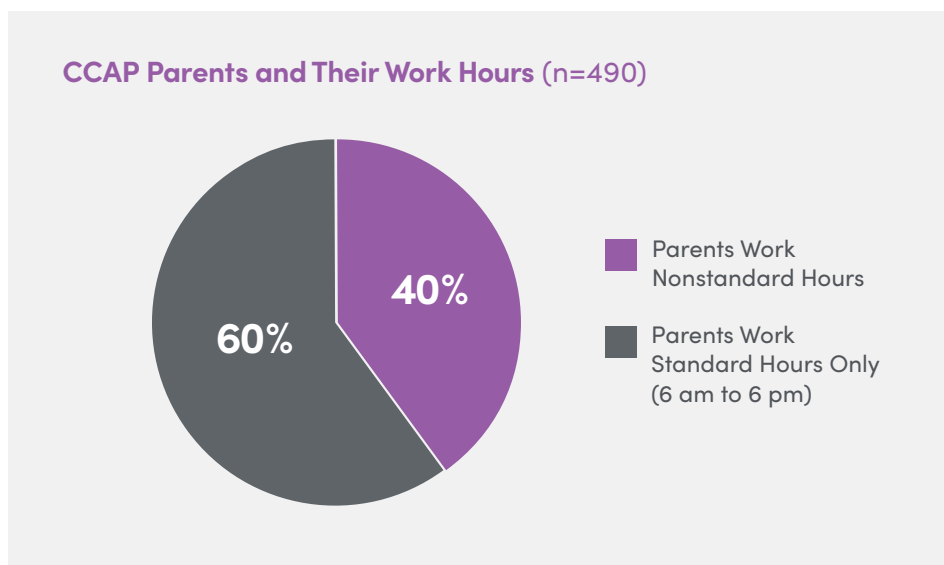
### Non-Standard Work Schedules

There is no universal definition of a non-standard work schedule. We define it as a schedule that includes any hour of work on a weekend, or on a weekday before 6 am (when 98 percent of licensed child care centers in Cook County are closed) or after 6 pm (when 87 percent of licensed child care centers are closed).

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## How Many Employed CCAP Parents Have Non-Standard Work Schedules?

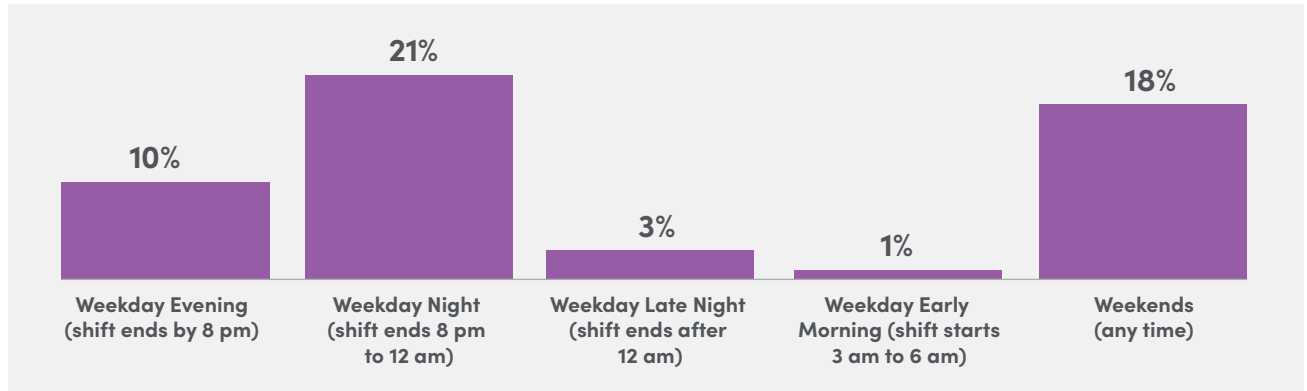
Forty percent of CCAP parents work some non-standard hours. This includes parents who work just a few per week as well as those who work predominantly non-standard hours. The large majority of parents who work non-standard hours also work some standard hours.



