

# Underutilization of the Child Care Assistance Program: A Case Study of Transportation Challenges

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## Introduction

The Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) is a federally funded program that subsidizes child care for low-income families while parents are either working or attending school. While this program assists many families in Louisiana, a persistent underutilization problem has been identified reflecting families who apply for the program, are deemed eligible, but do not utilize the funds that have been set aside for their use. Seeking to improve utilization among those applying for the program, the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) sought to explore potential barriers for those accepted into the program, but not utilizing the available funds. To better understand underutilization of the CCAP program, LDOE engaged the Kathleen Blanco Public Policy Center at UL and LSU Economics & Policy Research Group. The first phase of the research was a broad-based survey with those identified by LDOE as underutilizing the program. The survey identified a number of reasons for CCAP underutilization, with the most common reason cited as the household no longer needed it, often due to the eligible child reaching schooling age, or availability of other care. However, multiple families noted transportation as a common concern.

In order to develop a better understanding of transportation concerns expressed in the initial interview, six of the CCAP clients were called for follow-up in-depth interviews. Clients were asked several questions related to the types of transportation most often utilized by the family, the impact of location on choosing a child care learning center, transportation barriers hindering greater utilization of the CCAP, and suggestions for alternative modes of transportation to better assist clients with getting their children to and from child care learning centers.

Overall, there seemed to be two prevailing themes indicated by the six clients who were contacted: the necessary use of personal vehicles to transport children to and from child care facilities and a stronger push for more transportation assistance, particularly when attempting to transport school-aged children to aftercare, following dismissal, so that clients do not have to leave work in the middle of the day.

### **Utilization of Personal Vehicles**

When asking the CCAP clients about their families' primary means of transportation, most of them (5) indicated that they utilized their own personal vehicles regularly. Only one client said she only used the bus after she had a bad car accident, which left her without her vehicle for a while. When asked what her alternative was to transport her child(ren) to and from their child care learning center, she said, *"Well, I had to not bring them. I talked to the provider because look, I'm paying \$40 out of a day and I don't make that much. And I work at a daycare in Westlake."* She went on to express, *"See the problem would be, for me, is they got to come pick me up, my children, bring them to their center, then bring me all the way to Westlake. I'm like, oh my God. Like, it's killing me."* Another client commented on how not having her own, personal transportation created a significant barrier for her when trying to utilize the CCAP.

*"Umm...it was mainly that I just didn't have my car at the time, when I did have the stuff – you know, when I qualified for it, I had my car and then when I finally got approved for it, then I had an issue with my car, and then I was able to get the child care back and then I wasn't able to use it."*

Two clients reported that their school-aged children only utilized public transportation via the school bus. Most of the clients in our sample indicated that neither they nor their children ever utilized any form of public transportation.

Aside from quality, location was an important factor when clients were deciding which child care learning center was the best choice for their child(ren). Most clients (5) indicated that when looking for child care learning centers, they try to find centers that are closer to home as opposed to closer to their place of employment. Only one client reported that the ideal location for a child care learning facility would be somewhere between her home and her place of employment. Responses varied a bit more when clients were asked how far would be too far for them to drive to transport their children to and from a child care facility. Distances ranged from a 10-minute radius to a 30-minute drive. In addition to location, clients also found their child's experiences at the child care learning center to be important. One client stated, *"Usually, if you just find a place where your kids are comfortable and safe, that's just enough, you know?"*

It seems safe to assume that the particular areas in Louisiana where clients reside may have had an impact on the distance that they were willing to travel for child care. For example, those living in larger, more metropolitan areas might be willing to drive shorter distances (e.g. 10 minutes or 10 miles) because it is expected that there would be more child care learning centers in those areas. However, those residing in more rural areas might be willing to travel a bit further (e.g. 20-30 minutes) to get to a child care learning center because there might be fewer facilities available, especially when limited to those accepting child care assistance. We

were unable to get a true assessment of this variable for the current study in an effort to maintain client anonymity.

### **Transportation Assistance**

Two clients with school-aged children reported having access to a bus that transported their children from their schools to their child care learning facilities for aftercare. However, transportation assistance does not seem to be offered at many facilities. *“Oh, at the time when I was on it, the daycare he was attending didn’t provide any transportation.”* This seemed to be a more prominent problem for single parents, especially for clients trying to juggle various aspects of life. When discussing transportation problems, one client commented, *“Yeah, and I was having to work and go to school, so that was hard.”* Another client said, *“Because that’s hard trying to get your child back and forth when you’re trying to work and do everything else.”* One client expressed that this is *“the biggest problem. Most of the daycares don’t provide transportation...the ones around here don’t.”* One client was utilizing a child care provider who provided transport, but they were only willing to pick up school-aged children.

