# THE MISSING PIECE

## Quality Early Childhood Education as an Essential Component in Addressing Louisiana's Labor Force Needs

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## AUTHORS & CONTRIBUTORS

**Stephen Barnes, Ph.D.**
University of Louisiana at Lafayette
Kathleen Babineaux Blanco Public Policy Center

**Belinda Davis, Ph.D.**
Louisiana State University

**Ben Vincent, M.A.**
University of Louisiana at Lafayette
Kathleen Babineaux Blanco Public Policy Center

**Heather Cope, M.S.T.**
Louisiana Policy Institute for Children

**Libbie Sonnier, Ph.D.**
Louisiana Policy Institute for Children

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors thank our colleagues Mattilyn Karst Batson and Victoria Gudino at the Louisiana Policy Institute and Vincent Rossmeier at NOIR Consulting for their contributions in producing this report.

This report was made possible with the support of Entergy and W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

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# Abstract

Across the United States, the academic and social benefits of early childhood education (ECE) are widely recognized by scholars and policymakers. While early research into the field focused on benefits to children and local communities, research has shifted to focusing more on the economic impact for employers and working parents. This study uses survey data to assess the prevalence of challenges Louisiana's families face in employment when they encounter child care difficulties. Additionally, it estimates how access to quality ECE could play a key role in helping Louisiana meet its labor force demands and the corresponding economic impact benefits it would create.

This study was conducted in two phases. First, researchers at Louisiana State University (LSU) conducted a statewide survey of households with children age 4 and under, asking parents and guardians a series of questions on workforce participation and child care issues. Second, economists at the Blanco Public Policy Center at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette (ULL) developed an estimate of the impact of child care failures on workforce participation and absenteeism, and the corresponding impact of child care access on increased labor force participation, wage earnings, and economic output.

Key findings from the survey and workforce participation estimates include the following:

- **Parents of young children juggle jobs and child care:** Two-thirds of children under age 5 have all available parents in the workforce. Yet, 66% of families also rely on parental care for child care.
- **Child care issues keep parents from working:** 1 in 3 respondents reduced their work hours due to child care challenges. Nearly 1 in 5 quit their job due to child care issues.
- **ECE is a driver for the Louisiana economy:** Statewide universal, comprehensive ECE is estimated to generate as much as $3.2 billion in additional earnings and $5.3 billion in output statewide due to expanded maternal labor force participation.[1] The increase in economic output implies roughly $129 million in new state tax collections annually, once labor force and earnings expansions have fully adjusted.

# INTRODUCTION

## Background

In 2017, the Louisiana Policy Institute for Children (LPIC), in conjunction with academic researchers from across the state, published *Losing Ground: How Child Care Impacts Louisiana's Workforce Productivity and the State's Economy*. This groundbreaking report quantified economic losses to the state and to its businesses when parents experience problems related to child care. In addition to being replicated by states across the country, the report has been cited by hundreds of nonprofits, think tanks, interest groups, and state and local governments, including the National Governors Association, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, and the Bipartisan Policy Center. This year, LPIC facilitated a similar but more comprehensive examination of how Louisiana's working families navigate the state's child care environment and how the problems they encounter impact Louisiana's economy. In particular, this year's report focuses on how the state's labor supply is impacted by problems associated with access to child care.

The benefits of early childhood education (ECE) are now well documented in academic research, ranging from academic and social benefits for children who receive high quality ECE to community returns on investment such as lower crime rates and higher tax collections as a result of increased income.[2] Louisiana has responded to this well-established and growing body of research by increasing the amount that businesses can contribute to the Workforce Child Care Tax Credits (formerly known as the School Readiness Tax Credits), co-locating all five of the state's early education programs in a single agency for more effective and efficient programming, and revamping its Quality Rating Improvement System by relying on a high-quality and rigorous assessment measure. However, the state continues to lag behind other states in important metrics such as the number of all 3- and 4-year-olds not in school,[3] a longstanding waitlist for the Child Care Assistance Program which now surpasses 7,800 children,[4] and an inadequate supply of licensed child care providers.[5] This report provides an update on the economic consequences of failing to ensure that all Louisiana families have access to high-quality ECE.

Against a backdrop of a huge wave of capital investment announcements across the state, the most recent Louisiana Legislative session was dominated by bipartisan efforts to ensure that the state could meet the labor demands of the anticipated economic growth from these projects. This need for skilled labor requires the coordination of multiple agencies, such as the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE), the state's institutions of higher education, Louisiana Works, and the Louisiana Department of Economic Development. The analysis in this report illustrates that addressing the child care needs of Louisiana's working families is an essential component of meeting the state's growing labor demands and ultimate economic prosperity.

## Overview of Methodolgy

This study was conducted in two phases. First, researchers at Louisiana State University (LSU) developed and contracted with a firm to conduct a representative statewide survey of households with children aged 4 and under. The survey questions assess Louisiana families' child care arrangements and the intersection of child care issues and workforce participation.

The second phase of the study builds upon key findings from the survey, with the Blanco Public Policy Center at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette (ULL) developing an economywide estimate of the impact of child care instability on workforce participation and absenteeism. The labor-supply estimates combine three major elements:

1. American Community Survey estimates of the number of mothers of young children currently out of the labor force in Louisiana;
2. A 10-percentage-point participation response drawn from the range of rigorous evaluations of large-scale ECE expansions; and
3. Estimated employment rates, hours, and earnings for Louisiana women ages 19-44.

The LSU survey supplies the local evidence that the same constraints documented in the national literature (e.g., job-match hurdles or reduced hours) hold true in Louisiana, and supports the key finding of the expected increase in labor force participation that would result from expanded ECE. The resulting estimates were then analyzed with a regional economic impact model to determine the broader economy-wide impact of child care challenges. In addition, Blanco Center researchers estimated the state tax revenues associated with the total economic impact of child care challenges. Together, these findings provide a broad assessment of the economic impact of child care challenges on Louisiana's employers and state government and, more importantly, its impact on parents and their ability to engage in the workforce and help support a critical expansion of Louisiana's labor supply.