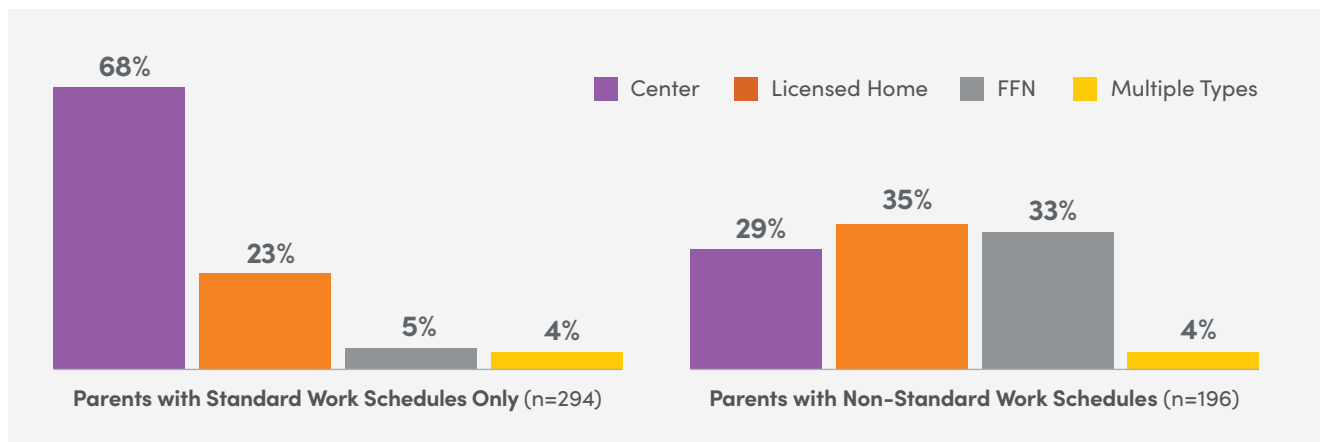
<sup>2</sup> Illinois Action for Children administers the Illinois Child Care Assistance Program in Cook County.

## What Types of Non-Standard Hours Do CCAP Parents Work?

Some CCAP parents –10 percent –work shifts that extend into the evening and end by 8 pm. It is more common, however, for CCAP parents to work beyond 8 pm to as late as midnight. This is the case for 21 percent of parents. A small percentage of parents work after midnight (3 percent) or begin their shift before 6 am (1 percent). Finally, weekend hours are common and worked by almost one fifth of parents. About two thirds of the parents who work weekends also work weekday evenings or nights.



## What Type of Child Care is Used by Parents with Standard or Non-Standard Work Hours?



Parents who work standard schedules most commonly use center-based child care. Over two-thirds (68 percent) use center care compared to just 28 percent who use home-based care, mainly licensed home care.

Conversely, parents who work non-standard hours most commonly use home-based child care. Over two-thirds (68 percent) use home-based care and just 29 percent use center care. The type of home-based child care used by families with non-standard schedules is split nearly equally between licensed home care and informal family, friend and neighbor (FFN) care.

Although 29 percent of parents with non-standard work hours use center care, further analysis finds that the majority (68 percent) of these parents use the center care only during their standard work times and do not use CCAP-paid child care during their non-standard work times.<sup>3</sup>

Only five percent of families that work strictly standard hours use FFN care, suggesting that working non-standard hours is a primary driver of use of FFN care among CCAP parents.

<sup>3</sup> For comparison, among parents with non-standard work hours that use home-based care, seven percent use this care only during standard hours.

## Types of Child Care

### Child Care Centers

Child care centers are, with some exceptions, regulated and licensed to provide care for dozens or even hundreds of children. Serving many families, they must employ a staff and establish more formal operating rules, including hours of operation. Only two percent of Cook County's 1,100 centers open before 6 am. Only 12 percent are open after 6 pm and only 3 percent on the weekend.