Among our sample, trouble with transportation seemed to impact both children’s enrollment and attendance to child care learning facilities and created unnecessary inconveniences for some clients. When asked to be more specific about transportation barriers faced when trying to utilize the CCAP, one client said,

*“It just was the times that I had to work and the times that the daycare opened up...umm...it didn’t coincide with me. Because the daycare that my middle son was going to is like the only daycare in my area that goes to his school... Where – I had my kids in 2*

*different daycares. Because I had my baby, he had been in the daycare he was in since he was like 6 months old and now my middle son – the daycare my 6-month old went to, the transportation doesn't go from my son's school."*

This client ultimately had to split up her children and send them to two different child care centers because of limitations regarding transportation assistance from her middle child's school to a facility offering after school care. This results in the client having to leave work and go to two different child care learning centers to pick up each of her children, which created a huge inconvenience for her.

Another client had a similar issue with transportation, where the problem was not in getting the child to a child care learning center or school in the morning, but that getting the child from their school to an afterschool care program after dismissal. When asked about any suggestions for improving their ability to transport their children to and from child care learning centers, one client responded,

*"It's more of a problem getting them from school to the daycare. So, it's not really a getting them to the daycare in the morning. And that's the only thing. Just like a PM van or something like that."*

Some sort of transportation provided by child care facilities was mentioned by some of clients (3) when making recommendations for improving utilization of the CCAP. When specifically asked whether transportation assistance would have a significant impact on their use of child care learning facilities, all of the clients (6) agreed. While some concerns about potential safety issues and liability associated with child care learning centers providing

transportation assistance, most of the clients in this sample (5) stated that they would utilize transportation assistance even if there was an additional fee. One client suggested, *“That would be better, if we had more daycares in my area that did that because I don’t know of any.”*

Another client emphasized the difficulty in getting children to child care learning centers without a personal vehicle.

*“And you don’t want to depend on someone to bring you to pick up your child and they don’t. And now you owe the daycare late fees and, you know, you stressed because you don’t have a way of picking up your kids from daycare and it’s time for the daycare to close.”*

However, there were a couple of clients with mixed feelings regarding the child care learning centers providing transportation. When asked about thoughts regarding transportation assistance for child care, one client stated,

*“I think it’s [child care transportation assistance] a good thing, I just wish there were more umm...I mean, I know it’s a risk for them but it would help more if there were – I know years ago, they used to have like drop off at home or pick up at home.”*

Another client went into more detail regarding her concerns,

*“I probably would use it. It depends on where they – I don’t know. I have girls. SO, I’m kind of scared of like the bus stop thing and I kind of stay on a busy street... So, it kind of scares me, leaving little girls out at night... It’s dark. But like other than that, if it would come like close in the driveway or at a time when I can take them to catch the bus before I go to work, then I definitely will.”*

While clients were enthusiastic about some sort of transportation assistance provided by the child care learning centers, they also indicated that the service needed to be affordable. This was especially so because the cost of child care is already so high. Clients indicated that they would agree to pay somewhere between \$20 and \$40 per week for this sort of service.

**Summary:**

- Clients generally have to utilize their personal vehicles for child care transportation, as opposed to other means of transportation.
- While not many child care learning centers offer transportation assistance, clients indicated that this was a service they would utilize, even if there was an additional cost.
- Transportation barriers negatively impacted children's attendance to child care learning centers, utilization of the CCAP, and created unnecessary inconveniences for clients.

## Appendix

### CCAP Questions:

#### Script:

Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_, and I am calling from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. You recently completed a survey about the child care assistance program conducted by the department of education, and they have asked us to conduct follow up research to get more information about some of your concerns to improve the program. While the call will be recorded, any information provided in this call will remain anonymous. We expect this questionnaire to take about 10-15 minutes to complete and is voluntary, so you may choose to stop participating at any time. If you have questions about the questionnaire, you may contact Stephen Barnes at 337-482-5014 or the IRB at [irb@louisiana.edu](mailto:irb@louisiana.edu). Can you verify that you are at least 18 years of age before we begin?

#### Theme 3: Transportation

1. What forms of transportation do you and others in your family typically use?
  - a. Do you have your own transportation?
  - b. How often do you use public transportation?
    - i. Does your child(ren) use public transportation?
2. How do you typically transport your child(ren) to a child care learning center? (clarifying if this is the same as their general transport, or different for getting to/from a child care center)
3. Do you typically look for child care learning centers that are in close proximity to your home OR do you typically look for child care learning centers that are in close proximity to your place of employment?
  - a. What do you think of the child care facilities accepting CCAP near your home or place of employment?
  - b. Probe for quality concern mixed with transport – perhaps close options exist, but they would prefer a “better” option further away
4. How far is “too far away” for your child(ren) to attend a quality child care learning center?
5. In what ways was transportation a significant barrier to your child(ren)’s enrollment/attendance of a quality child care learning center?
  - a. Did it involve the time of day? (e.g. for working parents, such that child care facilities are not open long enough to benefit them)
  - b. Did it involve the distance of a CCAP accepting child care facility from your home or place of employment?
6. If your child(ren)’s child care learning center provided transportation, how likely would you use this service for your child(ren)?
  - a. Would you use this service if there was an additional fee associated?
  - b. How much would you be willing to pay for this service?
7. Does your child(ren) also attend before or after care?
  - a. Would transportation assistance impact whether or not your child(ren) would attend before or after care?

8. What is a suggestion you might have for improving your ability to transport your children to and from child care facilities?