



# Child Care Market Analysis & Strategic Plan for Child Care Independence, Iowa

## Key Findings from the Child Care Market Analysis

### **Finding 1: The Percentage of Families with Young Children and All Parents in the Labor Force is Declining**

As of 2022, 71% of families with children ages 0 to 5, living within the boundaries of the Independence Community School District have all parents in the labor force. Five years ago in 2017, those numbers were 77% and 87% respectively, and in 2012 they were 84% and 81%.

### **Finding 2: Parents are Having Difficulty Finding Child Care**

The child care needs survey completed as part of this project showed that 74% of parents with children ages 0 to 5 (not in kindergarten) and 81% of parents with children ages 5 to 12 found it difficult to find child care in the last 12 months.

**Finding 3: Parents Indicate Child Care is Affecting their Job**—Over the last 12 months, the top adverse effects parents experienced related to their job due to child care challenges were: missed a day of work because the provider was closed, on vacation, or not available (49%) and had to leave work early (48%).

**Finding 4: There is a Shortage of Spaces Among All Age Groups**— It is estimated there are 893 children ages 0 to 11 living in the Independence area that are likely to use regulated child care. Starting in May 2024 there will be 332 regulated spaces available, of which 332 will be available during the school year and 284 during the summer, leaving a shortage of 561 spaces during the school year and 609 spaces during the summer when some programs close temporarily.

**Finding 5: Parents want Center-Based Child Care**— The most preferred child care arrangement according to the child care needs survey is a licensed child care center, which is preferred by 76% of parents. In addition, parents prefer to drop-off their children for care between 7:00 am and 7:59 am and to pick them up between 4:00 pm and 4:59 pm, and to use care Monday through Friday year-round.

### **Finding 6: Median Income of Families with Children is Higher than the Child Care Assistance Threshold**

The median income for families with children under the age of 18 in the Independence area is \$83,958. To qualify for child care tuition assistance through the state, a family's income cannot exceed \$41,312 and a family of 4 cannot exceed \$49,920.

### **Finding 7: Child Care Centers are Willing to Expand**

Three (3) of the 4 licensed centers that participated in the child care needs survey indicated they would expand if they had the opportunity. As a follow-up those providers were asked what support they would need in order to be able to expand to serve more children. All responses were related to needing help with staffing and financing to expand their facility.

### **About this Project**

For working parents, choosing child care may be one of the most critical decisions they make. According to longitudinal research, the child care environment will have lasting effects on their child. When there are not enough spaces in a community, finding any care is a challenge; and options for quality child care that meets the needs and preferences of families can be even more challenging.

In 2023, City of Independence commissioned this study to better understand the supply and demand for child care and to gain insight to challenges experienced by parents in the Independence area. After that, a series of strategic planning sessions were held to develop goals and strategies to address the challenges identified through the child care market analysis. This document is a summary of two reports, *Child Care Market Analysis* and *Strategic Plan for Child Care*.



## Child Care Market Analysis & Strategic Plan for Child Care Summary Independence, Iowa

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### **Finding 8— Few Employers are Currently Impacted by Child Care**

Through the child care needs survey employers were asked if their business has any challenges in the last 12 months related to productivity, absenteeism, or had difficulty hiring due to child care options or challenges in the area. For each question, only 1 employer (the same employer) answered yes.

### **Finding 9—Some Employers are Willing to Donate or Make a Contribution to Child Care**

Employers that participated in the child care needs survey indicated their business is willing to assist in addressing the child care shortage and/or support child care businesses through various actions. The top two ways employers are willing to help are a donation or financial contribution to build, remodel, or expand a child care center and to make a donation or financial contribution for child care scholarships for their own employees.

## **Vision and Goals from the Strategic Plan for Child Care**

The following vision for child care was developed by the Child Care Steering Committee during the strategic planning sessions. This vision will help guide the future of child care in Independence.

***Independence will continue to be a thriving community with accessible, quality child care choices that allow employers to attract and retain workforce.***

### **GOAL 1: Support the efforts of child care businesses to be sustainable by facilitating partnerships and providing access to business resources.**

- Strategy 1- Facilitate partnerships between child care centers and local businesses.
- Strategy 2- Provide a local connection to regional and statewide business resources and supports for both existing and prospective child care providers.

### **GOAL 2: Maintain the existing supply of regulated child care and add a minimum of 50 new regulated spaces by 2029.**

- Strategy 1- Identify viable locations for an Iowa Department of Health and Human Services licensed child care center.
- Strategy 2- Inform the community of the need for more regulated child care spaces, and the efforts made toward exploring options to expand the number of spaces.
- Strategy 3- Identify an entity to operate an Iowa Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) licensed child care center in the former Starlight Cinema building.
- Strategy 4- Develop and implement a campaign to attract additional child care providers.

First Children's Finance, a national nonprofit organization, believes access to quality early care and education is essential for all communities, and that early care and education is the foundation of individual success and the engine of regional economic growth. First Children's Finance provides financing, training, and business-development assistance to child care businesses. First Children's Finance also provides consulting and planning assistance to communities, government agencies, intermediaries, and regional child care organizations. For more information on these and other topics, contact [InfoIA@FirstChildrensFinance.org](mailto:InfoIA@FirstChildrensFinance.org).