### Family, Friend and Neighbor (FFN)

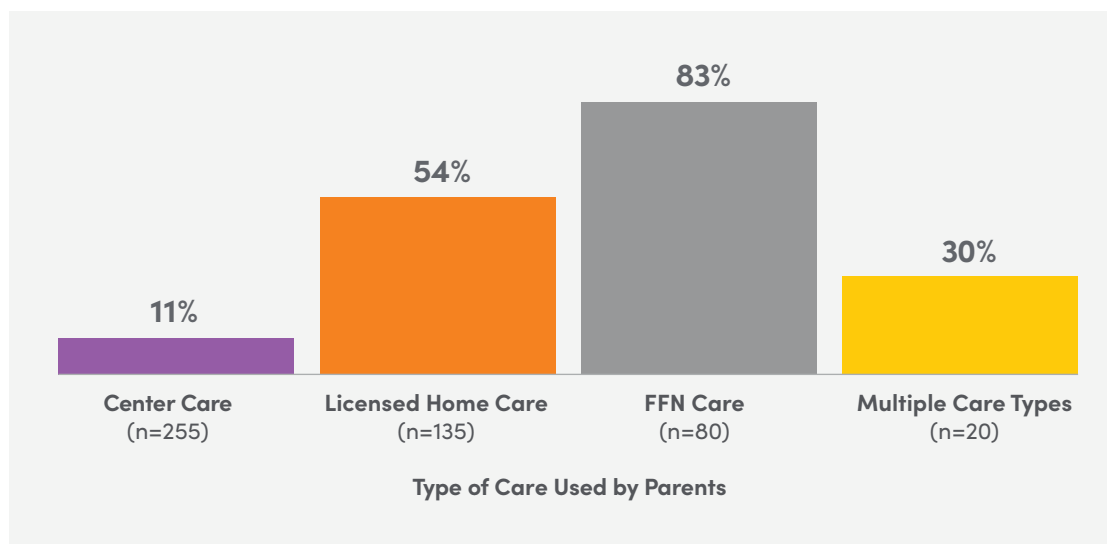
Family, friend and neighbor (FFN) home providers operate in their own home or the child's home. They are not licensed and are limited to caring for three children. FFN providers are thought to be more flexible about hours of care and payments than licensed programs. In 2018, 12,500 FFN providers operated in CCAP in Cook County; this number dropped to 8,200 by 2021.

### Licensed Child Care Home Providers

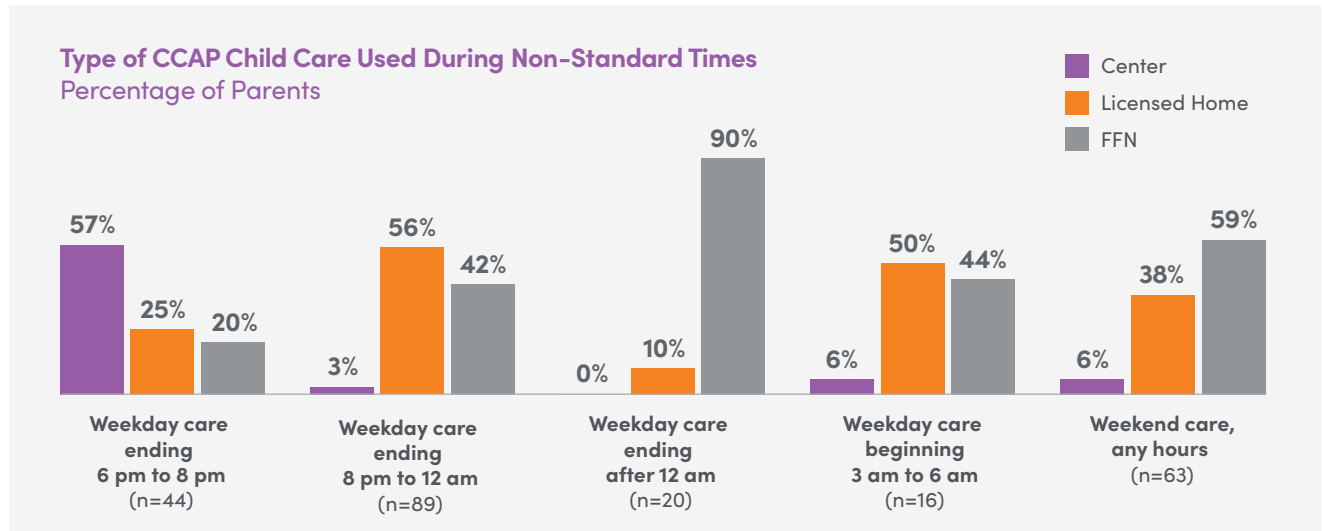
Licensed child care home providers are sometimes thought to operate on a spectrum between formal centers and more flexible FFN providers. They can care for as many as 12 to 16 children in their home but must meet formal licensing standards and regulations. Their hours may reflect some of the flexibility of FFN homes. About 77 percent of the 2,700 licensed home providers in Cook County are licensed to stay open after 6 pm, seven percent before 6 am, and 23 percent on the weekend. We do not know how many actually operate for all of their licensed hours.

## Percentage of Parents That Use Care During Non-Standard Hours, by Their Type of Care

We also analyzed families' care schedules based on the type of child care they use. Among families using FFN care, a large portion—83 percent—use this care during some non-standard hours. For families using licensed home care, over half—54 percent—do so during non-standard hours. Only 11 percent of families using centers use this care during non-standard care hours. This is not surprising given that center hours are least accommodating for families needing non-standard-hour care.



