



The Greater Kansas City Early Care and Education Landscape Study: Final Summary Report

Executive Summary

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March, 2017

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Acknowledgements

A debt of gratitude is owed to the early care and learning programs in Jackson County, MO, and Johnson and Wyandotte Counties, KS, that contributed their time to completing a survey so that the larger Kansas City community can understand the strengths, needs, and contributions of these programs. We also acknowledge the contribution made to the improvement of these programs in Kansas City by the investment made in this project by the Kansas City Early Education Funders Collaborative.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PURPOSE

Given that research shows early care and education (ECE) programs can have an important impact on children’s school readiness and later success in life, the Kansas City Early Education Funders Collaborative commissioned a landscape survey to better understand the existing ECE programs within Jackson County, Missouri (Phase 1) and Johnson and Wyandotte Counties, Kansas (Phase 2). Because of the wealth of information contained in each survey report, this summary report represents an effort to provide a synthesis of findings focused on characteristics of Missouri and Kansas programs. The purpose of this report is threefold: (1) to provide background information about relevant national, state, and local policies and conditions that affect the Greater Kansas City ECE landscape; (2) to summarize the pertinent descriptive information and provide a synthesis of findings from the two previous landscape reports within sociodemographic and policy contexts; and (3) to identify gaps in the ECE landscape across the metropolitan region.

RELEVANT NATIONAL, STATE, AND LOCAL POLICIES

Over the last few decades, the federal government has taken an active role in improving access to high quality ECE by providing assistance to states and providing funds for programs, training, and technical assistance. The Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) helps states pay for child care for low-income families. Through this fund, states increase access to ECE by providing funds to families to subsidize their child care costs and also invest in improving quality through teacher training and grants to child care providers for learning materials. Head Start/Early Head Start is the program administered by the federal government that provides educational, social, health, and nutritional services to promote school readiness for children from families with low incomes. Other more recent sources of federal funding for ECE include the Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge and Preschool Development Grants (none of which Missouri or Kansas has received). In addition, programs run by school districts may use Part B and C funds from the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Title I to fund ECE.

States play a large role in the regulation and funding of ECE programs. Licensing rules and regulations differ between Missouri and Kansas. In particular, all Kansas ECE facilities must be inspected (due to Lexie’s Law signed in 2010), which is not the case for some of Missouri’s programs. Child care subsidy policies also differ between the two states with respect to subsidy rates for ECE programs. According to federal recommendations, states should set their child care subsidy rates no lower than the 75th percentile of market rate (high enough to access 75% of providers). However, Kansas pays providers at approximately the 40th percentile, and Missouri at about the 45th percentile, which means that families using child care subsidies cannot easily access over half of the programs in their region. In Missouri, ECE providers may also receive increases called rate differentials in addition to the daily base subsidy rates. Programs can receive rate differentials if they are accredited by certain state-approved entities, if they serve children with special needs, and/or if 50% of the children they serve receive state subsidy.

Missouri and Kansas also differ with respect to family eligibility requirements for child care subsidies. Both states provide child care subsidies for parents who are working and/or attending school. In Missouri, families with gross incomes below 138% of the federal poverty level can qualify, whereas in Kansas, families below 185% are eligible.

In Kansas, the work and education requirements are stricter than in Missouri (e.g., in Kansas, students have a lifetime limit of 24 months of eligibility). Subsidy usage has declined in Jackson, Johnson, and Wyandotte Counties since 2013, partly based on families' frequent cycling on and off the subsidy program, interfering with their ability to access consistent care, which is crucial for the social-emotional development of young children. The new Child Care and Development Block Grant law lengthens eligibility periods to 12 months so families have more stable subsidies over time, which is more likely to support continuity of care and relationships between children and their providers.

