



Getting There

Cook County Parents' Commute
to Child Care and Work



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Getting There: Cook County Parents' Commute to Child Care and Work

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I. Introduction

For working families, time matters. How far parents commute to work, including how far out of their way they must travel for child care, impacts the time families have together at home. All else being equal, we would expect working parents to select a child care setting that is most conveniently located relative to their home, their work or their commute to work.

A parent's mode of transportation might have some bearing on what he or she considers convenient. Parents who walk to work or commute using public transportation, for example, might only consider child care near their home convenient. They might find it taxing to transport children on the bus or train or may want to limit their children's exposure to bad weather. Parents who drive, in comparison, will almost certainly tolerate commuting to more distant child care. They might find it convenient to drop off their children close to work or at some point along the way.

In surveys, parents who have used Illinois Action for Children's child care referral program identify location as a top priority in their child care selection process.¹ However, location competes with other important factors such as quality, affordability, availability of care, and having a provider one can trust. In the end, some parents, either by choice or for lack of options, use child care that is geographically inconvenient.

Our purpose is to examine a subset of Cook County parents – those using the Illinois Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) – to determine how far they live from their child care. We also want to learn where the families' child care is situated in relation to their workplaces, how parents' distance to child care varies by community, and whether the characteristics of family income, age of children and number of children in care make it more or less likely that parents travel longer distances for care.

Knowing which communities tend to use child care within their own neighborhoods and which travel significant distances for child care might tell us something about the relative demand for child care – where demand is greatest and for whom.

II. Methodology

Using addresses available in the administrative data from the Illinois Child Care Assistance Program, we calculated the distances between families' homes, their child care providers, and their workplaces.² The appendix details our methodology. These distances provide us with three indicators of how conveniently located child care is for parents.

The first measure is simply how far families live from their child care. While this distance is an indicator of convenience, it does not provide the whole picture because it does not consider where child care is situated in relation to the route to work. A parent may travel a long distance to child care but if the care is close to his or her workplace or along the route to work then going to child care does not add much to the parent's overall commute.

¹Surveys from 2004 through 2009. Parents using the referral service typically are those in search of licensed home care or care in a child care center.

²All distance calculations in this study are "as-the-crow-flies," i.e. the length of the straight line between two addresses. These calculations do not reflect the actual distances parents travel based on street, train or walking routes, which can differ dramatically from and almost always are greater than the length of artificial straight lines. Still, we believe our measures of distance generally do accurately reflect the relative inconvenience of child care commutes and the comparative need for convenient programs across communities.

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A second measure puts the child care commute in the context of the work commute; it is how much *extra* distance families travel for child care on top of their work commute. That is to say, the number of additional miles parents travel for child care beyond what they need to travel to get to work.³

Example: *A parent's direct route from home to work is 5 miles, while their total route when child care is included (home to child care, child care to work) is 7 miles; therefore, the extra distance parents travel for child care is 2 miles.*

Is traveling two extra miles inconvenient for a parent? A parent who only lives one half mile from work might think so, while a parent who lives 10 miles from work might not. Partly it comes down to the parent's perspective. As a third measure of convenience we consider the extra distance to child care as a percentage of the distance from home to work. This percentage describes *how far out of their way* parents travel for child care.

Example: *A parent travels 5 miles to work and 1 mile extra for child care; therefore, she travels 20 percent out of her way for child care. A parent who travels 5 miles to work plus 5 additional miles for child care travels 100 percent out of her way for child care.*

As a final note, this analysis includes only low-income parents in Cook County who receive financial support for their child care. The results are not generalizable to the parent population at large. The appendix gives more detail on the limitations of the data.

³Ideally we would measure how much extra *time* child care adds to the parent commute, since not all distances are equal. Traveling by bus or train or walking is not comparable to driving the same distance. Highway driving is not comparable to driving on city streets. Unfortunately we do not have information on the mode of transportation of CCAP parents or on the time spent traveling to and from work and child care. According to the 2008 American Community Survey, among workers earning less than \$35,000, approximately 30 percent of Chicagoans take public transportation to work, 7 percent walk, and 60 percent drive or carpool. In suburban Cook County, 88 percent drive or carpool while 10 percent walk or take public transportation.

III. Measuring Distance

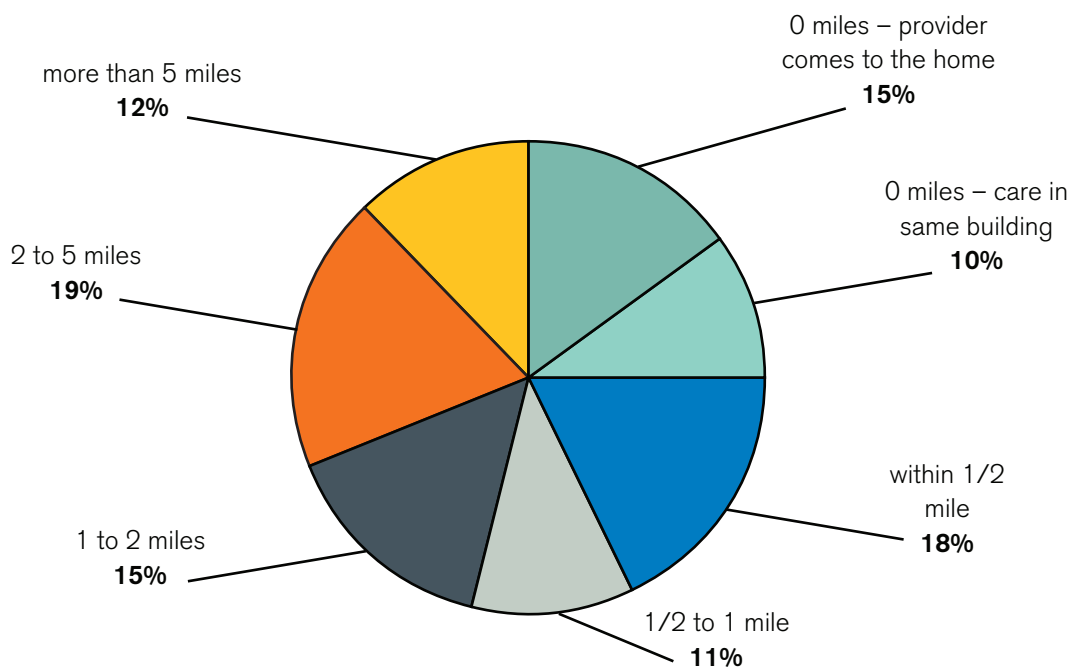
How Far CCAP Parents Live From Their Child Care

The most geographically convenient child care option for parents is care in their own home. A friend, neighbor, relative or nanny commutes to (or lives in) the child's home, and the parent is only responsible for her own commute to work. Families whose children are cared for in their own home constitute about 15 percent of CCAP families. Another 10 percent of families have their children in the care of providers who live in the same buildings in which they live.⁴ These parents, too, benefit from optimal child care locations.

The remaining three-quarters of families travel some distance to their child care. A significant portion of parents are within walking distance – with 18 percent living within one-half mile of their child care, and an additional 11 percent living between ½ mile and 1 mile. In total, just over half of CCAP families live less than one mile from their child care. Conversely, that means almost half of parents travel one mile or more for child care.

While only 12 percent of parents live more than 5 miles from their child care, many parents in this group live quite far from their providers, with the median distance being 7.8 miles. Figure 1 presents the distribution of parents according to how far they live from their child care.

Figure 1. How Far Parents Live From Their Child Care



All ranges should be read as in the following example: "2 to 5 miles" means "2 miles up to but not including 5 miles."

