

## Cook County Parents, Nonstandard Work and Child Care

Nonstandard 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 the dearth 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 185% 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, overnight or on the weekends – hours when licensed child care is hard to find?**
2. **If parents work nonstandard hours, are these a significant portion of their weekly hours?**
3. **What types of child care do parents with nonstandard hours use and how does this compare with parents working standard hours?**

### Research Approach

To answer these questions Illinois Action for Children research staff examined a representative sample of 485 Cook County families in CCAP in May 2013, our study period.<sup>2</sup> That month more than 48,000 Cook County families and 81,300 children participated in CCAP.

#### 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 about 90 percent of those served.

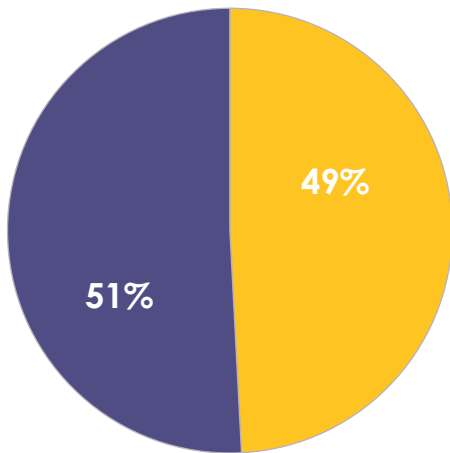
We examined data from parents' initial or renewal applications to the CCAP program. To receive child care assistance while they work, parents must report their typical weekly work schedules, their child care providers, and the hours when their children are in care. We transferred this information from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

## Nonstandard Work Schedules

**There is no universal definition of a *nonstandard 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 99 percent of licensed child care centers in Cook County are closed) or after 6 pm (when 79 percent of licensed child care centers are closed).**

### 1. How Many Employed CCAP Parents Have Nonstandard Work Schedules?

Almost half of employed CCAP parents (49 percent) regularly worked at least one nonstandard hour. This is consistent with our research on all working parents across Illinois.<sup>3</sup>



#### Shares of Employed CCAP Parents Who Work Nonstandard Hours and Standard Hours Only

- Parents with Nonstandard Work Hours
- Parents with Standard Work Hours Only

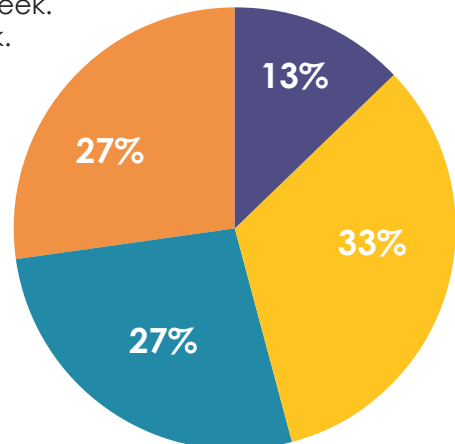
### 2. How Many Nonstandard Hours Do CCAP Parents Work?

Most parents who worked nonstandard schedules reported that they worked a substantial number of nonstandard hours.

- Forty-two percent reported that the majority of their work hours were nonstandard.
- The majority reported working at least 16 nonstandard hours per week.
- On average these parents worked 19 nonstandard hours per week.

#### Number of Weekly Nonstandard Hours that CCAP Parents Work (among parents working nonstandard hours)

- Five hours or less
- 6 to 15 hours
- 16 to 25 hours
- 25 hours or more



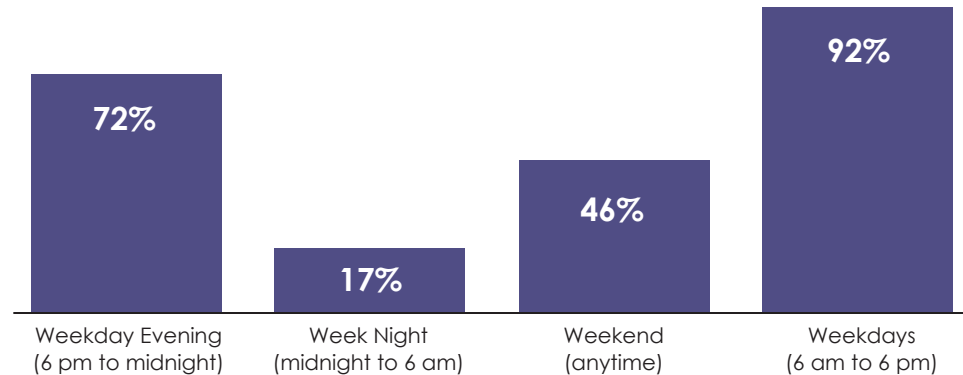
Many parents worked in more than one shift.