Both states have state-supported preschool programs. In Missouri, the Missouri Preschool Program (MPP) operates in public schools, community-based child-care centers, and nonprofit agencies. In 2014-2015, MPP was offered in 30% of districts in the state, and 95% of MPP children were enrolled in programs that were operated by a public school. In Jackson County, four of the twelve school districts currently participate in MPP. Kansas has two state-funded preschool programs. The Kansas State Pre-Kindergarten Program provides funding directly to public schools, although schools may subcontract with community-based organizations to provide services. Nine out of the ten school districts in Johnson and Wyandotte participated. The other program is the Kansas Preschool Program. In Wyandotte and Johnson Counties, two of the ten school districts participated in the Kansas Preschool Program. Grants are awarded to school districts and nonprofit community partnerships or community agencies on behalf of a coalition of service providers. Although important elements in the ECE system, these programs are not sufficiently funded to provide universal prekindergarten for all children in either state.

One approach to informing consumers about the quality of available ECE programs is the use of a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), which summarizes the quality of programs into an overall rating. Both Missouri and Kansas had a QRIS until 2012, when both were abandoned (in Missouri, due to legislation; in Kansas, due to funding). Both states plan to begin funding new QRIS pilot projects in 2017.

Accreditation is frequently used as an indicator of quality for ECE programs. Supporting early care and education programs to achieve national or state accreditation has been a focus of quality initiatives in the Greater Kansas City area for over twenty years. In the three counties, the number of accredited programs reached its highest level in 2006, 161 programs, and has dropped off considerably since. In 2012 the Missouri Legislature trimmed \$10 million in funding for ECE programs, including accreditation support.

DEMOGRAPHIC, ECONOMIC, AND ECE COUNTY PROFILES

The three counties covered by the two survey projects differ with respect to demographic and economic conditions, as well as ECE characteristics. Johnson County fares better on all economic indicators than Jackson and Wyandotte Counties. For example, the 2015 median household income for Johnson was \$82,892, compared to \$48,212 in Jackson and \$41,800 in Wyandotte. Johnson County also has fewer minorities compared to Jackson and Wyandotte. Whites make up 81% of Johnson County's population, but only 63% and 42% of Jackson and Wyandotte's population, respectively (2015 ACS estimates). Wyandotte County has the largest proportion of Hispanics/Latinos (28%) of all three counties. Based on the number of children under six years old with all parents in the labor force, as well as the number of spots available in licensed programs, the need for licensed child care exceeds the licensed capacity available in all three counties. The cost of child care also differs among the three counties. Average weekly child care costs are highest in Johnson, followed by Wyandotte, then Jackson. For example, center-based care for an infant under one year costs an average of \$294 a week in Johnson, \$198 in Wyandotte, and \$173 in Jackson.

METHOD

The Family Conservancy (TFC) was the lead agency for the Greater Kansas City Early Care and Education Landscape Study, with the Juniper Gardens Children’s Project (University of Kansas) and the Office of Social and Economic Data Analysis (University of Missouri) as collaborating subcontractors.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions were addressed by the survey.

- 1: What are children’s demographic characteristics?
- 2: What are the programs’ characteristics?
- 3: What are program staff characteristics?

POPULATION OF PROVIDERS AND PARTICIPANTS RECRUITED

To address the research questions, the following types of ECE programs were recruited:

- **School-based programs** were school district Pre-K programs located in school district facilities, which are exempt from licensure.
- **Center-based programs** were licensed child care centers able to serve more than 20 children. Also included here were licensed group home programs that are able to serve 11-20 children who are not relatives of the provider that may be located in the operator’s residence.
- **Home-based programs** were licensed homes operated by an individual in her/his residence, caring for up to 10 children who are not relatives of the operator.

Three surveys were developed specifically for each program type. Across both phases a total of 414 programs were surveyed: 25 school-based, 248 center-based, and 141 home-based programs. The programs employed over 5,500 staff and served about 26,000 children. The Phase 1 surveys were conducted in spring/summer of 2015, and the Phase 2 in spring/summer of 2016. The survey return rate for Phase 1 was 58% and 50% for Phase 2.

LIMITATIONS/CONSIDERATIONS

One drawback of survey research is that the data are based on self-report, which relies on the memory and knowledge of the respondents. Some programs were reluctant to share financial data, including staff pay, which resulted in missing data.