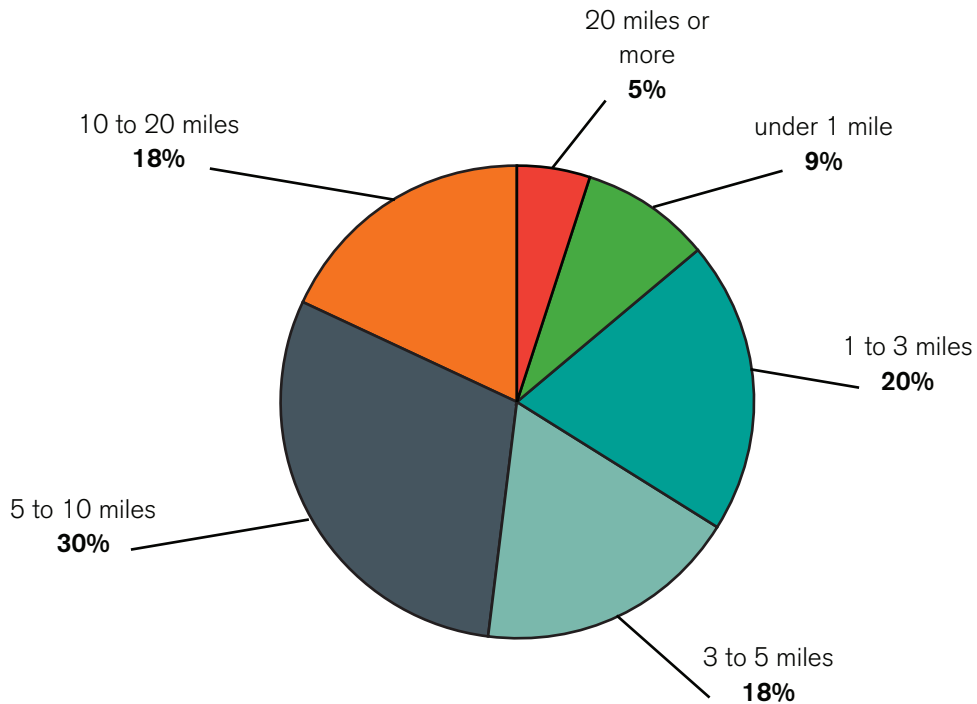
The remainder of this report focuses on the families that use child care *outside of their home*. It excludes the 15 percent of families whose providers come to their homes to provide care.

⁴Some families in this 10 percent may live in the same house or unit as their provider. These parents indicated on their CCAP application that their child care takes place in the *provider's* home, yet geocoding finds that the parent and provider live at the same geographic coordinates. Ambiguity in parent and provider addresses prevents us from knowing how many parents share a home with their provider as opposed to living in a separate unit. For the majority of this report, data are presented only for parents who use care outside their own home, in which we include this 10 percent.

How Far CCAP Parents Live From Their Workplace

Parents live much farther from their workplace than they live from their child care. While the typical parent with CCAP lives 1.2 miles from her child care, she lives 5.4 miles from her workplace. As shown in Figure 2, only about 10 percent of parents live less than a mile from their workplace, almost 40 percent live between 1 and 5 miles, and another 30 percent live between 5 and 10 miles. More than one-fifth of parents live 10 miles or more from work.

Figure 2. How Far Parents Live From Their Workplaces



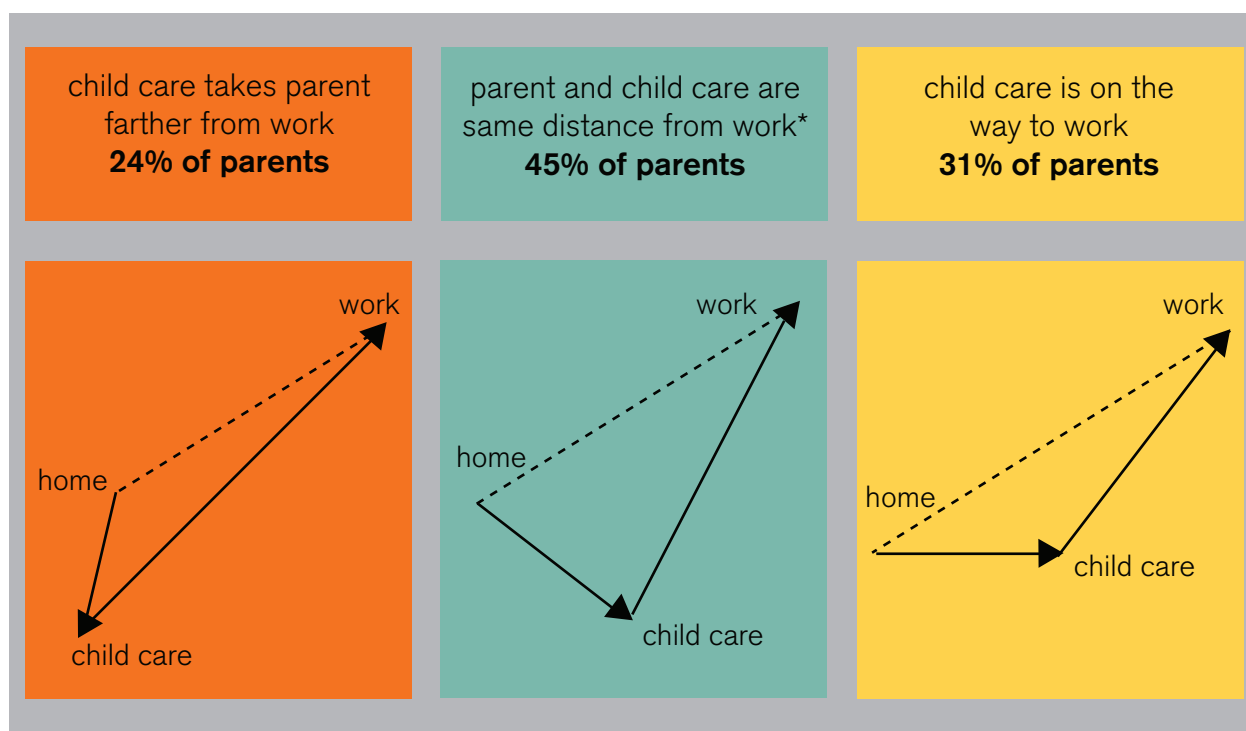
All ranges should be read as in the following example: "2 to 5 miles" means "2 miles up to but not including 5 miles."

A small subset of CCAP parents attend school or training and do not work. The median distance these parents live from their school is 4.4 miles. Generally speaking, then, CCAP parents attending school or training are closer to their programs than working parents are to their places of employment.

The Child Care-Work Commute

Child care providers of CCAP parents typically live the same distances from the parent workplaces as do the parents. However, for one-fourth of parents the trip to child care actually takes them farther from their workplace than they were when at home. For these parents, commuting to child care and work involves some degree of backtracking. For another group of parents, almost one-third, the commute to child care brings them closer to their workplace rather than away from it; in this sense, their child care can be considered “on the way” to work, though going to child care may still add considerable distance to the work commute. See Figure 3. Of the parents who use child care that is “on the way,” about half (49 percent) use child care that is closer to their workplace than to their home. This might seem like a lot, but among all CCAP parents using care outside their home, whether it is on the way to work or not, only 22 percent use care that is closer to their workplace than to their home.

Figure 3. Location of Child Care in Relation to Home and Work



**distance is the same within a half mile*

How Much Extra Distance Parents Travel for Child Care

Even a parent whose child care is “on the way” in the sense just mentioned may have to travel a significant distance on top of their work commute if that care takes them far from the direct route from home to work.⁵ On the other hand, some parents who travel long distances for child care travel little extra distance because their care is truly on the way – situated close to the work route. How much extra distance child care adds to the work commute is another measure of how geographically convenient care is for parents.

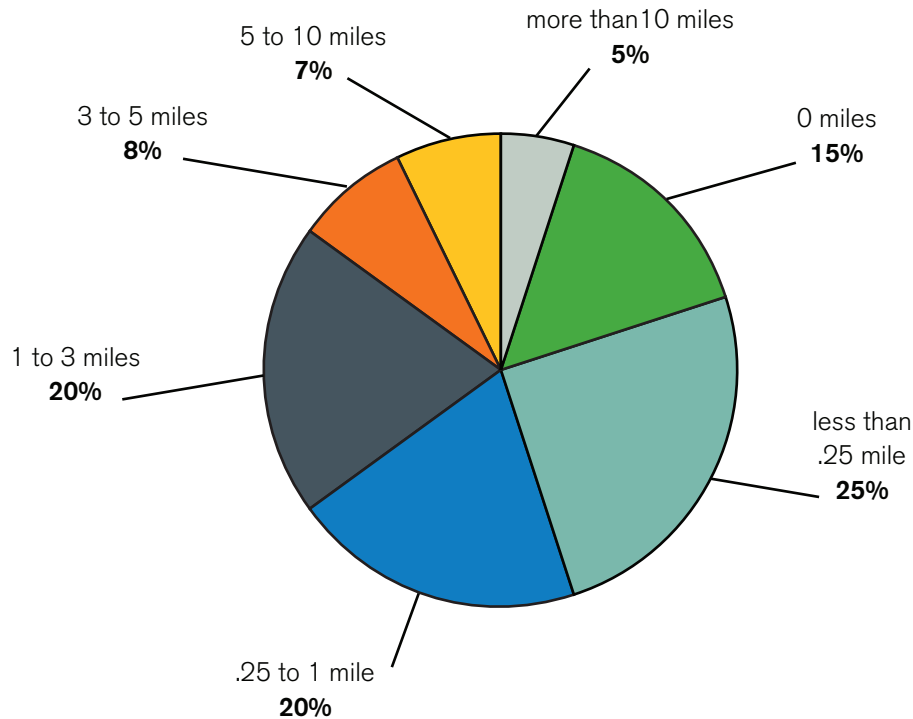
⁵By work route we mean the straight line from home to work. Again, we do not know the actual routes parents take to work or to child care or the means of transportation they use.