## Are There Differences in the Types of Child Care Used Based on the Times of the Non-Standard Care?



Some CCAP parents (9 percent) have work schedules or commutes that extend into weekday evenings, and they need care for an hour or two beyond 6 pm. These parents in our sample all continue their daytime child care into the evening, and over half (57 percent) use center care. In fact, early evenings is the only non-standard time in which families use center care in significant numbers.

A larger group of parents uses care that extends past 8 pm into the later evening hours and for some as late as midnight. These parents depend on home-based care and use licensed care in somewhat higher proportions than FFN care.

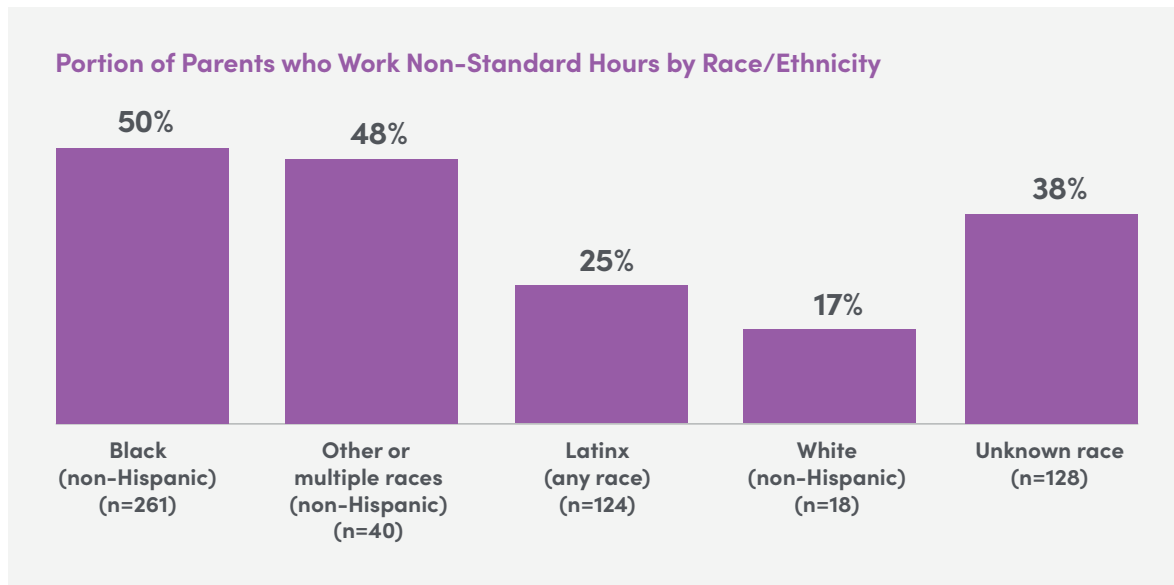
However, parents who need care beyond midnight, and often throughout the entire night, rely predominantly on FFN care. FFN care is also particularly important to families with weekend care – over half (59 percent) use FFN care on Saturdays or Sundays.

## Are Families that Work Non-Standard Schedules More Likely to Have Multiple Care Types?

While some families use a “patchwork” of child care to meet their families’ needs, it is uncommon for parents to do so through CCAP. Only 4 percent of each group – parents working standard schedules and parents working non-standard schedules – use multiple care types through the CCAP program. And only six percent use multiple *providers*, even within the same care type. Many families that use a second or third child care arrangement do so outside of the CCAP program. We know, for example, that a quarter of parents who work non-standard hours use CCAP only to pay for their standard hour care. This percentage is even higher among the parents using center care; as discussed earlier, over two thirds of these parents do not use CCAP during their non-standard hours.