Due to differences in licensing regulations, there are far more licensed homes in Johnson and Wyandotte Counties than in Jackson County. We chose to recruit a sample of homes in the Kansas counties, rather than recruiting from the population as we did in Jackson County. As a result, the number of home-based programs—and the associated number of children served—is not representative of home-based programs for Johnson and Wyandotte Counties.

The school-based program data represents information for most school district early childhood programs. However, because school districts were given the option to complete more than one survey if they had more than one early childhood program within the district, the sample size for school-based programs represents 11 overall district responses (representing 27 programs) and 14 specific school-based program responses (from 5 districts).

Due to project fiscal considerations, there were no direct assessments of program or class quality, which limits the ability of this study to draw any definite conclusions about the quality of early learning programs.

SUMMARY OF LANDSCAPE CONDITIONS ACROSS GREATER KANSAS CITY

Below are key results from Phases 1 and 2. Broadly speaking, most of the differences seen between regions are due to the disparate policy contexts of Missouri and Kansas. The policy differences with respect to child care subsidy and accreditation all favor Missouri programs. Most of the discrepancies between program types, which typically favor school-based programs over centers and homes, can be attributed to differences in resources and expectations for accountability.

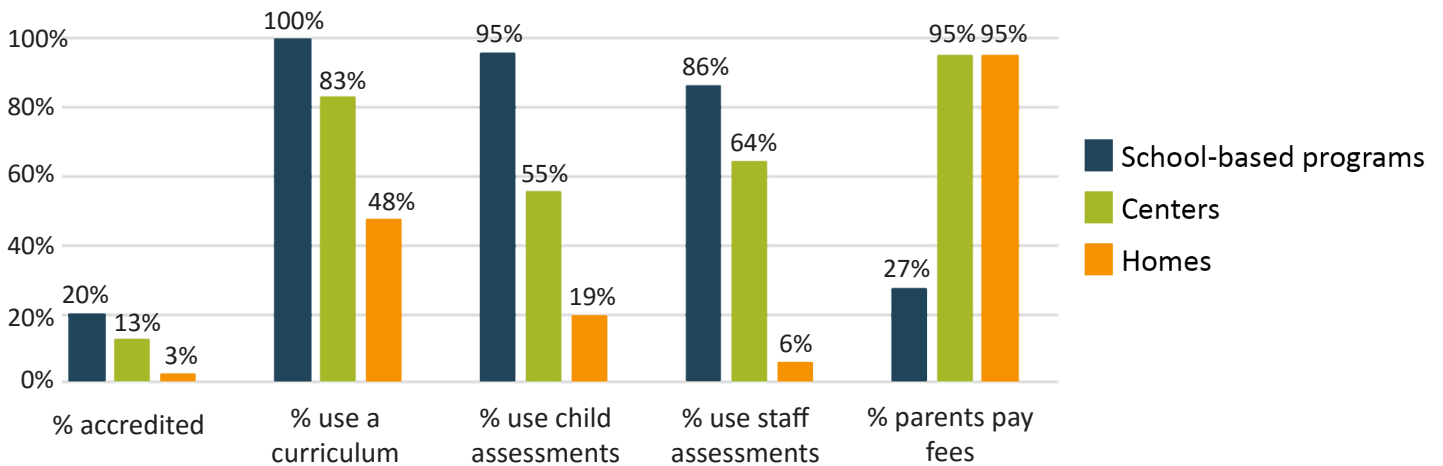
Program Characteristics

For the programs surveyed across the three counties, centers served the majority of children (74%), followed by school-based programs (22%), then home-based programs (4%). (Note that the figure served by homes is not representative of the actual number served across the three counties). As shown in Figure 1, school-based programs, centers, and homes differed with respect to program characteristics across both phases. Compared to centers and homes, school-based programs were more likely to be accredited, use a curriculum, assess children, and employ staff assessments. In turn, centers were more likely than homes to meet these conditions. Centers and homes relied most heavily on parent fees, as well as child care subsidies, to fund their programs. Schools reported access to other funding sources, such as Head Start and state-based preschool grants, which are not easily available to centers and not available at all to homes.

