

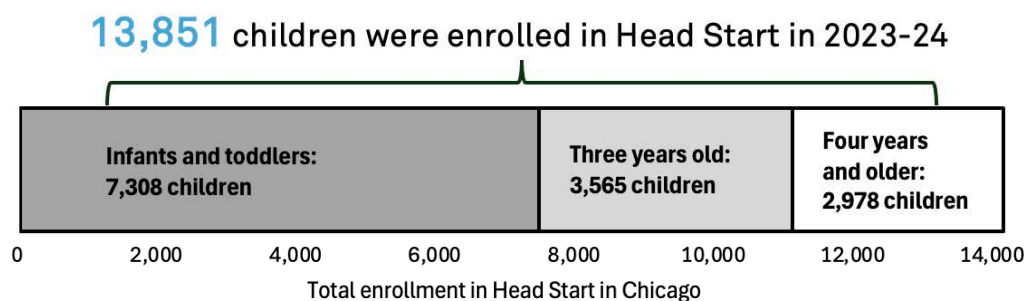
# Head Start is Vital to Chicago's Children, Families, and Communities

Chicago's early childhood care and education system relies on crucial support from Head Start



Head Start funding is a critical component of Chicago's early childhood care and education system, providing nearly one quarter of all public funding for child care and early learning for children under 5 in the city. Head Start programs prepare young children educationally and socially for success in school, and enable parents to participate in the workforce by providing reliable, high-quality care. In a city where affordable child care options are limited and many families rely on Head Start as a lifeline, reducing financial pressure on working families and addressing long-term educational economic disparities is essential.

In Chicago, nearly 14,000 children were enrolled in Head Start in 2023-24. This number represents 36 percent of the children living in poverty in the city. Over half of these children were infants and toddlers.



**Notes:** Figure shows total cumulative enrollment of children in Head Start programs located in Chicago based on data from the 2023-24 Head Start Program Information Report.

In a majority of families with children participating in Head Start, all of the parents in the home are in the workforce. This includes over 6,000 single parents who are employed, in school, or in job training, and more than 1,100 two-parent families where both parents are employed, in school, or in job training. Head Start provides a critical work support to these parents.

**55%** of families in Head Start rely on the program so they can work



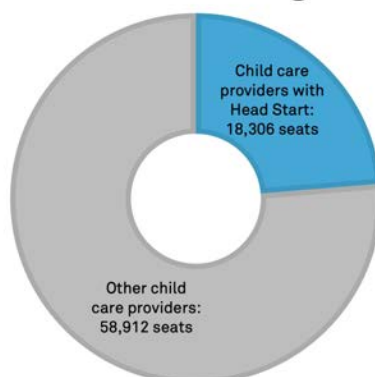
**13,090 families** participated in Head Start in 2023-24. In **7,228 families**, all parents were employed, in school, or in job training

**Notes:** Figure shows the estimated number of families in Head Start programs located in Chicago where all parents are employed, in school, or in job training. Estimates are based on data on the number of one- and two-parent families and number of families with at least one parent who is employed, in school, or in job training from the 2023-24 Head Start Program Information Report.

Chicago early childhood programs receive \$176.5 million annually in federal Head Start funding, which represents almost one quarter of public spending on child care for children under 5. Head Start funds make up an especially large proportion of public spending for infants and toddlers (one in every three dollars), and a bit less in terms of proportion of public dollars for 3 to 5 year olds (one in every six dollars).