# Placing Louisiana in the National Context

Before diving into the specifics of the child care environment in Louisiana, it is helpful to examine some basic economic indicators from a national and state perspective. Louisiana's labor force participation rate lags behind that of the national average, and the state's unemployment rate is slightly higher than that of the nation overall.[6] Simultaneously, the share of unfilled Louisiana jobs consistently exceeds that of the nation overall, while Louisiana maintains a lower rate of unemployed labor force participants per job opening than the United States.[7] Louisiana's average weekly wage is materially less than the national average, as reflected in Table 1 below. While the percentage of the median family income spent on infant care for married couples matches the national rate at 10%, for single-parent families in Louisiana, 39% of their income is spent on infant care compared to 33% nationally.[8]

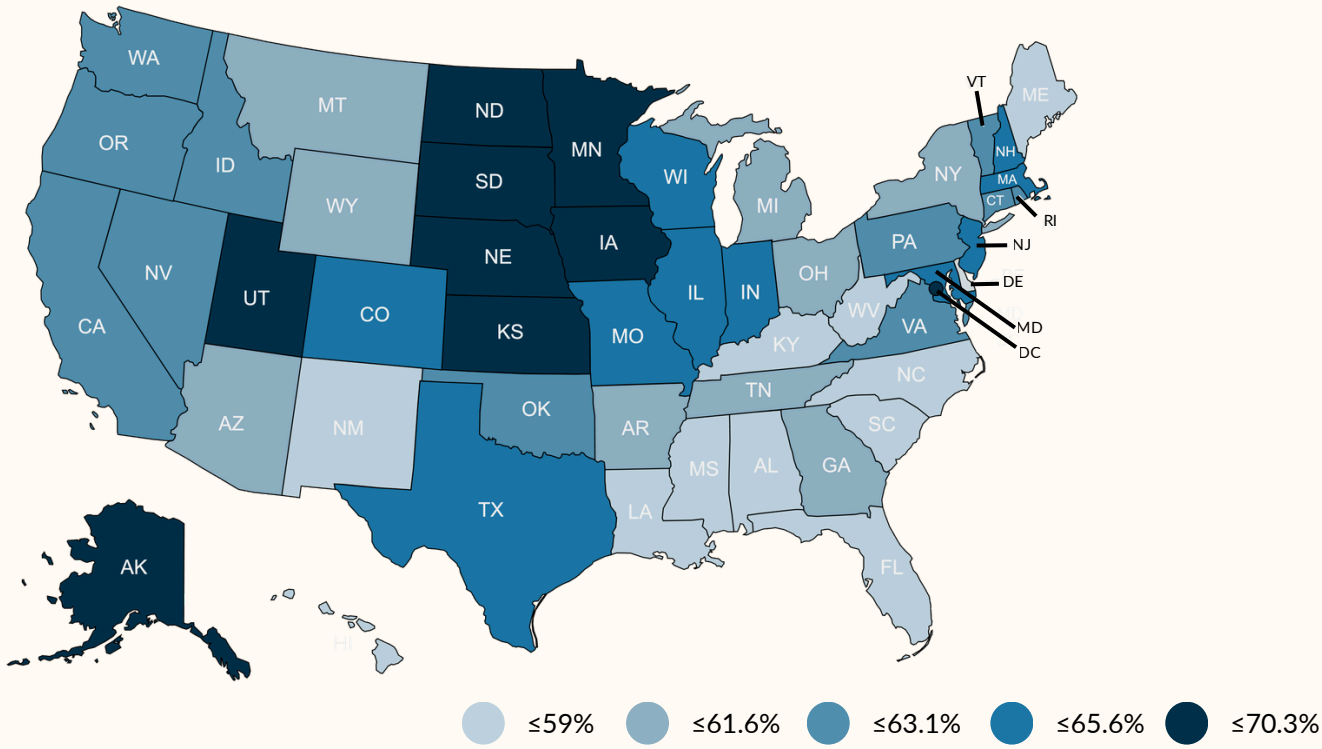
**Table 1: Basic Economic Indicators**

| | United States | Louisiana |
|---|---|---|
| Labor Force Participation Rate | 62.4% | 58.2% |
| Unemployment Rate | 4.3% | 4.3% |
| Average Weekly Wage | $1,514 | $1,213 |
| % of Median Married Family Income Spent on Infant Care | 10% | 10% |
| % of Median Single Family Income Spent on Infant Care | 33% | 39% |
| % of Children Living in a Child Care Desert | 46.0% | 49.5% |

*Note. Table data for labor force, unemployment, and wages represent 2025 annual averages.*
*Sources: U.S. labor force participation rate and unemployment rate data are from the Current Population Survey, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Louisiana labor force participation rate and unemployment rate data are from Local Area Unemployment Statistics, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Average weekly wage data for both the U.S. and Louisiana are from Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.*[9]

**The share of unfilled Louisiana jobs consistently exceeds that of the nation overall, while Louisiana maintains a lower rate of unemployed labor force participants per job opening than the U.S.**

**Figure 2: Labor Force Participation Rate by State**




*Created with MapChart*
*Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics via FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis*

Despite increasing interest in how employment experiences and employment decisions are affected by challenges with child care, questions on national surveys that also allow for a state breakdown are still rare. The National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH) consistently includes a question on its surveys that assesses employment changes because of problems with child care, such as the need to quit a job or take time off due to a lack of child care coverage.[10] According to NSCH data, 10.3% of respondents nationally with children aged 0 to 5 indicated they experienced employment changes due to child care issues.[11] For Louisiana residents, the percentage in the NSCH data set was slightly higher at 10.9%; however, the sample size is relatively small. In the LSU survey, 14.7% of respondents answered yes to the same question, a difference of nearly 4 percentage points.[12]

**Table 3: Percentage of Respondents Reporting Child Care Issues Affecting Employment**

| | Percent of Respondents | Number of Respondents |
|---|---|---|
| Nationwide (National Survey of Children's Health 2023-24) | 10.3% | 3,398 |
| Louisiana (National Survey of Children's Health 2023-24) | 10.9% | 109 |
| Louisiana (Louisiana State University Survey 2026) | 14.7% | 495 |

# STATEWIDE SURVEY RESULTS

The LSU survey results offer a more robust snapshot of how Louisiana families' employment experiences and decisions are impacted by child care access, costs, and challenges. This representative survey sample included 500 respondents, allowing for more substantial analysis of statewide results compared to similar national surveys. Nearly 70% of the survey respondents were married, and 57% reported being employed full-time. The modal family income of respondents was between $75,000 and $99,999. See Appendix A for additional survey methodology detail.

# PARENTAL CARE DOMINATES CHILD CARE ARRANGEMENTS

Louisiana families rely on varied types of arrangements to provide child care for their children under age 5. Table 4 shows the types of child care arrangements used by Louisiana families by arrangement type and child age. Survey respondents were asked to indicate all of the options that applied to an individual child. Overall, 66% of respondents reported relying on a parent for child care. Parental care remained the most common form of care until age 4. When infants were not being cared for by one of their parents, the most common child care arrangement was a home-based provider, commonly referred to as family child care. Two-year-olds were the children most likely to be in a child care center outside of the home. Yet, while nearly a quarter of 2-year-olds were in a child care center, that number dropped sharply to just over 4% for 3-year-olds.