One of the most important findings is the lack of accredited programs in both regions, which is especially noteworthy in Kansas where no school-based or home-based programs were accredited in the sample. Because of differing state policies, Missouri programs have more incentives and supports to reach accreditation than Kansas programs.

Figure 1

Selected Program Characteristics across Phases 1 and 2



Schools $n = 25$

Centers $n = 248$

Homes $n = 141$

Note: n 's may differ by indicator

Child Characteristics

As shown in Figure 2, the programs surveyed served more children three years and older (67%) than children younger than three (33%). Children under the age of three were served mostly in homes and centers, whereas school-based programs almost exclusively served children three years or older (see Figure 3).

Figure 2

Children Served by Age Group across Phases 1 and 2

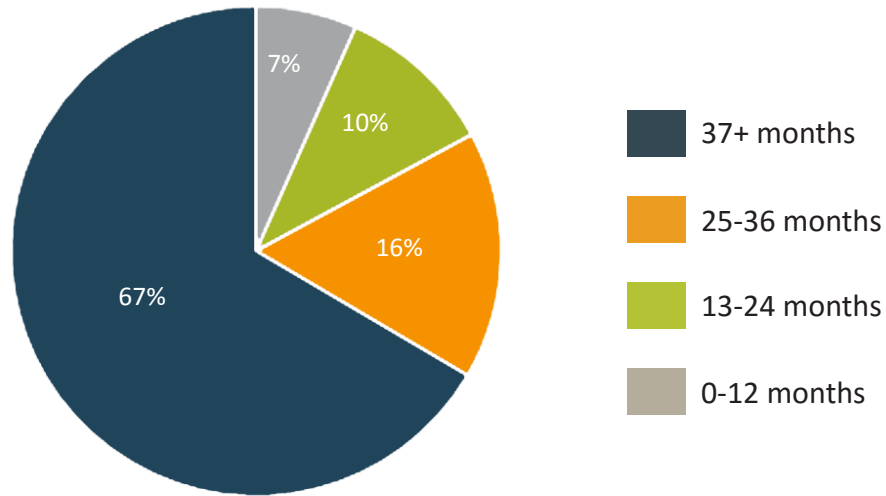
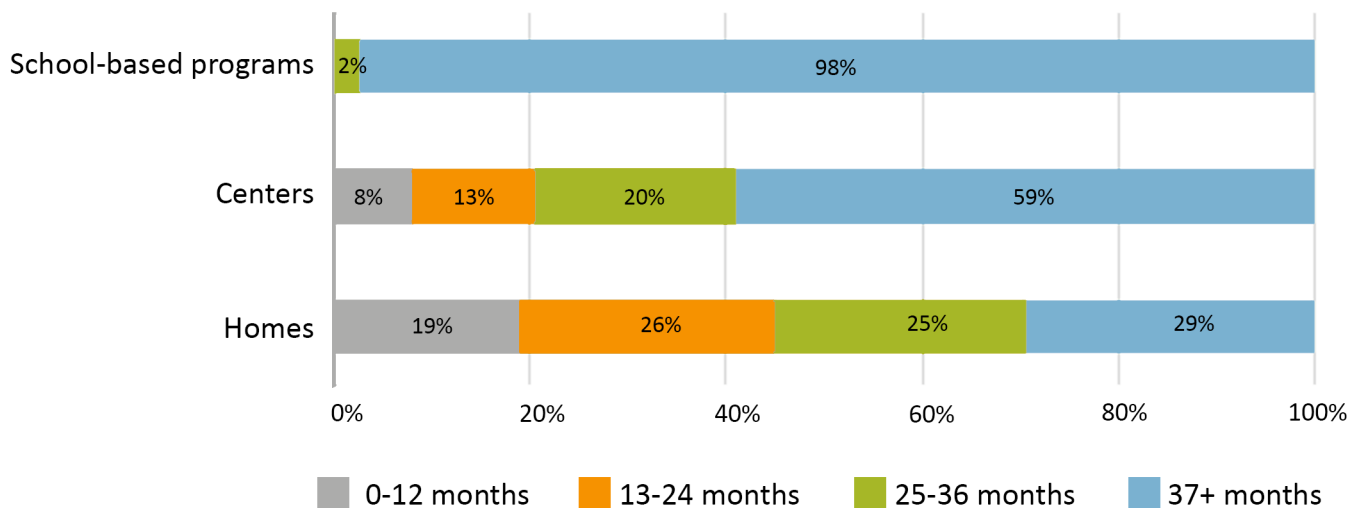