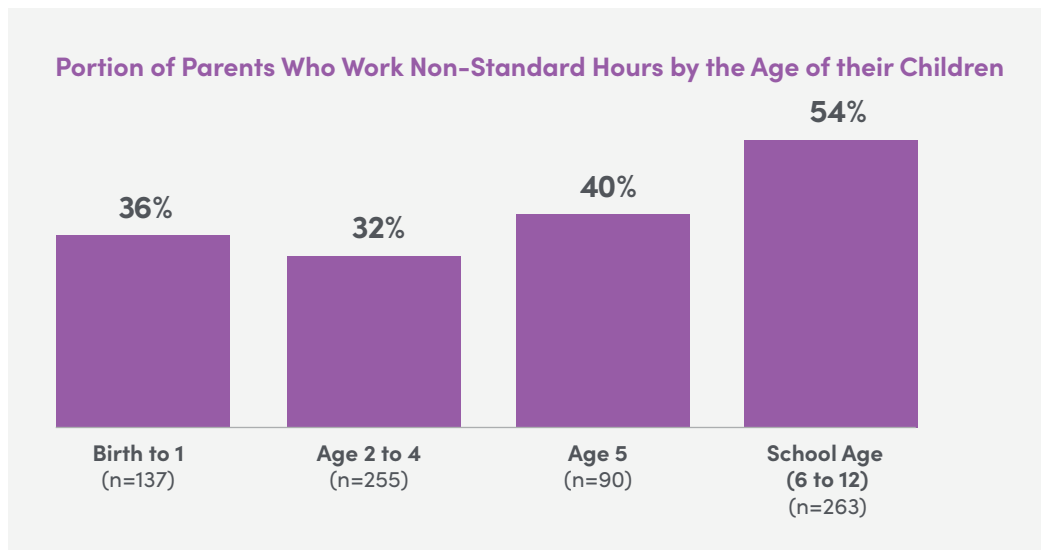
## Does the Portion of Parents Working Non-Standard Hours Vary among CCAP Families based on their Race or Ethnicity?

Black families in CCAP are more likely to work non-standard hours and are, therefore, more likely to depend on home-based child care than Latinx and white families. One half of black families had non-standard work schedules compared to just a quarter of Latinx families and 17 percent of white families. The rate of working non-standard hours was also high (at 48 percent) among families with children of multiple races or an “other” race.<sup>4</sup>



## Does the Portion of Parents Working Non-Standard Hours Vary among CCAP Families based on Children's Ages?

Parents of school-age children are the most likely to work non-standard hours, with over half (54 percent) doing so. A smaller portion, approximately a third, of parents with children birth through four work non-standard hours.



<sup>4</sup> Data reflect the race or ethnicity of the parent's children. A parent may fall in more than one race category if they have children of different races/ethnicities.

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## Do Parents' Work Schedules Have Implications for State Child Care Policy?

Non-standard hours of work pose multiple challenges for families. Unlike standard work schedules, non-standard schedules may not only conflict with valuable aspects of family life such as dining together, doing homework, reading and bedtime routines, but also fall outside of the hours when licensed child care programs operate. Since 40 percent of employed CCAP parents work non-standard hours, it is important for Illinois to invest in child care that supports these parents.

First, investment in licensed home care is critical. Licensed family child care programs have been steadily declining in Illinois and nationwide. Yet a growing portion of CCAP parents with non-standard schedules depends on this care.<sup>5</sup> Illinois can support the licensed home provider workforce with higher compensation. It can also grow the workforce with more funding to assist providers with licensing and for startup grants. Additionally, shift premiums could be paid for care provided during non-standard hours. The extra funding could help home providers hire additional staff to prevent burnout from long work hours.

Second, it is important that state child care policies and CCAP rules do not inflict unintended consequences upon parents who work non-standard schedules. Regulations imposed on FFN providers, even with good intentions, risk discouraging many relatives, friends or neighbors from providing child care through the CCAP program. Current regulations for certain FFN providers include provider registration, criminal background checks and, most recently, health and safety training requirements – the latter of which led to a decline of 10,000 children in CCAP FFN care, most of whom left the CCAP program.<sup>6</sup>

Parents who use FFN care without support from CCAP because of program barriers are, in a way, paying a tax for working non-standard hours. Meanwhile their providers, who offer an important service to our social and the economic well-being, do so with little support or investment from the state. At a time when a reduced child care workforce is a major policy concern, we could do more to support and develop the workforce we have.

The state can relieve the burden on parents by reducing parent barriers to CCAP use and by incentivizing their providers' participation in CCAP through fair compensation that recognizes the important service they provide. In place of cascading provider requirements, the state can offer an array of supports for FFN providers including resources, peer groups and learning opportunities that are responsive to their daily challenges, and that include incentives to participate.

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<sup>5</sup> In 2013 in a similar study, we found only 18 percent of CCAP parents with non-standard work schedules used licensed home care. In 2018 the percentage was 35 percent.

<sup>6</sup> "Unintended and Inequitable Impacts of a 2017 Policy Change for License-Exempt Home Child Care," forthcoming 2022.





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