Just over half of families with a 4-year-old utilized pre-kindergarten (pre-K) in a school setting. While Louisiana does not offer universal pre-K for 4-year-olds, there are publicly funded options for economically disadvantaged families through the Cecil J. Picard LA 4 Early Childhood Program and the Nonpublic School Early Childhood Development Program. Additionally, a handful of parishes fund universal pre-K programs using local funds (for example, Pointe Coupee, Sabine, St. Bernard, St. Charles, and Washington). More recently, some districts, such as East Baton Rouge Parish, are experimenting with public-private partnerships to expand pre-K programming. The survey results suggest that when pre-K programming is available, parents are likely to use this child care arrangement.

**Table 4: Type of Child Care Arrangements Used by Child Age**

| Type of Care | Infants | 1-Year-Olds | 2-Year-Olds | 3-Year-Olds | 4-Year-Olds | Overall |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Parent | 73.7% | 93.6% | 89.1% | 85.7% | 41.5% | 66.4% |
| Family Member | 6.3% | 8.6% | 8.0% | 23.9% | 40.7% | 29.9% |
| Home-Based Provider | 44.5% | 2.7% | 8.3% | 6.7% | 2.8% | 10.7% |
| Child Care Center | 4.2% | 13.6% | 23.6% | 4.2% | 4.7% | 12.7% |
| Head Start | 0.5% | 9.4% | 15.0% | 12.8% | 6.0% | 11.6% |
| Pre-Kindergarten | – | – | – | 9.7% | 50.4% | 27.0% |
| Private Sitter | 5.7% | 2.2% | 2.8% | 2.4% | 1.6% | 2.8% |
| Friend | 1.2% | 0.3% | 2.1% | 3.5% | 0.6% | 2.5% |
| *Number of Observations* | *82* | *72* | *123* | *157* | *194* | *500* |

*Note: Respondents may use more than one type of care for each child. Percentages may total more than 100%.*

Table 5 breaks down types of care by respondents' number of children. Respondents with more than one child aged 4 and under were much more likely than those with a single child to rely on a parent for child care, 95.5% and 57.0%, respectively. Because respondents were asked to indicate all types of care that are used for each individual child, it is possible to analyze whether or not families are cobbling together child care across multiple types of arrangements.[13] Statewide, over 41% of parents reported using multiple child care arrangements for an individual child. This number is slightly higher than national reporting of multiple arrangements. For example, a study by the Pew Center found 39% of parents reported using multiple arrangements. Families with only one young child were more likely to rely on multiple care arrangements than families with more than one child under age 5. Roughly 1 in 2 respondents with a single child under age 5 relied on multiple child care arrangements compared to just 1 in 4 respondents with multiple children under age 5.

**Table 5: Type of Child Care Arrangements Used by Number of Children**

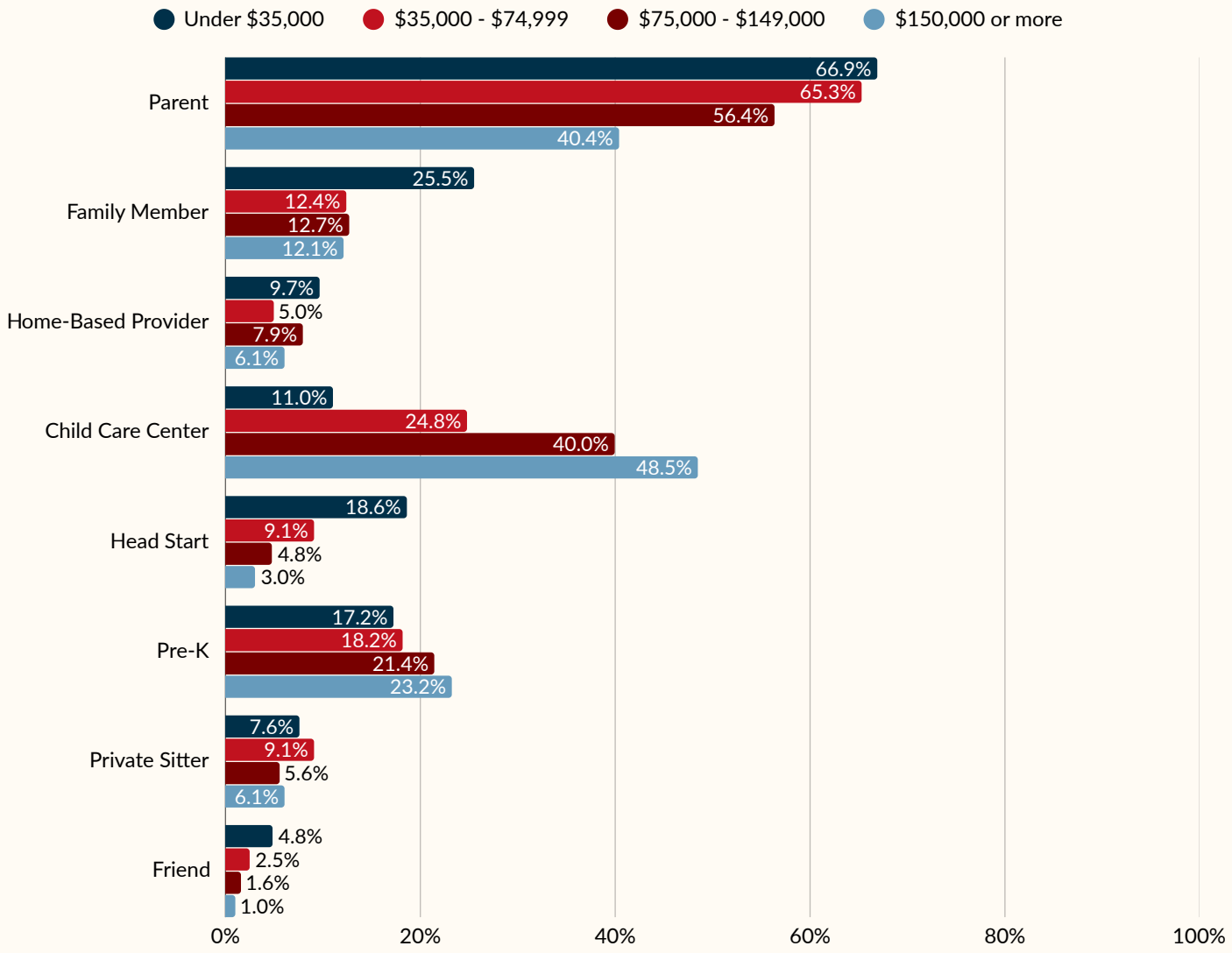
| Type of Care | One Child | Two or More Children | Overall |
|---|---|---|---|
| Parent | 57.0% | 95.5% | 66.4% |
| Family Member | 35.5% | 13.0% | 29.9% |
| Home-Based Provider | 9.2% | 15.3% | 10.7% |
| Child Care Center | 10.5% | 19.5% | 12.7% |
| Head Start | 10.0% | 16.4% | 11.6% |
| Pre-Kindergarten | 29.9% | 19.3% | 27.0% |
| Private Sitter | 2.0% | 5.0% | 2.8% |
| Friend | 0.4% | 8.6% | 2.5% |
| Multiple Care Arrangements | 47.5% | 24.9% | 41.4% |
| *Number of Observations* | *374* | *120* | *500* |