Figure 3

Age of Children Served by Program Type across Phases 1 and 2

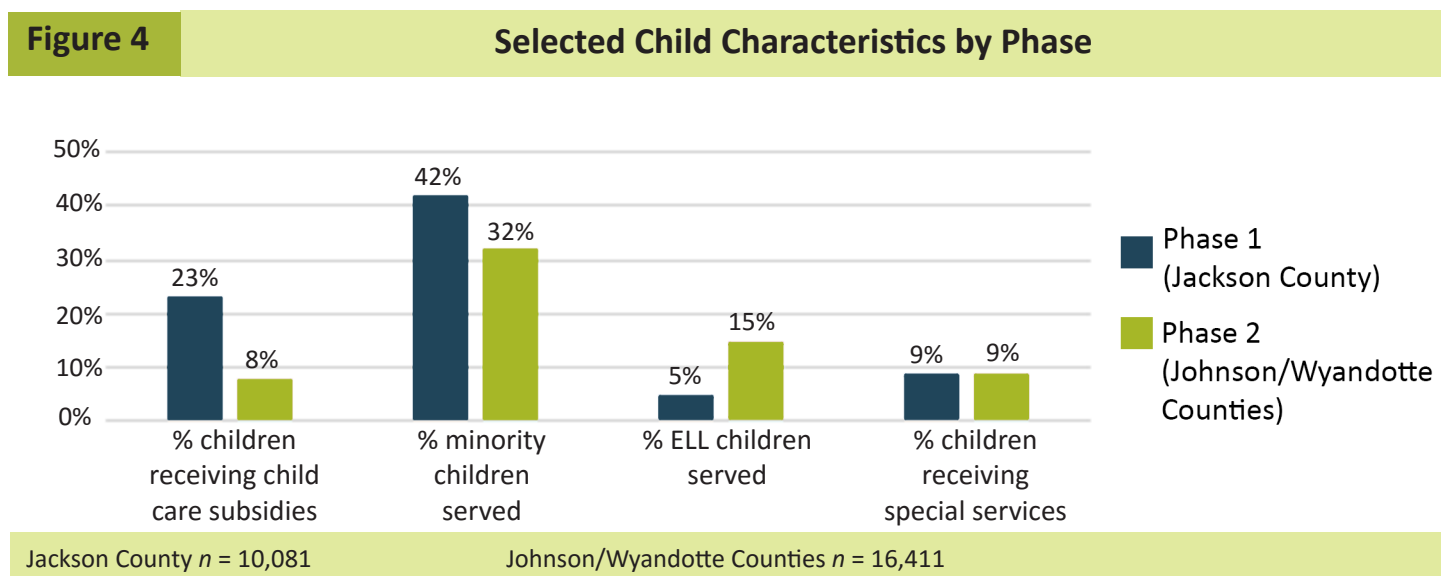


Schools $n = 5,698$

Centers $n = 18,401$

Homes $n = 1,009$

As shown in Figure 4, the characteristics of children served by the participating programs differed between phases. Programs in Johnson/Wyandotte Counties served a larger proportion of English Language Learners (ELLs) than those in Jackson County. Two reasons for the discrepancy between the two regions are the higher percentage of Latinos/Hispanics and the higher percentage of residents who speak languages other than English on the Kansas side. For both regions, more ELL children were served in school-based programs than in centers and homes.