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As mentioned, some parents live in the same building as their child care providers and therefore travel no extra distance for care. Another set of parents use child care located at their worksites, in many cases because they work for their child care providers. In total, 15 percent of parents travel no extra distance for child care.

Forty-five percent of parents travel less than one extra mile for child care. For these parents, child care is relatively close to their home, workplace or route to work. More than one-quarter of parents travels 1 to 5 extra miles for child care, while 12 percent travel more than 5 extra miles. Figure 4 displays the distribution in more detail. The median extra distance of all parents is half a mile, while the median extra distance of parents traveling 5 or more extra miles is 8.5 miles.

Figure 4. How Many Extra Miles Parents Travel for Child Care On Top of Their Commute to Work



*All ranges should be read as in the following example:
"2 to 5 miles" means "2 miles up to but not including 5 miles."*

How Far Out of Their Way CCAP Parents Travel for Child Care

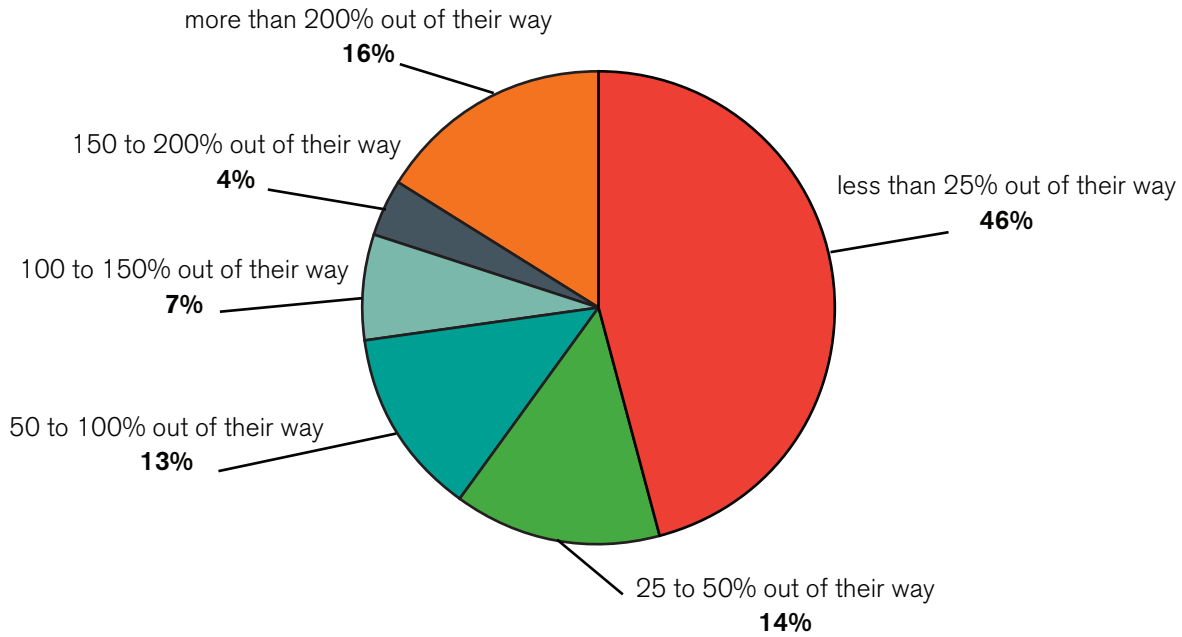
To put the extra miles parents travel for child care into context, we present them as a proportion of the parent's commute from home to work. This tells us the *percent out of their way* parents travel for child care. A value of 100 percent means the extra distance traveled for child care is just as far as the parent's direct commute to work (child care doubles the commute). A value smaller than 100 percent means the extra distance for child care is less than the direct commute to work, while a value larger than 100 percent means the extra distance parents travel for child care is even greater than the distance they need to travel for work – child care more than doubles the overall commute.

Overall, working CCAP parents typically travel about 10 percent out of their way for child care, meaning child care adds an additional one-tenth of the home to work commute. Looking only at parents living more than one mile from their child care – parents for whom the child care commute might cause the most inconvenience – the trip to child care typically takes them 31 percent out of their way, or almost one-third of their commute to work. Figure 5 shows the variation among these parents in terms of how far out of the way they travel for child care, if they travel more than a mile to child care.

For more than one-quarter of parents, child care at least doubles their commute, taking them 100 percent or more out of their way. The majority of these parents use child care that takes them over 200 percent out of their way, or more than triples their commute.

Figure 5. How Far Out of Their Way Parents Travel for Child Care

As a percentage of their work commute; parents who travel more than 1 mile for child care



All ranges should be read as in the following example: "25 to 50%" means "25 percent up to but not including 50 percent."

Summary

Reporting on distance without taking into consideration the means of transportation has real limitations in terms of quantifying the hardship parents face due to the location of their child care. Traveling just a mile on the bus in the company of children, including the walk to the bus stop, the wait time, and the weather, is not comparable to a one-mile drive in the car.

Though we know little about how long or challenging parents' commutes are, what we have learned, in sum, is that roughly half of parents travel over a mile for child care, 40 percent use child care that adds over a mile to their work commute, and 40 percent use child care that takes them more than 50 percent out of their way to work (in other words, the commute including child care is 1 ½ times the work commute alone). Overall, three out of five working CCAP parents fall into one of these three categories of inconvenience. Figure 6 summarizes these inconveniences.

Figure 6. Summary of Child Care Commute of CCAP Working Parents



IV. Geographic Differences

Certain community characteristics are related to families' use of child care close to home. More densely populated communities have more child care settings to choose from, increasing the likelihood families will find care within their own community that accommodates their needs and preferences. Highly concentrated communities also have more local employment opportunities, and parents who work close to home have incentive to seek local child care.

Parents in communities where relatively few families use cars are also more likely to use child care close to home. Families are bound to child care within their community unless they are able and willing to transport their children on public transportation.

The affordability of child care in the community is another important factor, though it is not always clear how the cost of care plays out with families with CCAP. While the subsidy makes child care more affordable to families, it may not cover the entire cost of care in communities with higher costs of living and more expensive child care. Some providers will absorb the shortfall, but others will ask parents to pay the difference, therefore pricing many parents out of the care. Some providers do not even accept CCAP payments, perhaps more commonly in communities where use of CCAP is less of the norm.

As a whole (but with numerous exceptions), Chicago neighborhoods are more likely than suburban communities to be densely populated, have more families without cars, and have lower cost child care. Suburban communities, meanwhile, are less populated and, in most communities, owning an automobile is taken for granted. Moreover, connecting highways allow suburban parents to travel greater distances in shorter periods of time, creating less inducement for child care to be close to home.

Considering these differences, it is not surprising that the suburban parents in our study live greater distances from work (typically 6.1 miles) than do parents in Chicago (5.3 miles) and travel longer distances for child care than Chicago parents. While parents in Chicago typically live 1.1 miles from their child care, those in suburban Cook County live 1.6 miles away, about 50 percent farther; and while Chicago parents typically travel 8 percent out of their way for child care, suburban parents travel 11 percent.⁶ Table 1 summarizes the differences between Chicago and suburban Cook County.