- Almost three out of four worked weekday evenings (some hours between 6 pm and midnight).
- One in six worked week nights (some hours between midnight and 6 am).
- Forty-four percent worked on a weekend (6 am Saturday to 6 am Monday).
- Almost all worked at least one hour during standard weekday hours as well.

### CCAP Parents with Nonstandard Work Hours

Many work in more than 1 shift, including the day shift.

(Percentages show parents with any work hours in the shift.)



## 3. What Types of Child Care Do Parents with Nonstandard Hours Use?

### Types of Child Care

**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 1 percent of Cook County's 1,200 centers open before 6 am. Only 21 percent are open after 6 pm and only 7 percent remain open after 7 pm.

**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. Annually, more than 25,000 FFN providers operate in CCAP in Cook County.

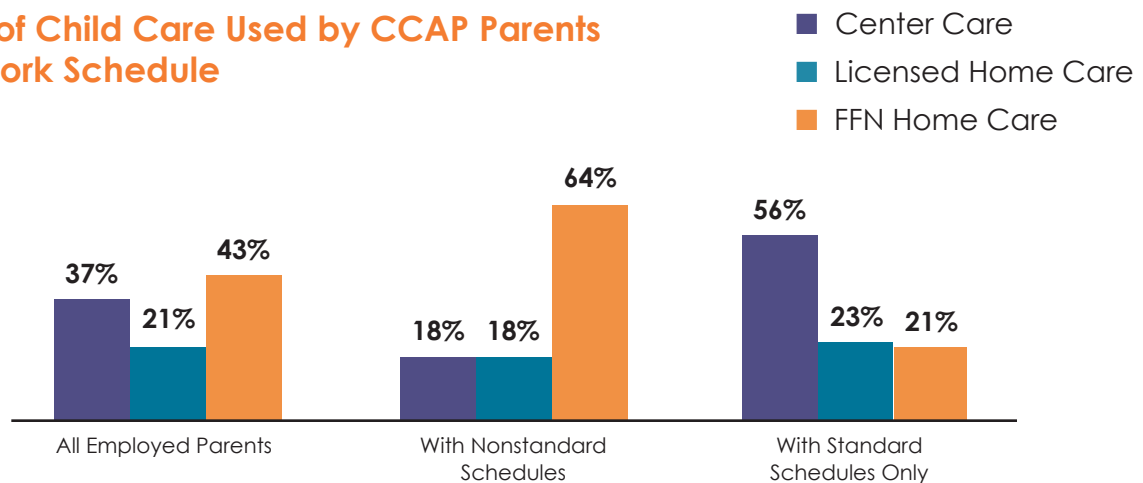
**Licensed child care home providers** are sometimes thought to operate on a spectrum between formal centers and more flexible FFN providers. They can care for as many as 12 to 16 children in their home but must meet formal licensing standards and regulations. Their hours may reflect some of the flexibility of FFN homes. About 63 percent of the 3,500 licensed home providers in Cook County are licensed to stay open after 10 pm. We do not know how many actually operate for all of their licensed hours.

In their use of child care, CCAP parents with nonstandard work schedules differed sharply from parents who work only traditional hours. Overall about the same proportions of all employed CCAP parents used licensed child care centers and FFN child care homes: 37 percent and 43 percent respectively.

Once we separate CCAP parents by their work schedules, however, opposing patterns emerge.

- The parents with nonstandard schedules were three times more likely to use FFN care than centers (64 percent to 18 percent).
- By contrast, parents with only traditional work schedules were more than twice as likely to use center care as FFN care (56 percent to 21 percent).
- Only in their use of licensed home child care were CCAP parents with nonstandard work schedules at all similar to those with standard work schedules (with rates of 18 percent compared to 23 percent).