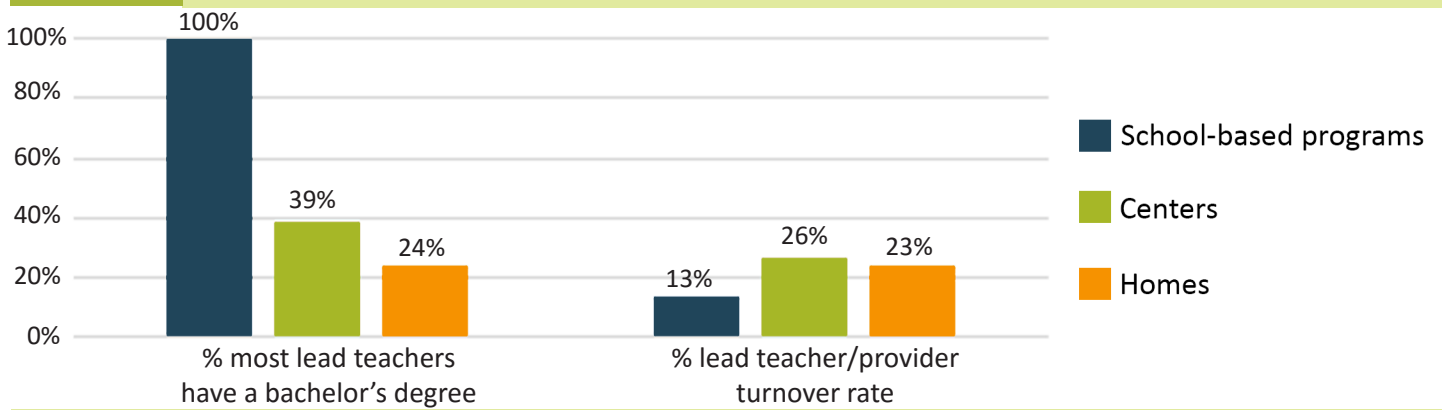
A critical finding is that the two regions differed in the extent to which they served children from families with low incomes. Programs in Jackson County served a larger percentage of children receiving subsidies (23%) than those in Johnson/Wyandotte (8%), mostly due to differences in income demographics and the greater availability of child care subsidies in Missouri. Fortunately, families with low incomes on both sides appeared to be accessing the few accredited programs at roughly the same rate as families with higher incomes.

However, the data suggest that there were differences between the two regions with respect to how frequently minority children accessed accredited programs. In Jackson County, accredited programs served a higher percentage of minority children than non-accredited programs (62% vs. 38%). In Johnson/Wyandotte Counties, the opposite was true (17% vs. 34%). A potential reason for this difference is that most of the accredited programs on the Kansas side were in Johnson County, which has relatively fewer minority children compared to Wyandotte and Jackson Counties.

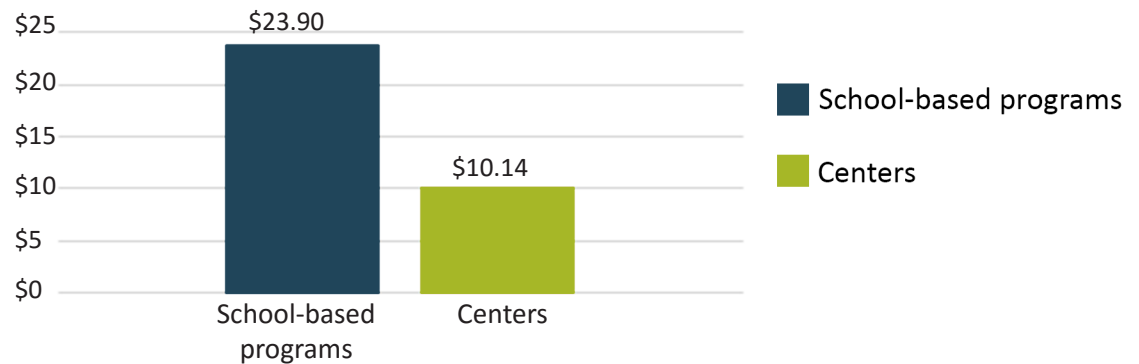
Staff Characteristics

As shown in Figure 5, there were large differences in highest education level for lead teachers/providers among program types. All school-based programs reported that most of their lead teachers had a bachelor's degree or higher. For centers, the percentage was significantly lower, with home providers the least likely to report having a bachelor's degree. There were also county differences; a higher percentage of Johnson County programs (53%) reported that most of their lead teachers/providers have a bachelor's degree compared to programs in Jackson (25%) and Wyandotte (31%) Counties.