*Note: Respondents may use more than one type of care for each child. Percentages may total more than 100%.*

**The waitlist for Louisiana's Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), which provides subsidized child care for working families meeting income eligibility requirements, has more than 7,800 children on it.**

While child care arrangements vary by the age of the child, Figure 6 illustrates how Louisiana families' choices differ by income. For example, as incomes rise, families increase their reliance on child care centers. Families with annual incomes of at least $150,000 a year were much more likely to use child care centers. In fact, parents in this income bracket were more likely to use a child care center (48%) than they were to rely on parental care (40%). At the other end of the income spectrum, families with annual incomes under $35,000 a year utilized child care centers around 10% of the time, and only 19% of these families relied on a Head Start Program for child care. One potential reason for the low rate of center use by parents with lower incomes is the waitlist for subsidized care. The waitlist for Louisiana's Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), which provides subsidized child care for working families meeting income eligibility requirements, has more than 7,800 children on it.[14] Additionally, only 9% of those eligible for Early Head Start and 31% of those eligible for Head Start are able to be served at the current federal funding level.[15] For additional detail on common occupations in Louisiana that fall into these income categories, and their corresponding average wages, see Appendix B.

**Figure 6: Type of Child Care Arrangements Used by Household Income Band**




*Note: Respondents may use more than one type of care for each child. Percentages may total more than 100%.*

# THE ROLE OF GEOGRAPHY IN CHILD CARE ARRANGEMENTS

To examine whether or not location plays a role in determining families' choices for child care, arrangements were also analyzed by region and by urban and rural designations. The state's parishes were grouped into three regions: Southeast Louisiana, Acadiana and Southwest Louisiana, and Central and North Louisiana. The lists of parishes included in each region can be found in Table 7.

**Table 7: Geographic Regions Used for Analysis**

| Geographic Region | Parishes |
|---|---|
| Southeast Louisiana | Assumption, Lafourche, Jefferson, Orleans, Plaquemines, St. Bernard, St. Charles, St. James, St. John the Baptist, St. Tammany, Terrebonne |
| Acadiana & Southwest Louisiana | Acadia, Allen, Ascension, Beauregard, Calcasieu, Cameron, East Baton Rouge, East Feliciana, Evangeline, Iberia, Iberville, Jefferson Davis, Lafayette, Livingston, Pointe Coupee, St. Helena, St. Landry, St. Martin, St. Mary, Tangipahoa, Vermilion, Washington, West Baton Rouge, West Feliciana |
| Central & North Louisiana | Avoyelles, Bienville, Bossier, Caddo, Caldwell, Catahoula, Claiborne, Concordia, DeSoto, East Carroll, Franklin, Grant, Jackson, LaSalle, Lincoln, Madison, Morehouse, Natchitoches, Ouachita, Rapides, Red River, Richland, Sabine, Tensas, Union, Vernon, Webster, West Carroll, Winn |

Figure 8 reveals large regional differences in child care arrangements used by families. Nearly 90% of families in Central/North Louisiana relied on a parent for child care, while in the other two regions of the state, just over half of parents used this option. One reason for these differences might pertain to the number of children under age 5 in the home. In the Southeast and Acadiana/Southwest regions, 85% of families reported having a single child under age 5 in the home. For the North/Central region, just 50% of families reported a single child under age 5 in the home. Additionally, pre-K programs were more frequently utilized in the Acadian/Southwest region of the state, with over 40% of parents using this option compared to just 20% in the Southeast and less than 5% in Central/North Louisiana. Less than 3% of families in the Central/North region relied on child care centers.