Table 1. Median Distances to Work and Child Care for Cook County CCAP Parents

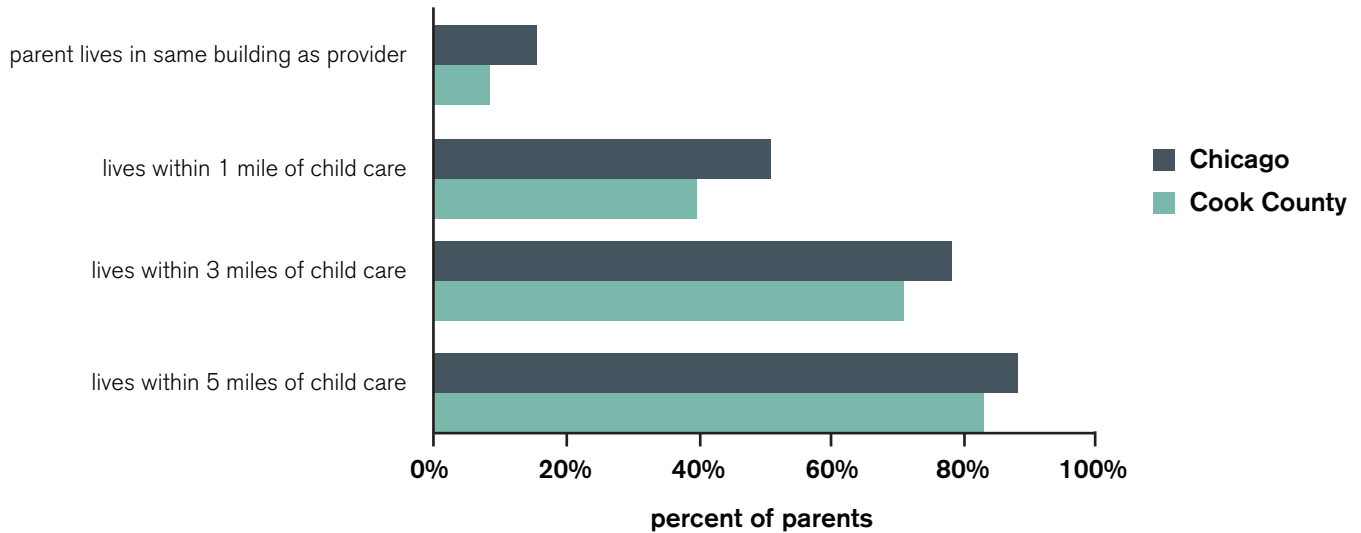
	Cook County	Chicago	Suburban Cook County
distance from home to work, not including child care	5.4 miles	5.3 miles	6.1 miles
distance from home to child care	1.2 miles	1.1 miles	1.6 miles
distance from child care to work	5.2 miles	5.1 miles	5.4 miles
total commute distance (home to child care to work)	7.4 miles	7.0 miles	8.3 miles
extra distance for child care (on top of work commute)	0.5 miles	0.4 miles	0.7 miles
percent out of their way parents travel for child care (extra distance for child care as a percent of distance from home to work)	9%	8%	11%
percent out of their way parents travel for child care – parents living one mile or more from child care	31%	33%	27%

⁶Figures represent median distances. Differences in Chicago and suburban median distances are significant at the .05 level.

Figure 7 provides another comparison of Chicago and suburban Cook County. For each, it shows the distribution of how far parents live from their child care. We can see that Chicago parents are more likely to live in the same building as their child care providers than are suburban parents. Also, whereas 50 percent of Chicagoans live within one mile of their child care, only 39 percent of suburban parents do. Finally, 88 percent of Chicagoans live within 5 miles of their child care compared to 83 percent of suburban parents.

Figure 7. How Far Parents Live From Their Child Care Providers – Chicago vs. Suburban Cook County

percentages are cumulative



Comparing Individual Communities

Looking at the individual cities within suburban Cook County and the Community Areas within Chicago, the median distances families travel for child care range from as low as one-tenth of a mile in the Near South Side community (just south of the loop downtown) to as high as 3.8 miles in the southern border suburb of University Park.

Maps 1 through 4 allow us to compare the communities of Cook County, both Chicago Community Areas and suburban municipalities. Since parents can travel far distances for child care without traveling far out of their way for that care, we report measures of total distance and measures of distance *out of their way*. Maps 1 and 2 present the median distances families in these communities live from their child care, while Maps 3 and 4 present the median percent out of their way families in these communities travel.⁷ Maps 3 and 4 can and do show different results from Maps 1 and 2 in terms of which communities have the more inconvenient child care commutes.

As discussed, certain community characteristics can impact the distances families travel. The most obvious is the availability of child care within or near a community. Parents in communities where friends and family live in close proximity or where there is an abundant supply of center or licensed home care have closer child care options. For the CCAP parents living in Chicago, we found that those in communities with fewer center and licensed home slots live greater distances from their child care than do families in communities with more slots. This is true not only in regards to the number of slots, but also to the ratio of slots per child under age six in the community. However, these relationships are not present in suburban Cook County. One possible reason for this is that suburban parents are deliberately choosing friend or relative care and are less likely to substitute it with center and licensed home care, even when they have to travel farther distances for friend or relative care.

⁷Because we are using the percentage out of their way as an indicator of inconvenience, only parents who live at least a half mile from their child care are included in the medians.

Table 2. Relationships Between Distances Families Live From Their Child Care and Other Community Characteristics

	Coefficients of Correlation with Distance to Child Care§			Coefficients of Correlation with Distance to Child Care§ Only parents who use care outside their building		
	All of Cook County	Chicago	Suburbs	All of Cook County	Chicago	Suburbs
number of center and licensed home slots	--	-.288**	--	-.171*	--	--
number of center and licensed home slots per child under age 6	-.268**	-.361**	--	-.240**	-.241*	--
average cost of center care for a preschooler	--	--	.267*	.398*	.391**	.346**
average cost of licensed home care for a preschooler	--	--	--	-.240**	-.266*	-.279*
number of cars per parent	.291**	.498**	--	.269**	.441**	--
number of people per square mile	-.384**	--	-.401**	-.257**	--	-.422**
percent of CCAP parents who work within a mile from home	-.205**	-.362**	--	--	--	--
percent of families under 200 percent of the poverty level	--	--	--	.177*	.288**	--
percent of families under 50 percent of the poverty level	--	.230*	--	.173*	.360**	--

§when controlling for other variables

*statistically significant at the .10 level

**statistically significant at the .05 level

The available care must be affordable for parents. In communities where care is more expensive on average, CCAP can potentially help low-income families afford this care. When the subsidy does not cover the full cost of care or is not accepted by programs, however, more expensive programs are out of reach and parents must choose a less expensive type of care or travel beyond their community to where care is less expensive.

For families who travel outside their own home or apartment building for care, we found a positive relationship between the average cost of center care within the community and the median distance families in that community travel, suggesting that some families may travel farther distances because the cost of care within their own community is too high, at least the cost of center care. It might also be the case that the more expensive centers do not accept Child Care Assistance payments.

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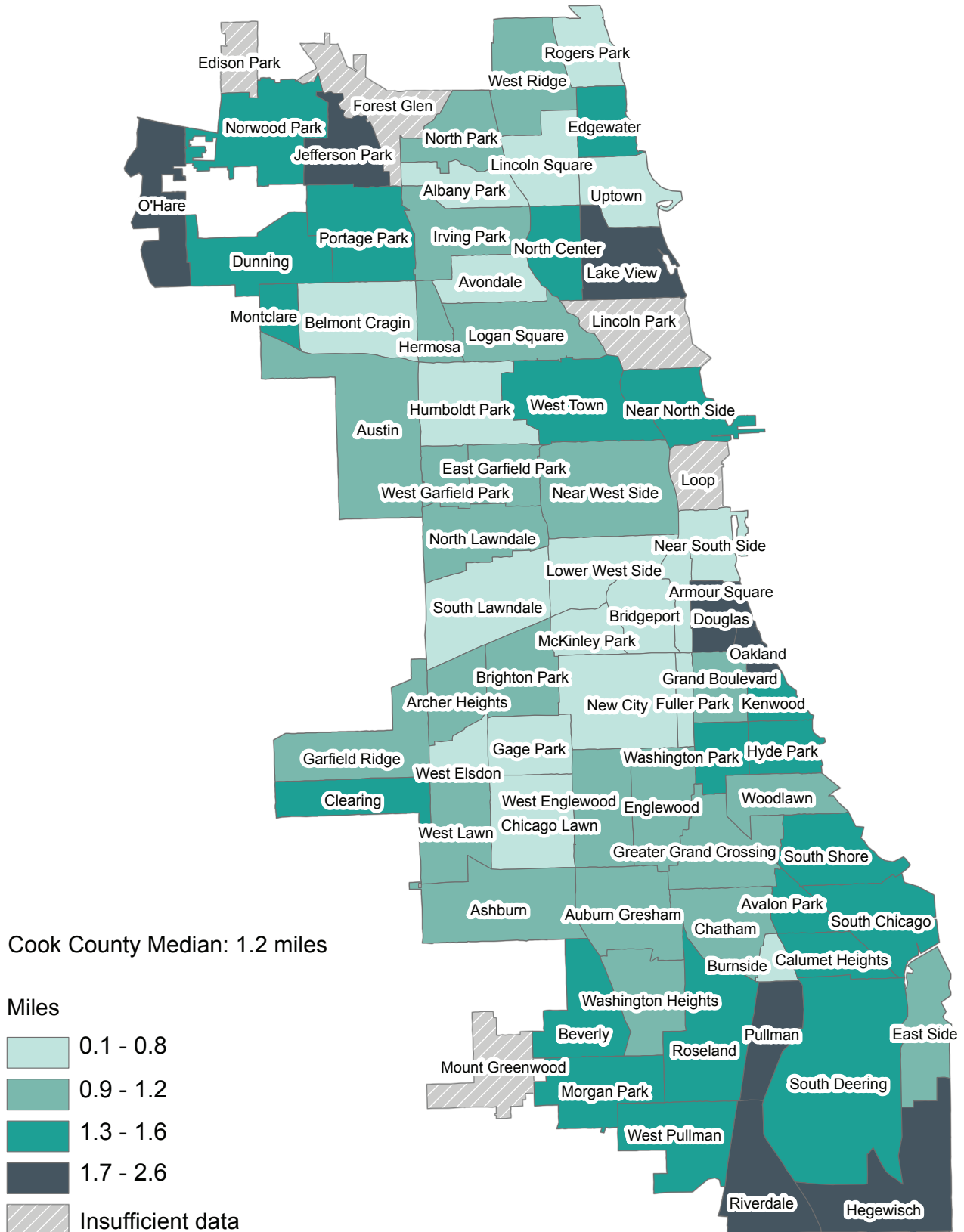
Some communities use cars less than others. They tend to be more walkable, have good public transportation options, or have residents for whom cars are not affordable. Assuming that parents with access to cars are willing to travel greater distances for child care, or farther out of their way to work for child care, we would expect to see a relationship between cars available within a community and the distance to child care. In suburban Cook County, we found no such relationship, likely because virtually everyone (almost 90 percent of the population) drives or carpools to work. However, within Chicago where it is far more common to not drive, we found that parents in communities with greater concentrations of cars per parents did travel greater distances for child care.