### Types of Child Care Used by CCAP Parents – by Work Schedule



The finding about work schedules and use of center child care is not surprising. Child care centers have more limited operating hours than FFN providers. (See box, “Types of Child Care.”) And with small exceptions CCAP will not pay for child care beyond the hours of work or school and time for the parent’s commute. Working together, centers’ operating schedules and CCAP rules make it difficult for parents with nonstandard work schedules to use CCAP to access center care for their children.

#### The Exceptions

The relationship between the type of work schedule parents have and the type of child care they use is very strong, but it has exceptions that can tell us much about the complex interaction between work and choice of child care.<sup>4</sup> For example, the fact that 21 percent of CCAP parents with *standard* work schedules also use FFN care reflects the reality that parents choose FFN providers for reasons in addition to nonstandard work hours. FFN providers often:

- Accommodate frequent changes in parents’ work schedules.
- Are familiar to and trusted by the parents and children or share cultural values with them.
- Are more affordable to parents and often accept in-kind payment such as cleaning the home or cooking instead of cash.

Also, the fact that 18 percent of CCAP parents with nonstandard work schedules managed to use a child care center (at least in conjunction with a FFN provider) suggests that these parents either work enough standard hours to make formal care practical, or have resources and preferences that override the typical alignment of work and child care hours.

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

Nonstandard hours of work pose multiple challenges for families. Unlike standard work schedules, nonstandard schedules not only may 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 almost half of the employed CCAP parents work nonstandard hours, it is important to ensure that state child care policies and CCAP rules do not inflict unintended consequences upon these parents.

Proposals that regulate FFN child care more tightly within CCAP, for example, might reduce the supply of relative, friend or neighbor providers, a result that would disproportionately limit child care access for CCAP parents with nonstandard work schedules. Policies over the last decade that imposed registration and criminal background checks on FFN providers in CCAP might already have reduced their numbers. Policy makers should weigh the value of new restrictions against the risk that, if enacted, they would discourage many relatives, friends or neighbors from providing child care that parents need to stay employed.

In designing its quality initiatives, the state could also take the unique dimensions of FFN care into account. Imposing standards of traditional center-based programming that is geared toward academic readiness may make less sense for FFN care provided in the evening, nights, and weekends. Quality initiatives that recognize and support activities more suitable to family, friend and neighbor home settings and times of day may be more appropriate than imposing formal learning standards.

A future Policy Brief will address specific policies that Illinois should consider.

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<sup>1</sup>Illinois Action for Children. (2007). "Working Later in Illinois: Work Schedules, Incomes and Parents' Access to Child Care." [http://www.actforchildren.org/content\\_assets/MDP\\_ResearchPublications\\_PDFs\\_WorkSchedsCondensed.pdf](http://www.actforchildren.org/content_assets/MDP_ResearchPublications_PDFs_WorkSchedsCondensed.pdf)

<sup>2</sup>Illinois Action for Children administers the Illinois Child Care Assistance Program in Cook County. Staff of that program very kindly gave the Research team secure access to the sample parents' work schedules.

<sup>3</sup>See note 1.

<sup>4</sup>For some descriptive and analytic reviews of parents' child care choice, see:

Forry, Nicole D., Tout, K., Rothenberg, L., Sandstrom, H., & Vesely, C. K. (2013). *Child care decision-making literature review*. Washington, DC: U.S. Administration for Children and Families, Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation. (OPRE Brief 2013-45).

[https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/child\\_care\\_decision\\_making\\_literature\\_review\\_pdf\\_version\\_v2.pdf](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/child_care_decision_making_literature_review_pdf_version_v2.pdf).

Porter, Toni, Paulsell, D., Del Grosso, P., Avellar, S.A., Hass, R., Vuong, L. (2010). A review of the literature on home-based child care: Implications for future directions. Washington, DC: U.S. Administration for Children and Families, Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation. [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/cc/supporting\\_quality/reports/lit\\_review/lit\\_review.pdf](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/cc/supporting_quality/reports/lit_review/lit_review.pdf)

Susman-Stillman, Amy R., Banghart, P. (2011). *Quality in family, friend, and neighbor child care settings*. Child Care & Early Education Research Connections. <http://www.researchconnections.org/childcare/resources/14340/pdf>