Figure 5 also shows that lead teacher/provider turnover rates were lower in school-based programs than centers and homes in both phases. Higher wages, better benefits, and stability of school-based positions contribute to the retention of lead teachers in schools.

Figure 5**Selected Staff Characteristics by Program Type**Schools $n = 25$ Centers $n = 248$ Homes $n = 141$

Note. The turnover rate for homes is actually the percent of home providers who reported they were considering closing.

Figure 6**Average Starting Wages for Lead Teachers by Program Type**Schools $n = 12$ Centers $n = 232$

As shown in Figure 6, starting hourly wages for school-based lead teachers were more than twice that for center lead teachers in both regions. (Home providers were not asked about their wages.) The differences in education level for lead teachers in school-based programs and centers explains much of the difference in average hourly wages for teachers in these two groups. For the most part, wages were similar across both regions.

The survey findings about the staff pipeline to programs yielded some interesting differences among program types. Across both regions, school staff cited working in the same program but in a different position (e.g., moving from assistant to lead teacher) as their most common prior employment status. Center staff were most likely to cite working in a different program but in a similar position, which corresponds with the turnover rate seen in centers. Home-based providers across both regions were most likely to report that their job prior to working as a provider was in a field outside of education. Given that home providers were less likely to have a bachelor's degree compared to school-based and center lead teachers, these findings taken together suggest that home providers generally have less experience and qualifications than teachers working in centers and schools.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the background information and findings from the Phase 1 and 2 reports, the following conclusions are drawn about the ECE landscape of Greater Kansas City.

The child population served by participating ECE programs is diverse.

- The percentage of minority children served by participating Jackson County programs was 42%, compared to 32% for programs in Johnson and Wyandotte Counties.
- In Johnson and Wyandotte Counties, 15% of children served by participating programs were ELL, compared to 5% for Jackson County.
- Across all three counties, 9% of children received special services.
- In Jackson County, 23% of children received child care subsidies compared to 8% of children in Johnson and Wyandotte Counties. The difference between the two regions is partly based on demographics as well as policy differences between the two states.

Most children served by participating programs were three years or older.

- Two-thirds of children served were ages 36 months or older, whereas one third were less than three years old.
- Children under the age of three were served mostly in homes and centers, whereas school-based programs almost exclusively served children three years or older.

The proportion of accredited ECE programs is low.

- Twelve percent of Jackson County programs were accredited, compared to 7% of Johnson/Wyandotte County programs.
- In the three counties, the number of accredited programs reached its highest level in 2006 and has decreased considerably since.

State-based incentives and supports for accreditation and quality improvement are lacking.

- Neither state has a currently functioning QRIS system. Both states are planning pilots for 2017.
- In Missouri, state funds for increasing ECE program quality and helping programs achieve accreditation were cut in 2012. There are currently no state dollars for accreditation support.
- Missouri provides some incentives for programs to achieve accreditation by offering enhanced child care subsidies to programs that are accredited. Kansas does not have similar policies.
- Kansas currently has no incentives or state-based programs to support accreditation or quality improvement.

Compared to school-based programs, centers and homes have fewer financial resources.

- Centers and homes rely most heavily on parent fees, as well as child care subsidies, to fund their programs.
- Lack of resources and supports likely impacts the ability of centers and homes to hire qualified staff and to embrace important aspects of quality, including curriculum usage, use of child assessments to inform instruction, and staff assessments.

Compared to school-based programs, centers and homes tend to have less qualified teachers.

- Center teachers and home providers typically make less money, have fewer benefits, and have less education than school-based teachers.
- Teacher turnover is higher in centers than schools, partly due to the disparities in wages and benefits. One-quarter of home providers reported that they were thinking of closing in the coming year.