The population density of a community is another factor in how far parents travel for child care. Less dense populations in communities mean fewer neighbors and fewer businesses and services such as child care. Families may have to travel farther for care than in highly concentrated areas where many services are walkable. We found this relationship between population density and distance to care to be significant in suburban Cook County but not in Chicago, perhaps because of the greater variation in population density in the suburbs. This relationship may in part explain why parents in less populated communities such as Lynwood and Matteson in the south suburbs or Northbrook and Hoffman Estates in the North suburbs travel greater distances than the typical parent in more populated suburbs such as Cicero, Berwyn and Maywood.

An additional community characteristic to consider is the amount of employment opportunities within a community. Parents who work locally may place more value on child care close to home than do other families. Of parents who work within one mile of their home, 62 percent use child care that is also within a mile of their home. This is compared to only 43 percent of the parents who work one mile or more from their home. Some communities with higher percentages of parents who both work and use child care locally are Oak Park, Evanston and Berwyn in the suburbs and Uptown, Rogers Park and Armour Square in the city.

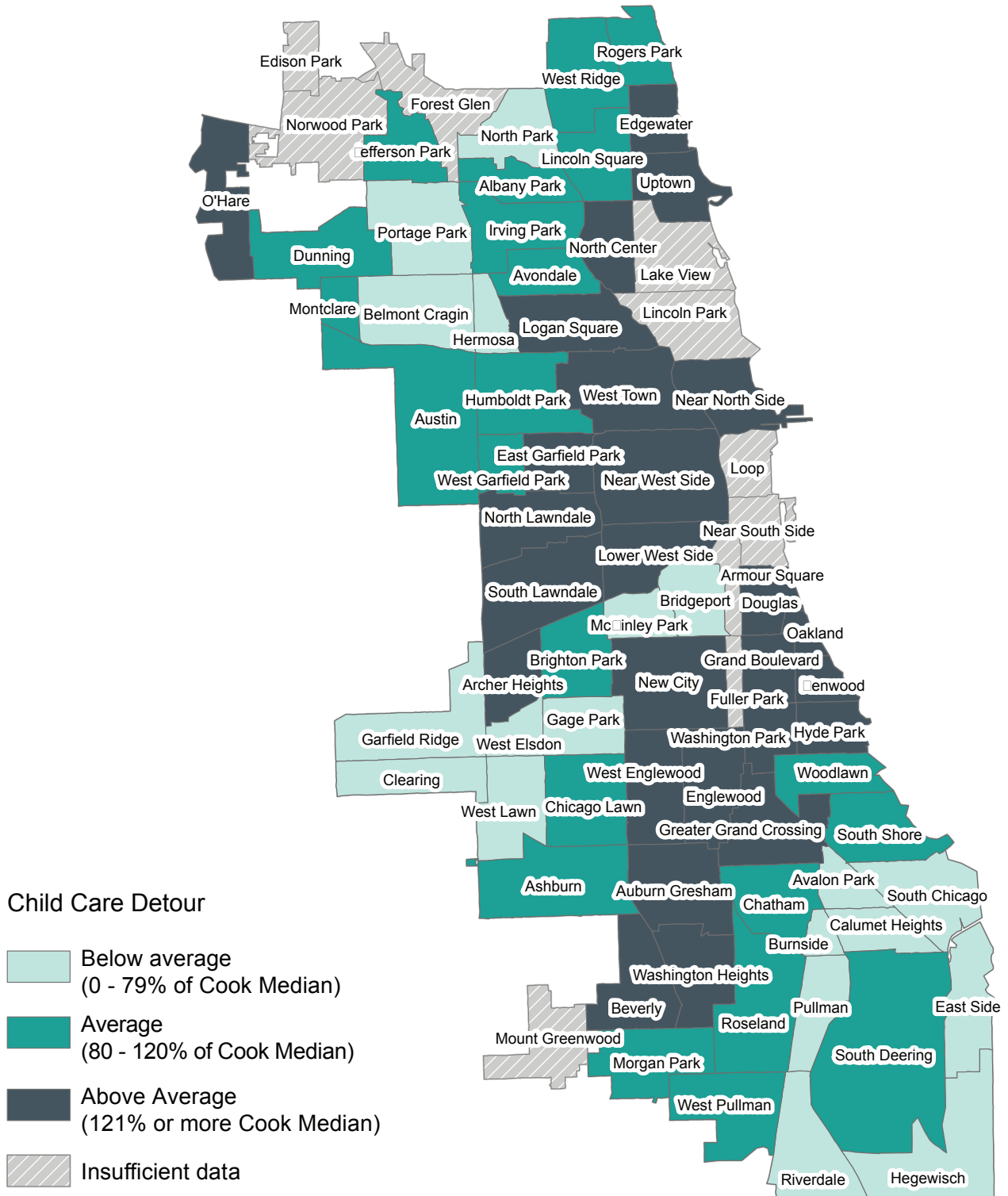
Finally, families in largely Latino communities tend to have geographically convenient child care. In the 23 communities (either Chicago Community Areas or suburbs) where Latinos make up 50 percent or more of the population, families in all but two of those communities travel less distance to child care typically than families across all communities. This is despite the fact that these Latino communities tend to have comparatively low numbers of center slots per child. CCAP families in Latino communities use center care almost as much as families in other communities. What we found was that a greater proportion of CCAP families in Latino communities use licensed home care compared to families in other communities who are more likely to use family, friend and neighbor (FFN) care. As we will see in the next section, families using licensed home care tend to travel less distance for care than those using FFN care. This might account for the relationship.