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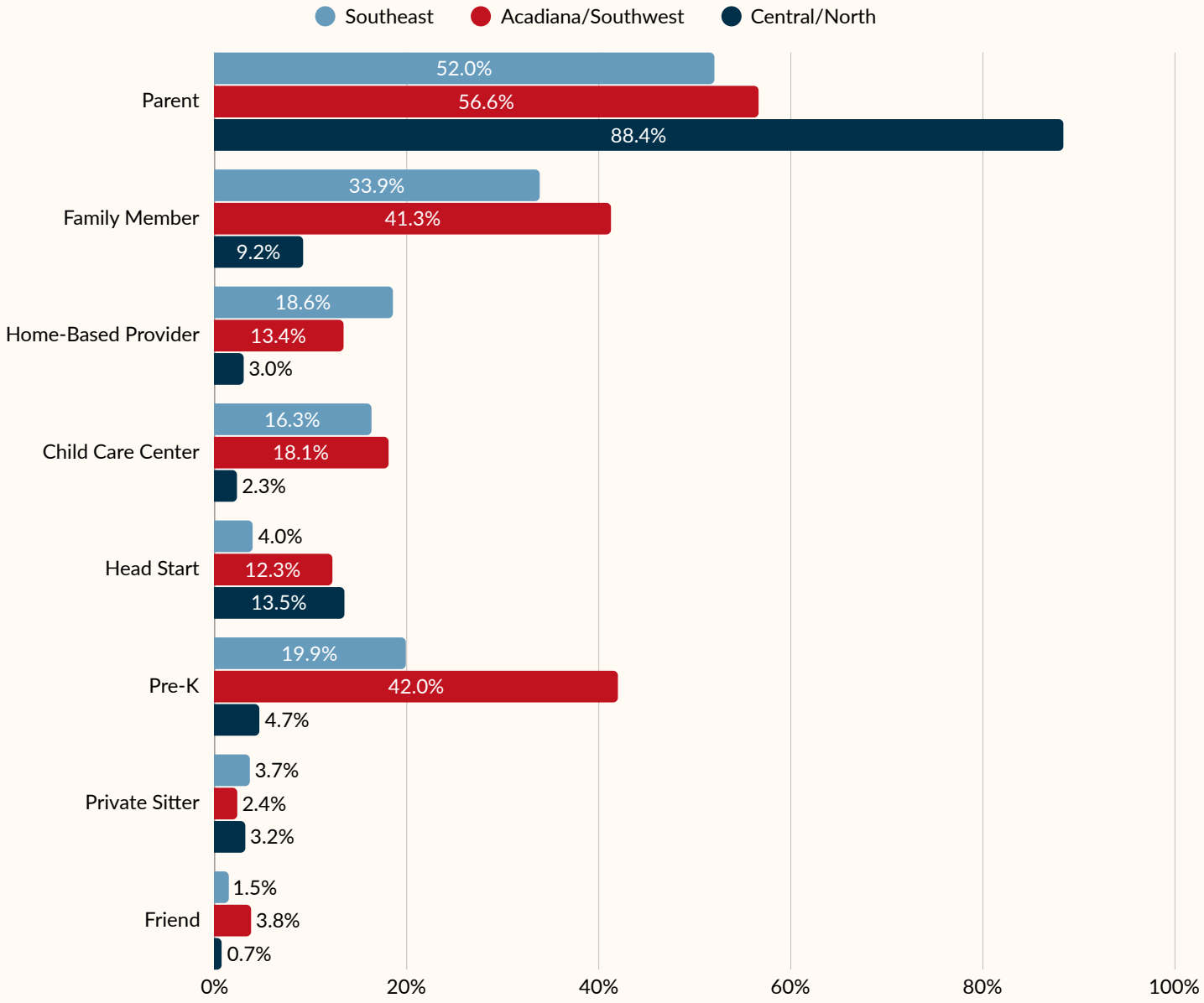
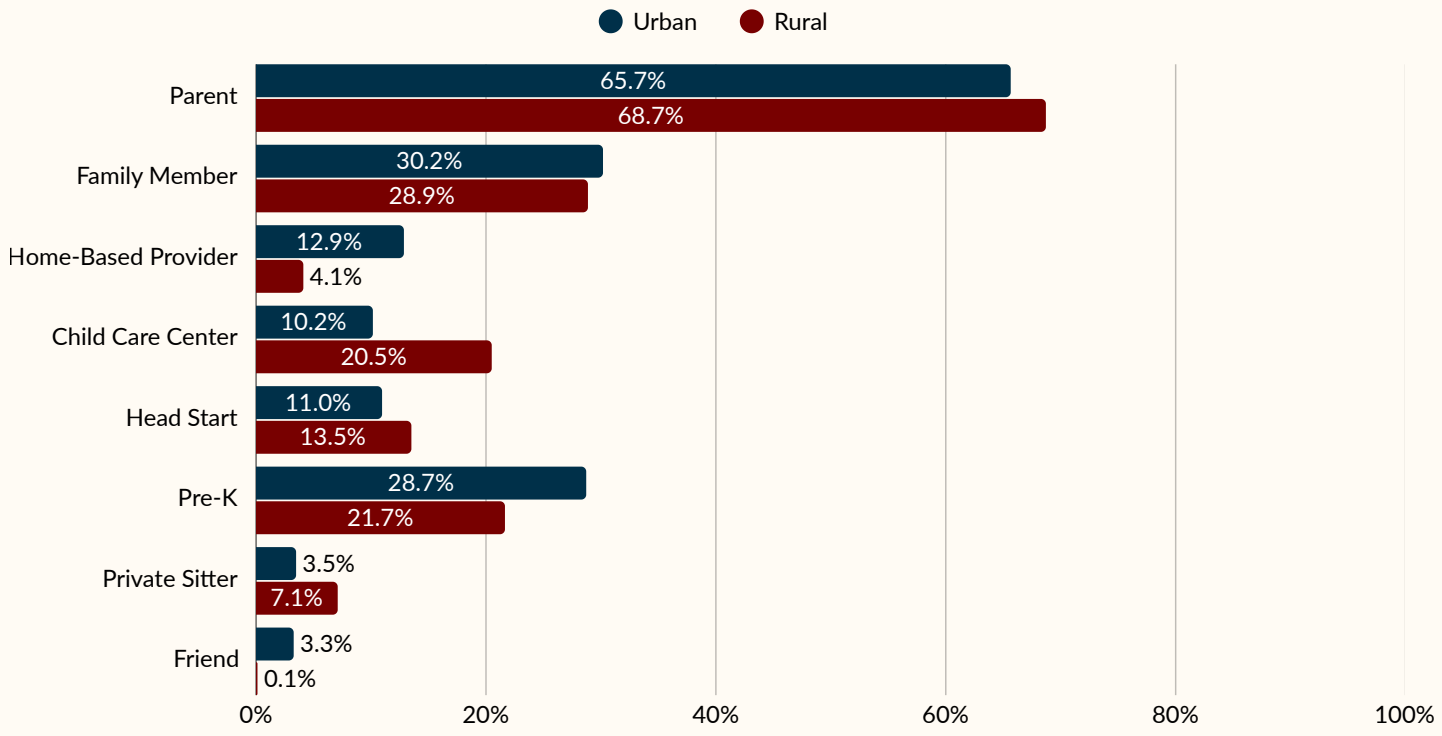
**Figure 8: Type of Child Care Arrangements Used by Geographic Region**




*Note: Respondents may use more than one type of care for each child. Percentages may total more than 100%.*

The differences across urban and rural communities are not as dramatic as those across geographic regions. The largest differences between urban and rural areas pertain to the utilization of child care centers and pre-K programs. One in 10 children in an urban area were served by a child care center compared to 2 in 10 children in rural areas. Families in urban areas were more likely to utilize pre-K than their rural counterparts.

**Figure 9: Types of Child Care Arrangements Used by Urban and Rural Designation**




*Note: Respondents may use more than one type of care for each child. Percentages may total more than 100%.*

# THE INTERACTION OF CHILD CARE AND EMPLOYMENT

The vast majority of survey respondents, 353 of the 500 (71%), reported being employed and working an average of 44 hours per week. Respondents with a household income of less than $35,000 a year worked, on average, 38 hours per week. Families with household incomes of $150,000 or more reported the highest weekly hours at nearly 60 hours per week.

**Table 10: Average Hours Worked by Household Income Band**

| | Under $35,000 | $35,000 - $74,999 | $75,000 - $149,000 | $150,000 or more | Overall |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Average Hours Per Week if Employed | 38.0 | 43.7 | 41.6 | 59.6 | 44.0 |
| *Number of Observations* | *77* | *86* | *96* | *88* | *353* |

The data in Table 11 reveal that difficulties with child care arrangements impact the employment decisions of Louisiana families. Overall, more than 1 in 3 respondents indicated that they reduced their hours at work due to child care issues, with just under 15% noting that the reduction was large enough to meet the definition of moving from full-time to part-time. Table 11 also reports these employment problems by gender. The largest gap between males and females exists around the move from full-time to part-time work. Just over 24% of females reported moving from full-time to part-time, while slightly less than 6% of males reported this large a reduction in hours, though males were more likely than females to report reducing their work hours generally.