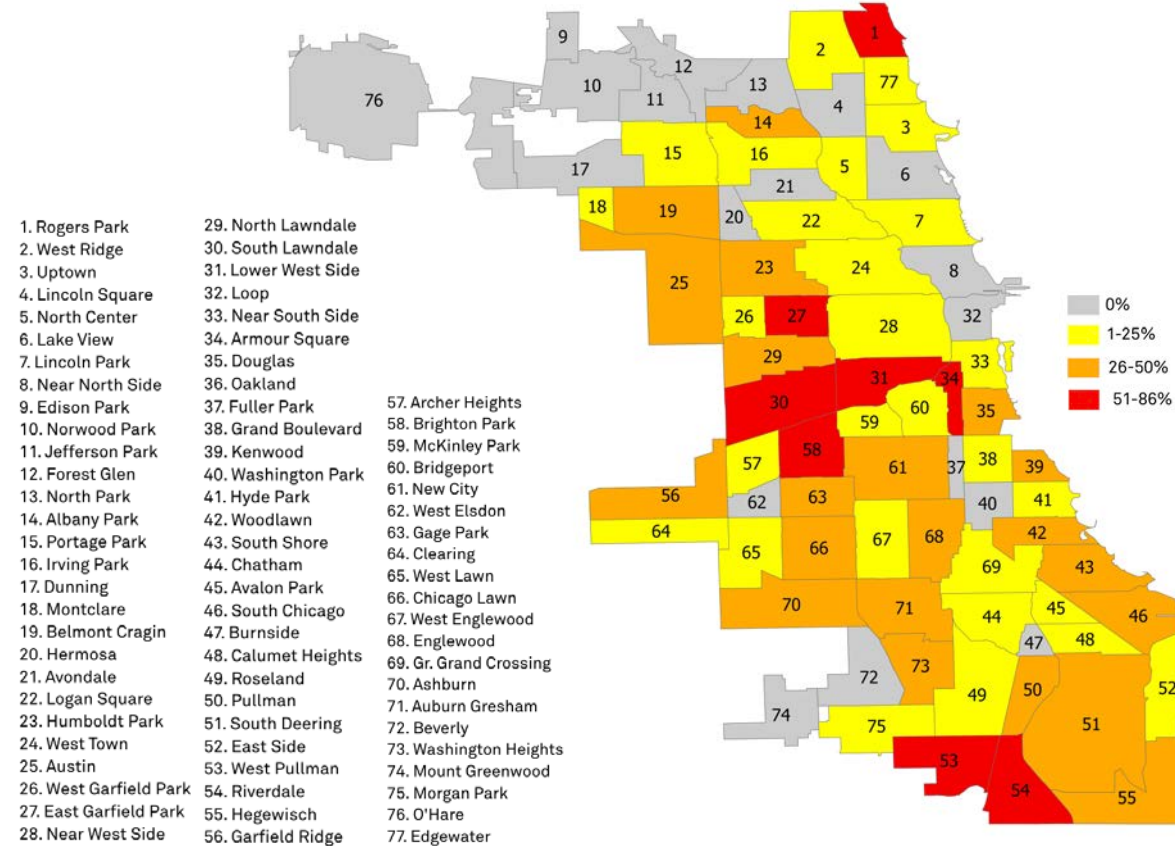
Many child care centers and family child care homes rely on Head Start as a crucial source of funding. Nearly one fourth of the total capacity for child care for children under 5 in Chicago is provided by centers that receive some funds from Head Start. These child care centers also provide important work support to hundreds of non-Head Start parents.

**Nearly 1/4** of child care seats in Chicago are tied to Head Start



**Notes:** Figure shows the number of seats in community-based organizations with and without Head Start funding based on 2023 data from the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (INCCRRA).

The child care sector in nearly every community in Chicago is supported by Head Start. In some communities, Head Start supports a large share of child care providers. More than half of the total licensed child care capacity in East Garfield Park, South Lawndale, Brighton Park, the Lower West Side, Armour Square and Rogers Park is provided by centers and homes that receive Head Start funding. The map below shows by community area the share of the total child care capacity by organizations that receive Head Start funding.



**Notes:** Figure maps the share of total number of seats in community-based organizations that are funded by Head Start for each Chicago community area based on 2023 data from the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (INCCRRA). Total shares in each community are based on the number of seats in sites with some Head Start funding in relation to the total number of seats, and the color corresponds to a community with 0% (grey), 1-25% (yellow), 26-50% (orange), or 51-86% (red) of seats with some Head Start funding. Each number represents the community area number, with the corresponding community name listed above. 57 out of 77 communities receive Head Start funding, with 8 communities having over 50% of seats receiving some funds from Head Start.