Median Distance Traveled by CCAP Parents to Child Care, by Chicago Community Area



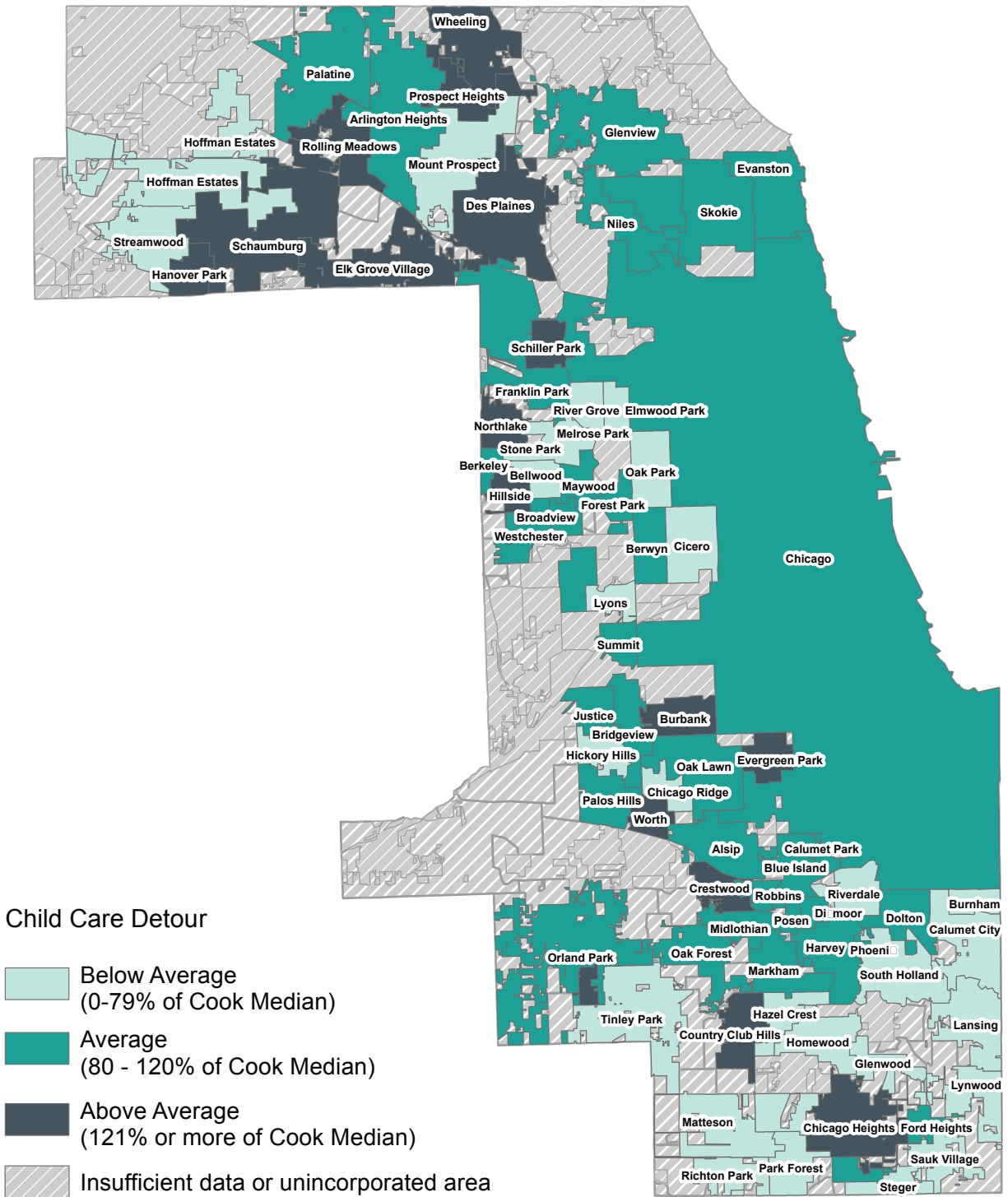
How Far Out of Their Way to Work Parents Travel for Child Care, by Chicago Community Area

For parents who travel more than a half mile for child care



How Far Out of Their Way to Work Parents Travel for Child Care, by Cook County Municipality

For parents who travel more than a half mile for child care



V. Child Care Choice and Distance Traveled

The type of child care families choose and how far they travel for that care go hand in hand. Some families prioritize location and select child care from what is available within their community, while others value a certain type of care and are willing and able to travel out of their way for this care. Most families probably search for a balance between these two factors.

The three types of child care considered in this report are family, friend and neighbor (FFN) care, licensed home care and care in a child care center. The box to the right describes each type of care. Our question is whether there is a relationship between the type of care parents use and the distance they travel for their care.

As discussed earlier, about 10 percent of families use care in the same building in which they live. The majority of this care, though not all, is FFN care. When we compare the distances families live from their child care by type of care and include this 10 percent of parents, the parents using FFN care travel the *least* distance for care as compared to those using licensed home or center care. However, when this 10 percent of parents is not included, the remaining families using FFN care typically travel *greater* distances for care (2.2 miles) than families using licensed home care (1.5 miles) and those using center care (1.4 miles).

A similar relationship exists between the type of care used and the *extra* distance families travel for care on top of their work commute. Also, parents who use FFN care outside their building travel farther *out of their way* typically than parents using other types of care. Parents travel 50 percent out of their way for FFN care but only 39 percent out of their way for license home care and 23 percent out of their way for center care. Figures 8 and 9 break down these comparisons for Chicago and suburban Cook County.

So while some parents are fortunate to have a friend, relative or neighbor in their building to provide care, other parents who desire FFN care generally are willing to travel further for it than what parents using licensed home or center care travel. From what we know of families using FFN care, it is likely that they are willing to travel the extra distance because they value providers they know and trust; because relatives and often friends share their language and culture; and because there may be limited child care choices available at the cost they can afford during the hours they need. Parents working nights, for example, will find their child care options greatly limited and may need to travel farther for evening or overnight care.

Types of Child Care

The three types of care this report considers are family, friend and neighbor (FFN) care, licensed home care and center care. *FFN care* is unregulated care, meaning the caregiver is not licensed or monitored by any regulatory agency. For our purposes, FFN refers to care in the caregiver's home, but generally it also includes care in the home of the child. FFN care often is a personal arrangement between a family and the caregiver, who frequently is someone well known to the family. Therefore, FFN care is typically the most flexible in terms of the days and hours of care and costs. Some caregivers do not ask families to pay for the care.

Licensed home care is care provided in the home of a caregiver who meets regulations set by the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). This care is more formal than FFN care in that caregivers usually have regular business hours and set prices. Yet providers still have the flexibility to make individual arrangements with parents to meet their needs.

Finally, *center care* is care provided in a facility outside of a home. The care can be licensed or unlicensed. It is generally the most expensive type of care and the least flexible for families in terms of the hours and prices, though some centers offer discounts or scholarships. Center care is most popular and widely available for preschool age children, but slots are scarce for infants and toddlers, as well as costly. In Cook County most children under age three use home care, particularly FFN care, as do school-age children.

While CCAP is designed to allow families to afford all types of care, in reality the cost of some care is still out of reach for families. Child care providers may not accept CCAP vouchers or may expect parents to pay the difference between what they charge and what CCAP reimburses.

Figure 8. How Far Parents Live From Their Child Care, by Type of Care

median distance, in miles; parents who use care outside their home or apartment building

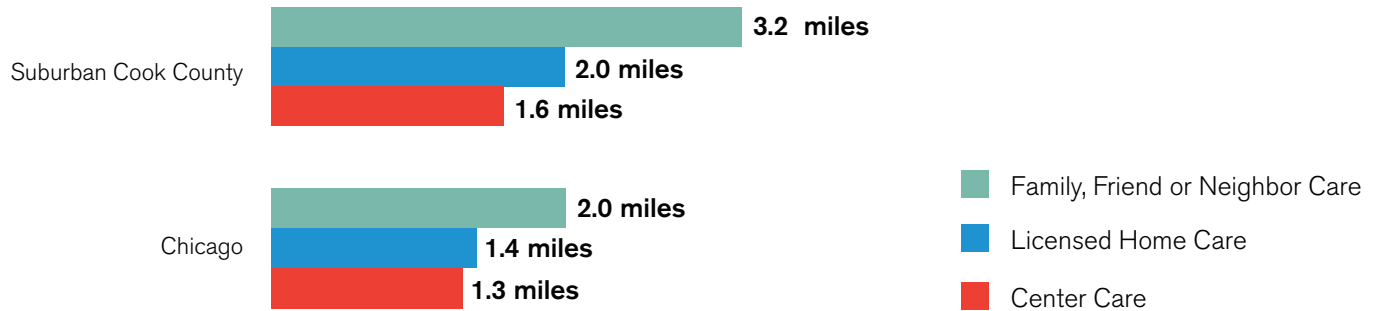
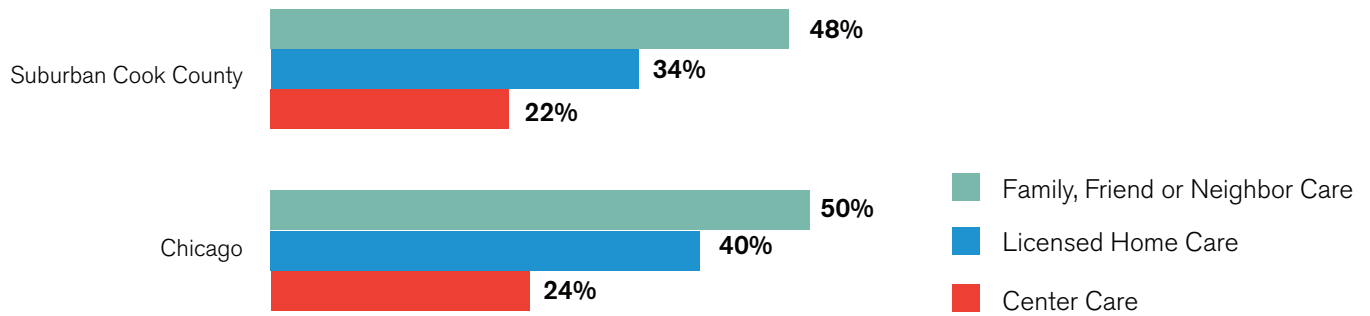