**Table 11: Child Care Issues Impact on Employment by Respondents' Gender**

| Experienced Employment Challenge | Male | Female | Overall |
|---|---|---|---|
| Ever Quit Their Job | 14.9% | 19.7% | 17.1% |
| Let Go or Fired | 16.2% | 9.7% | 13.2% |
| Reduced Hours | 39.5% | 30.7% | 35.5% |
| Full-Time to Part-Time | 5.9% | 24.1% | 14.1% |
| Not Moved from Part-Time to Full-Time | 7.4% | 8.9% | 15.1% |
| Turned Down a Promotion | 8.9% | 10.4% | 9.6% |
| Been Reprimanded | 17.0% | 13.6% | 15.4% |
| Demoted or Transferred | 1.0% | 6.1% | 3.3% |
| *Number of Observations* | *138* | *262* | *411* |

*Note: Respondents may have selected more than one response. Percentages may total more than 100%.*

**More than 1 in 3 respondents indicated that they reduced their hours at work due to child care issues.**

Employment issues broken down by income reveal substantial differences by family income. With the exception of reporting a reduction in the number of hours worked, families with a household income of $75,000 or more reported very few employment challenges related to child care issues. For example, around 25% of respondents with a family income of less than $75,000 reported being let go or fired due to issues related to child care, while around 2% of those with household incomes of $75,000 or more reported being let go or fired. Respondents with a family income of less than $75,000 were also much more likely to report moving from full-time to part-time work and to report reducing the number of hours they work.

**Table 12: Child Care Issues Impact on Employment by Household Income Band**

| Experienced Employment Challenge | Under $35,000 | $35,000 - $74,999 | $75,000 - $149,000 | $150,000 or more | Overall |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ever Quit Their Job | 28.0% | 35.9% | 0.2% | 2.3% | 17.1% |
| Let Go or Fired | 23.7% | 26.2% | 0.0% | 1.6% | 13.2% |
| Reduced Hours | 74.1% | 46.0% | 5.2% | 25.0% | 35.5% |
| Full-Time to Part-Time | 47.7% | 7.9% | 0.8% | 2.3% | 14.1% |
| Not Moved from Part-Time to Full-Time | 46.1% | 14.3% | 0.8% | 4.5% | 15.1% |
| Turned Down a Promotion | 33.1% | 6.0% | 0.0% | 1.8% | 9.6% |
| Been Reprimanded | 13.9% | 29.4% | 2.2% | 2.9% | 15.4% |
| Demoted or Transferred | 10.1% | 2.5% | 0.0% | 1.7% | 3.3% |
| *Number of Observations* | *108* | *97* | *107* | *91* | *411* |

*Note: Respondents may have selected more than one response. Percentages may total more than 100%.*

The stark differences in employment challenges experienced by different income bands continue when missed work days and arriving late are examined. Table 13 shows the percentage of respondents who reported experiencing these challenges. Overall, 38% of respondents reported being late to work or class. However, nearly 70% of those with family incomes under $75,000 reported being late for work due to child care issues. While 42% of respondents overall reported leaving work or class early, nearly three-fourths of those with family incomes under $75,000 reported leaving early. For more detailed information on these challenges (e.g., the number of days missed), see Appendix C. In sum, families with lower incomes face more employment disruptions than families with higher incomes.

**Table 13: Respondents Experiencing Employment Disruptions by Household Income Band**

| Experienced Employment Disruption | Under $35,000 | $35,000 - $74,999 | $75,000 - $149,000 | $150,000 or more | Overall |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Late to Work or Class | 65.6% | 67.3% | 4.9% | 15.0% | 37.9% |
| Leave Work or Class Early | 73.1% | 73.4% | 4.6% | 28.6% | 42.5% |
| Phone Calls at Work | 53.7% | 72.9% | 50.6% | 24.2% | 54.7% |
| Distracted at Work | 63.5% | 58.9% | 51.3% | 9.7% | 51.7% |

*Note: Respondents may have selected more than one response. Percentages may total more than 100%.*

The prevalence of employment challenges due to child care issues also varies by marital status. Single parents (divorced, separated, widowed, or never married) are much more likely to report employment challenges due to child care issues than their married counterparts. Over a third of single parents reported quitting their jobs due to child care issues. Additionally, nearly three-quarters of single parents reported reducing their hours, and nearly half reduced their hours enough to report moving from full-time to part-time work.

**Table 14: Child Care Issues Impact on Employment by Martial Status**

| Experienced Employment Challenge | Married | Single |
|---|---|---|
| Ever Quit Their Job | 11.2% | 34.5% |
| Let Go or Fired | 10.1% | 22.6% |
| Reduced Hours | 22.6% | 73.4% |
| Full-Time to Part-Time | 3.2% | 46.1% |
| Not Moved from Part-Time to Full-Time | 3.7% | 51.8% |
| Turned Down a Promotion | 1.9% | 32.8% |
| Been Reprimanded | 12.0% | 25.3% |
| Demoted or Transferred | 0.4% | 11.8% |
| *Number of Observations* | *268* | *143* |

*Note: Respondents may have selected more than one response. Percentages may total more than 100%.*

**The cost of child care can make up a significant portion of a family's budget and influence what type of care arrangements they use.**

## ACCESS AND THE COST OF CARE

The cost of child care can make up a significant portion of a family's budget and influence what type of care arrangements they use. The LDOE periodically conducts a Child Care Market Rate Survey that captures the average cost of child care, with the most recent conducted in 2023. Table 15 contains information on the costs of child care in inflation-adjusted 2026 dollars. Infant care in Louisiana, on average, costs $12,042 annually (assuming 265 days of work in a given year), and the cost of care for 4-year-olds averages $9,614 annually.

**Table 15: Average Child Care Costs by Age of Child**

| | Average Daily Rate | Average Cost Per Week | Average Cost Per Year |
|---|---|---|---|
| Infants | $45.44 | $227.20 | $12,041.60 |
| Toddlers | $40.09 | $200.45 | $10,623.85 |
| 3-Year-Olds | $37.37 | $186.85 | $9,903.05 |
| 4-Year-Olds | $36.28 | $181.40 | $9,614.20 |

*Source: Louisiana Department of Education, 2023 Market Rate Survey, adjusted for inflation (2026)*

The LSU survey results indicate that the majority of families in Louisiana are bearing the brunt of child care expenses entirely on their own. Survey respondents were asked about whether or not they had access to employer- or government-sponsored programs to facilitate access to ECE. Less than 15% of respondents reported that they were currently receiving government assistance, while an additional 4% reported that they had received government assistance in the past. Outside of dependent care savings accounts, assistance from employers was rare.