## Conclusion

Head Start provides critical support for children and working parents in Chicago. Nearly 1 in 4 total child care seats across the city, based on the total capacity of public and private providers, is touched by Head Start. Its vital impact is strongest among families with infants and toddlers and in several community areas spread across the city.

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## Acknowledgments

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We sincerely hope that our partners across Chicago find this short paper useful and that they will share it freely with their partners, collaborators, and funders.

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## Technical Appendix

The figures in this report draw on data from the Head Start Program Information Report and the Illinois Network of Child Care Resources and Referral Agencies. Below, we describe how we used data from each source.

### Head Start Program Information Reports

Data on children and families enrolled in Head Start in Chicago are drawn from the 2023-24 Head Start Program Information Report (PIR). The PIR includes information on all Head Start programs in the United States. We focused on programs located in Chicago. Some programs located in Chicago also operate some centers in neighboring areas; children and families in these centers are included in our analysis. We report the following:

**Total cumulative enrollment**, which represents the number of children enrolled in Head Start programs in Chicago at any point during the 2023-24 program year. The PIR reports program-level information on total cumulative enrollment of all children and total cumulative enrollment by child age group.

**Estimated number of families where all parents were in the workforce**, which represents the number of families in Head Start programs in Chicago where all parents were employed, in school, or in job training. We estimated this number based on the following program-level information reported in the PIR: the number of one-parent and two-parent families, and the number of families with at least one parent in the workforce (employed, in school, or in job training). We used this information in a multi-step process to estimate the number of families in each program where all parents were in the workforce:

- First, we calculated the percentage of all families in each program with at least one parent in the workforce.
- Second, to calculate the number of two-parent families where all parents were in the workforce, we first multiplied the number of two-parent families in each program by the percentage of all families in the program with at least one parent in the workforce (that is, we assumed one-parent and two-parent families were equally likely to have at least one parent in the workforce). We then assumed that 60% of two-parent families with at least one parent in the workforce had a second parent in the workforce.
- Third, to calculate the number of one-parent families where the parent was in the workforce, we multiplied the number of one-parent families in each program by the percentage of all families in the program with at least one parent in the workforce.
- Finally, to calculate the estimated number of families in the program where all parents were in the workforce, we added the estimated number of two-parent families where both parents are in the workforce and the estimated number of single-parent families where the parent is in the workforce.

## Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies

Data on child care providers in Chicago are drawn from 2022-23 licensing data from the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (INCCRRA). INCCRRA data includes information on the number of seats available for early care and education, and Head Start funding for each provider. We report the following:

**Total cumulative capacity in Chicago**, which represents the number of seats available for early care and education in Chicago during the 2022-23 program year. INCCRRA reports provider-level capacity to serve children for both licensed child care providers and license-exempt child care providers.

**Total cumulative capacity in Chicago for Head Start providers**, which represents the number of seats available for early care and education in Chicago during the 2022-23 program year in sites that have at least some Head Start funding. We estimated this number based on the provider-level indicator that specifies whether a provider receives Head Start funding or not. We used this information to estimate the number of early care and education seats provided by Head Start in Chicago.

**Total cumulative capacity in each Chicago community area**, which represents the number of seats available for early care and education for each community area during the 2022-23 program year. We used the street address where child care takes place for each provider and geocoded them to the community area in which the provider is located. To link each provider to a community area, we used data on provider addresses and capacity:

- First, we generated geocoordinates for each provider using an address locator feature in ArcGIS Pro.
- Second, we linked each provider to a community area using a geospatial map of Chicago community area boundaries from the Chicago Data Portal.
- Third, we aggregated the total capacity of all providers in each community area to calculate the estimated number of seats available in each community.

**Total cumulative Head Start capacity in each Chicago community area**, which represents the number of seats available in sites that receive some Head Start funding in each community. To link each provider to a community area, we utilized the same process as above, but restricted the sample to include providers that are funded by Head Start only.

**Share of capacity in providers that receive Head Start funding**, which represents the estimated share of child care capacity that is located in sites that receive Head Start funding. To calculate the share, we divided the total cumulative capacity in Head Start sites by the total cumulative capacity. This calculation represents the share of capacity that is directly or indirectly funded by Head Start.