Figure 9. How Far Out of Their Way Parents Travel for Child Care

as a percentage of their work commute; parents who travel more than 1 mile for care



At the other end of the spectrum, parents using center care travel the least distance for child care. We know that 97 percent of CCAP families with a child under age 6 are within one mile of a center that accepts CCAP payments, and three quarters of parents are within a half mile. However, it is not necessarily the case that the nearest center has openings for the parents wishing to use it or that its quality, cost, and hours meet the needs and preferences of these parents.

VI. Family Characteristics and Distance to Child Care

In addition to community characteristics that make it more or less difficult for families to use geographically convenient child care, individual family characteristics might also be factors. We examined three family characteristics: family income, the age of the children in care, and the number of children in care.

Differences Based on Family Income

We know that lower-income CCAP families are more likely to use FFN care than higher-income CCAP families.⁸ Based on this relationship and the previous discussion, we would expect the lower-income CCAP families who use care beyond their own building to travel greater distances for child care than higher-income CCAP parents; however, we found no clear relationship between income and distance to child care.

We did find two income patterns. Among Chicago CCAP parents using center care, those below the poverty level travel fewer *extra* miles for their care than parents above the poverty level. At the same time, of Chicago parents using home care, particularly FFN care, those in the lowest income group (0 to 50 percent of the poverty level) travel *more* extra miles than other parents.

We also found that higher-income CCAP families travel less distance out of their way for care than lower-income families, though this does not translate into their having greater access to geographically convenient child care. Further analysis showed that lower income families live closer to their workplaces than do higher income families, and therefore lower-income families' trips to child care make up a greater percentage of their work commute than is the case for higher income families. As shown in Figure 10, the median percent out of their way traveled by the lowest income group (0 to 50 percent of the poverty level) is 47 percent, while the highest income group (150 to 200 percent of the poverty level) traveled 23 percent out of their way.

Figure 10. How Far Out of Their Way Parents Travel for Child Care, by Income Group

as % of their work commute (parents who travel more than 1 mile for care)



⁸Thirty-two percent of families in the lowest income group (0-50 percent of the poverty level) use FFN care compared to only fourteen percent of the highest income group (150-200 percent of the poverty level). This could in part be because it is more common for lower income parents to work part-time and non-traditional schedules that cannot be accommodated by more formal care, particularly center care. Lower income parents may also find formal care too expensive despite their subsidy.

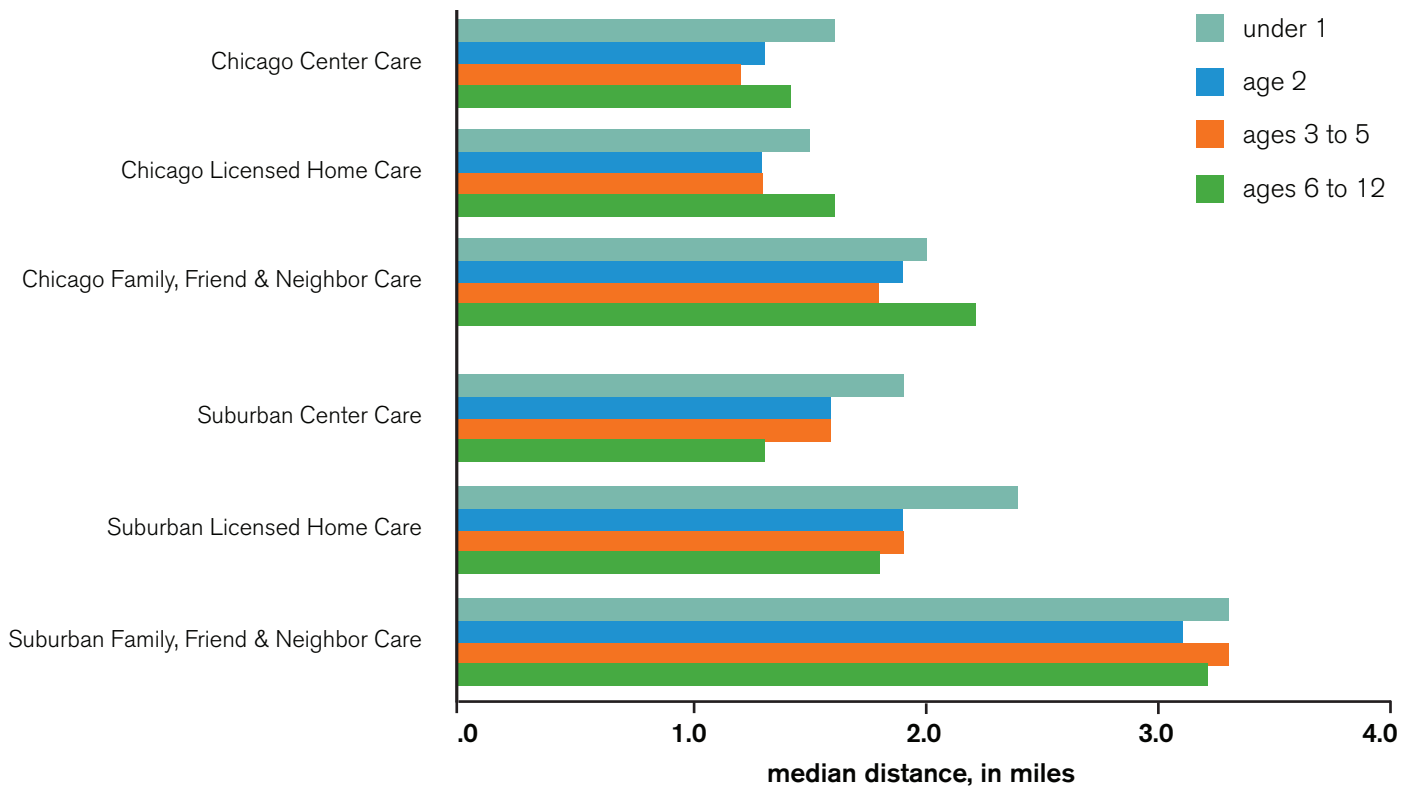
Differences Based on Child Age

We found that parents travel greater distances for infant care and, in Chicago, for school-age care than they do for care for two through five-year-olds. Similarly, they travel more *extra* miles for care for these age groups. Some variation exists depending on the type of care families use.

For parents in suburban Cook County using center or licensed home care, those with infants or toddlers in this care typically travel farther for care than do parents with older children. This is true in Chicago as well, but to a lesser degree. The farther distances for infant and toddler care could reflect the scarcity of slots for this age group as compared to other age groups.

In Chicago, families with school-age children travel both farther and farther out of their way for care than parents with two through five-year-olds. This is the case across all types of care and could signal unmet demand for school-age care in the city. See Figure 11.