**Table 16: Access to Government- or Employer-Sponsored Programs**

| | Percent Respondents Answering "Yes" |
|---|---|
| Receive Government Assistance for Child Care | 14.4% |
| Ever Received Government Assistance for Child Care | 4.0% |
| Employer Voucher or Subsidy | 0.9% |
| Onsite Work Child Care Center | 0.4% |
| Dependent Care Savings Account | 2.6% |

*Note: Respondents may have selected more than one response.*

Louisiana families without access to government or employer support for child care can face even greater financial challenges. A Louisiana family of four with two adults and two children under age 5 needs to earn over $57,000 per year to afford basic household expenses like housing, food, and transportation.[16] This amount does not include child care costs or setting aside any savings. Moving from a survival budget to a stability budget, that same family would need an annual income of at least $91,000 before child care costs.[17] As noted in Table 15, child care for an infant and a preschooler costs over $20,000 on average, meaning a family of four would need an annual income of at least $111,000 to afford a stable family budget. The median income for a family of four in Louisiana is $98,137.

Even if a family can afford child care, a majority of respondents reported challenges in their attempts to find quality child care, with nearly 17% reporting that it was "extremely" challenging. Respondents reporting less than $35,000 a year in family income were much more likely to find the search "extremely" challenging (43%) than other income brackets. The income bracket with the highest percentage reporting the search for quality child care was "not challenging at all" contains families with incomes from $35,000 to $74,999. This income bracket still qualifies for governmental assistance and has more income to address the costs of care than those under $35,000.

Overall, more than 1 in 3 respondents reported that it was "extremely" challenging to find affordable child care. Nearly 70% of respondents reported some level of challenge when it came to finding affordable care. The income brackets with the highest rates of reporting extreme challenges finding affordable child care were those under $35,000 (47%) and those between $75,000 and $149,000 (49%).

**Table 17: Level of Challenge Experienced Finding Quality Child Care by Household Income Band**

| Level of Challenge | Under $35,000 | $35,000 - $74,999 | $75,000 - $149,000 | $150,000 or more | Overall |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Extremely Challenging | 42.7% | 7.2% | 4.1% | 4.2% | 16.7% |
| Moderately Challenging | 4.3% | 2.2% | 0.0% | 5.4% | 2.5% |
| Somewhat Challenging | 4.9% | 38.1% | 47.9% | 16.1% | 28.9% |
| Slightly Challenging | 23.7% | 2.7% | 44.2% | 37.5% | 26.0% |
| Not Challenging | 3.2% | 22.9% | 4.1% | 3.2% | 7.6% |
| Not Applicable | 21.4% | 26.9% | 3.3% | 33.6% | 18.4% |
| *Number of Observations* | *145* | *121* | *126* | *99* | *496* |

**Table 18: Level of Challenge Experienced Finding Affordable Child Care by Household Income Band**

| Level of Challenge | Under $35,000 | $35,000 - $74,999 | $75,000 - $149,000 | $150,000 or more | Overall |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Extremely Challenging | 46.6% | 15.8% | 49.0% | 16.8% | 36.0% |
| Moderately Challenging | 4.5% | 13.1% | 0.2% | 6.8% | 5.6% |
| Somewhat Challenging | 7.9% | 39.8% | 9.9% | 2.5% | 16.6% |
| Slightly Challenging | 17.5% | 3.9% | 0.4% | 37.0% | 10.1% |
| Not Challenging | 6.9% | 20.7% | 37.0% | 3.6% | 20.1% |
| Not Applicable | 16.5% | 6.7% | 3.5% | 33.2% | 11.5% |
| *Number of Observations* | *142* | *120* | *121* | *99* | *487* |

# ECONOMIC ANALYSIS

Louisiana has long struggled with low labor force participation (LFP), and, as the state undergoes an extended period of large-scale capital investment, addressing the state's workforce challenges will be a significant determinant in the state achieving significant economic growth. One major issue impacting LFP is access to child care. Nationally, female nonparticipation in the labor force is driven by caregiving responsibilities that stifle employment.[18] The results of the LSU survey provide a window into why this is the case and provide tangible evidence of challenges facing Louisiana families. Louisiana's parents and guardians, particularly women, experience employment challenges as a result of the difficulties they encounter with child care. Additionally, working families with lower household incomes are much more likely to experience child care challenges. These findings provide important insight into one of the state's most pressing economic problems: growing the state's labor supply.

> **One major issue impacting labor force participation is access to child care.**

## UPDATED ESTIMATE OF LABOR SUPPLY EFFECTS FROM UNIVERSAL EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

In Louisiana, like most states and the nation, expanding labor supply is frequently a core goal of economic policymaking. Doing it successfully can boost aggregate earnings, increase productive capacity, and ease wage-driven inflation pressures across the economy. One group that is particularly constrained in its LFP is parents who want to work but lack access to affordable, high-quality child care.

One strategy to address the LFP challenges experienced by parents of young children is expansion of universal, comprehensive early childhood education for families. This analysis estimates the likely economic effects of statewide universal, comprehensive ECE by combining results from the Louisiana-specific household survey on child care barriers described above with findings from rigorous studies of publicly funded child care and pre-K expansions. Those studies illustrate a range of potential economic and social impacts, which we align to the Louisiana context. In addition, we estimate the lost earnings from child care coordination failures based on the survey results above. Finally, we use the benefits of expanding LFP as well as the benefits of resolving child care coordination failures for workers as inputs into an economic impact model to estimate the total impact on Louisiana. These estimates capture only near-term labor-market gains and exclude longer-term benefits such as improved lifetime earnings for children enrolled in ECE, higher maternal human capital that will result from increased job training and education, and very modest effects on paternal labor supply and hours worked.

# ECONOMIC ANALYSIS METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

The methodology for estimating potential labor supply effects likely to follow from ECE expansion included reviewing the range of observed effects from recent ECE or pre-K program expansions elsewhere, determining plausible effects of a similar program if implemented in Louisiana, applying the estimated observed effects to households with young parents in Louisiana, and observing the implied impacts on workforce behavior and earnings. We began by considering program evaluations of several similar program expansions in the United States and Canada. A summary of highlighted analyses follows.