Figure 11. How Far Chicago Parents Live From Their Child Care, by Age of Child and Type of Care
for parents using care outside their home or apartment building



Differences Based on Number of Children in Care

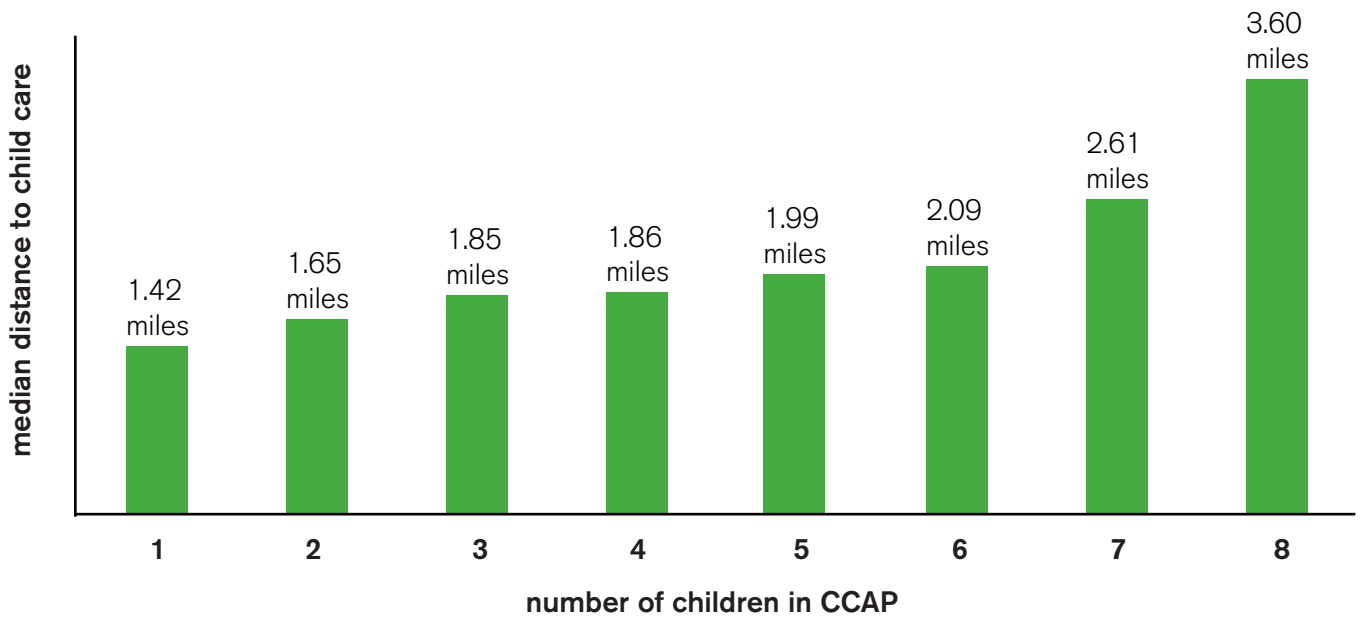
Parents who need care for more than one child have the added challenge of finding a provider with multiple openings or using an additional provider, which adds a stop to their work commute. Within the CCAP population, about 4 percent of parents use more than one provider outside their home.

Needing care for multiple children could mean that finding care is more difficult and families have to travel farther for this care. But it could also mean that parents are less willing to travel long distances with more than one child in tow and are more likely to prioritize care in their neighborhood. Our results show that, overall, families with more children in care travel greater distances for child care. A family with one child typically travels 1.4 miles, while in comparison a family with three children travels 1.8 miles. See Figure 12.

The fact that families with multiple children are more likely to use home-based care could in part explain this relationship – as families using FFN care travel the greatest distance for care.⁹ Yet, even among the individual types of care, the relationship between number of children in care and distance to care stands, with two exceptions: first, for parents using FFN care, once families have 4 or more children in this care the median distance to care decreases; second, among suburban families using center care, the median distance to care does not increase as the number of children in care increases until families have 4 or more children in care.

Figure 12. Median Distance to Child Care by Number of Children in Care

parents using care outside their own home or apartment building
 distance is to the child care provider used most by the family



⁹While 32 percent of families with one child in care on CCAP use home care (either licensed home care or FFN care), 60 percent of families with three children and 68 percent of families with 4 or more children use home care.

Policy Implications

Each family has its own threshold in terms of how far parents are willing to travel for child care and at what distance the commute becomes a hardship. Much depends on their mode of transportation, worksite, time constraints and other individual circumstances. Nonetheless, the data presented in this report suggest that a substantial number of CCAP parents encounter problems finding suitable care close to home, work or the route to work. We found that one-fifth of CCAP parents travels three or more additional miles for child care on top of their work commute and, for one-quarter of parents, the child care commute more than doubles their overall commute.

Traveling farther for child care is one of many trade-offs parents make when they have difficulty finding child care. Some parents respond by paying higher prices, accepting lower quality or choosing different types of care settings than desired. Other parents adjust their work schedules, forego potential work opportunities or even move to a new neighborhood. For most of these trade-offs, we have no data that captures the extent to which parents are making such sacrifices. The distance that parents travel for child care, however, is one parent behavior that can be measured and for which data are frequently available, at least for a subset of parents who use child care assistance or who can be interviewed.

If we can measure distance parents actually travel for child care, we can say more about how parents in a community value existing opportunities. The greater the distance they commute, the more we can assume parents value or need the particular child care they travel for. We thus propose that the distance measures for a community help solve an old and vexing issue for child care programming. They are indicators of where the need or demand for child care is highest and can help us think about areas of highest need for different types of care.

To identify geographic communities with unmet demand for care, community needs assessments can use a distance analysis to complement other starting-point methods such as the more traditional supply and demand analysis of comparing the number of children to the number of child care slots within communities. Unlike the child/slot approach, a distance analysis provides information on real behavior patterns of parents rather than on their presumed preferences about child care. The fact that parents in a community travel unusual distances for child care or unusual distances out of their way to work indicates the extent to which they find nearer options inaccessible or unsuitable.

An additional benefit is that a distance analysis avoids assuming that parents do not cross official boundaries such as municipal or Chicago Community Area borders when seeking care. This is another way it studies parents' real behavior rather than simplified versions of their behavior.

Once communities with unmet demand have been identified (either geographic communities or those based on a common attribute such as having an infant in care), particular policies can alleviate hardship for some parents and children. For example, infant care and school-age programs generally require longer commutes, and public policy makers could shorten these commutes by supporting development of new capacity particularly for these age groups. The state of Illinois currently pays a higher CCAP rate to providers of infant care and toddler care, and it gives a small preference to providers of infant care for some of its Quality Counts grants. The policy question is whether this support needs further enhancement.

A distance analysis is just a first step, not a substitute, for consulting parents directly about their needs. We know that not all parents who travel longer distances for care would or could substitute their current child care with care in their community if additional supply were offered. Once we identify communities with above-average travel, or in a community identify the types of child care parents travel farthest for, we need to try to identify and interview the parents who travel longer distances about why they choose the care they use, what barriers they encounter to accessing care close to home and what child care options they would consider. This would be valuable information for an in-depth needs assessment to determine whether more facilities should be built or a larger home care workforce should be developed within a community.

Appendix: Methodology

Administrative data from the Illinois Child Care Assistance Program include the addresses of 1) 43,002 parents participating in CCAP and 2) their places of employment and 3) their child care providers.¹⁰ Using the addresses, we calculated the distance from each parent's home to their child care provider, from their child care provider to the parent workplace, and the direct distance from the parent's home to their workplace.

The addresses available in the CCAP administrative data are those that the parents and providers use as their mailing addresses. This introduces an element of error in the analysis as we do not know who or how many parents or providers live at a separate address from their mailing address. Anecdotally, we know some providers have problems receiving their mail and have their payments sent to the parent address; to the extent that this occurs the results will be biased in favor of shorter distances traveled for child care.

While 43,002 parents participated in the CCAP program, the majority of this report focuses only on the parents who use child care outside their home. That is, it excludes the 14 percent of parents whose child care providers watch the children in the children's home. We could report only on parents whose addresses could be geocoded (assigned geographic coordinates) and whose child care providers' addresses could be geocoded. Parents whose addresses or providers' addresses were P.O. boxes or did not register with the geocoding software were excluded because without geographic coordinates we could not calculate distances. In total, 35,551 parents were included in our distance to child care calculations.

For our analysis of distance to child care *in relation to work*, we also excluded parents whose workplace could not be geocoded, parents who are in school or training only, and parents who work at home. This left 24,187 parents for whom we could report their distance to child care in relation to work.

About 4 percent of families have more than one provider caring for their children outside the home. In most of these cases, it is not that one of their children is in multiple care arrangements, but rather that different providers care for different children in the family. To simplify our analysis, in cases where families use more than one provider outside the home we selected just one provider per parent: the provider whose services were used the most that month. In the instances where there was no distinction among providers based on usage, we selected the provider who lived farthest from the parent to reflect parents' maximum hardship.

Finally, approximately 9 percent of parents use CCAP while they both work and attend school. In these cases, due to data limitations such as not having their work and school schedules, we excluded school from their commute and only analyzed child care in relation to their trip to work. If a parent worked two jobs we used the job most recently added to the database. In part this guards against cases in which the earlier job was erroneously retained in the database.

¹⁰Data are from the February 2010 CCAP payment file for services rendered in January 2010.