One of the largest programs in terms of scope considered here was a universal and nearly fully subsidized child care program for children aged 0 to 4, rolled out in Quebec from 1997 to 2000. Various analyses of the Quebec program have been conducted, with an estimated increase in LFP of 6 to 8 percentage points for participating parents.[19,20] More recently, Washington, D.C., and its universal pre-K program have been estimated to increase LFP for participating parents by approximately 10 percentage points.[21] New York City's "Pre-K For All" program is estimated to have increased LFP for mothers by a range of 3 to 13 percentage points, and to have increased hours worked weekly by 0.7 to 2.4 hours.[22] In a study of incremental subsidies for the Head Start program, a partial annual subsidy of $500 implied a 2-percentage-point LFP increase, with larger subsidies implied LFP increases of up to just over 10 percentage points.[23] An analysis of free kindergarten expansions across the country between 1970 and 2015 — which is similar to the concept of ECE expansion — expanded LFP by between 6 and 10 percentage points, and increased working hours by approximately 92 hours annually for participating parents who were already working.[24] Most recently, and local to the Louisiana policy setting, New Orleans' "City Seats" program offered child care seats funded by the city for children aged 0 to 3 for 1,000 seats.[25] Although LFP response estimates have not been performed on this program to date, we note that 77% of the participating parents reported that the program allowed them to pursue job searches and interviews (thereby transitioning from labor force non-participation to participation), and that 55% reported using their saved time and money to pursue vocational education or higher education (with 72% reporting taking on more hours).

Across these studies, maternal labor supply responses range from 4- to 13-percentage-point increases depending on program design and the population being analyzed, but a consistent result was that households earning lower incomes and led by younger parents benefited most from these expansions. Given Louisiana's status as a lower-income state, we apply an assumption of a 10-percentage-point increase in LFP of expanded ECE beneficiaries (or parents of young children), and turn to American Community Survey (ACS) data on the Louisiana population to estimate the resulting labor market and broader economic results of a potential ECE expansion.

Table 19 below is adapted from the U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey table B23008 using five-year estimates for 2024, and reflects the population of Louisiana households with children under age 6 by household structure, and their LFP characteristics. The column at right, labeled "After ECE Expansion" reflects our estimate of what a 10-percentage-point maternal LFP increase would do to these figures. To keep our estimates of earnings impacts conservative, we assume that paternal LFP responses would be negligible, as the studies referenced above consistently estimated very small positive LFP effects for fathers that were typically statistically insignificant.

**Table 19. Labor Force Participation Metrics by Selected Household Structure**

| Louisiana Households with Children Under Age 6 | 2024 ACS Data | After ECE Expansion |
|---|---|---|
| **Living with Two Parents:** | **177,054** | **177,054** |
| Both Parents in Labor Force | 115,186 | 132,891 |
| Father Only in Labor Force | 53,817 | 36,554 |
| Mother Only in Labor Force | 5,137 | 5,137 |
| Neither Parent in Labor Force | 2,914 | 2,472 |
| **Living with Mother:** | **117,361** | **117,361** |
| In Labor Force | 87,758 | 99,494 |
| Not in Labor Force | 29,603 | 17,867 |

*Note: 2024 data from U.S. Census Bureau, 2024 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Age of own children under 18 years in families and subfamilies by living arrangements by employment status of parents (Table B23008). After ECE Expansion data reflect authors' estimates.*

Combining anticipated effects from two-parent households and single-mother households, these figures imply an additional 29,442 labor force participants in Louisiana. Applying typical rates of annual hours worked and typical earnings, and a typical unemployment rate of approximately 4%, we estimate $1.4 billion in new annual earnings as a result of expanded maternal LFP.

In addition, the statewide LSU survey discussed in Section 2 of this report shows that households with children under age 5 currently lose the equivalent of three full workdays per quarter (or 12 workdays per year) due to child care coordination failures. These losses include both full days missed and partial days from tardiness or early departures. Converting these hours at typical wages produces an additional $397 million in recovered earnings. This $397 million, in addition to the $1.4 billion in total new earnings from expanded labor supply, creates an estimated direct earnings effect of approximately $1.8 billion, which is used as an input to assess an overall economic impact, as described below.

Economic impact assessments capture more than a company's direct spending and employment; they capture the broader set of economic activities generated by an initial infusion of new dollars into the economy. When new economic activity occurs, businesses purchase additional inputs, jobs are created, and workers have additional dollars for purchasing goods and services. Economic impact studies account for indirect spending by businesses and induced spending by workers who benefit from additional dollars. Typically, these studies focus on how new dollars that enter a regional economy (such as a parish, state, or other geographic area) circulate and generate further economic activity.

The full impact of the indirect and induced effects within a regional economy are quantified using a regional economic impact model that can be quantified as economic multipliers. Economic impact models estimate the total amount of economic activity associated with an initial round of spending using jobs, earnings, value added, and output multipliers. This methodology is based on measuring inter-industry linkages across the economy and relies on the commonly used input-output method developed by Wassily Leontief, for which he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Economics (NobelPrize.org, n.d.).

To estimate new Louisiana economic activity inclusive of multiplier effects, we use RIMS II multipliers from the Bureau of Economic Analysis, assuming that the earnings gains from reduced child care challenges are distributed throughout all industry sectors in proportion to the state's current employment mix.[27] These multipliers measure how an initial change in economic activity (the direct effect) generates additional activity via two additional channels: indirect effects and induced effects. *Indirect effects* occur when businesses purchase goods or services from other suppliers in the state, while *induced effects* occur when households spend a portion of their additional earnings on goods or services produced in the state. "Type II" multipliers capture the effects of direct, indirect, and induced spending, and are utilized for the purposes of this analysis.

**Expanded labor force participation totals approximately $3.2 billion in additional earnings and $5.3 billion in economic output statewide.**

Ultimately, we estimate that the final, aggregate impact of increased earnings due to expanded maternal LFP totals approximately $3.2 billion in additional earnings and $5.3 billion in output statewide.[28] Accounting for effects on all state-level taxes that are likely to be impacted, this increase in economic activity implies roughly $129 million in new state tax collections annually, once labor force and earnings expansions have fully adjusted.

# CONCLUSION

This study builds on the work of the 2017 *Losing Ground: How Child Care Impacts Louisiana's Workforce Productivity and the State's Economy* by shifting the focus to how addressing ECE needs can play a key role in helping Louisiana meet its workforce demands. Louisiana's anticipated economic growth has resulted in a multi-agency effort to ensure that the state is able to meet the labor needs that come with economic development. This study suggests that including access to ECE in these efforts would help the state meet its labor force goals.

Results from the LSU survey indicate that the majority of Louisiana's families rely on parental care for child care. However, when public child care is available, such as pre-K programming, parents use these programs at a high rate. The results also indicate that securing access to high-quality and affordable child care is a struggle for many parents. Moreover, child care issues lead to reductions in work hours for a third of workers and result in employment challenges such as showing up late for work, leaving early, and work distractions. The economic analysis from the Blanco Public Policy Center highlights how statewide universal, comprehensive ECE can increase LFP, especially among mothers, and potentially mitigate the consequences associated with child care challenges, such as a reduction in hours worked and loss of employment. **This type of program could lead to an increase of as much as $3.2 billion in additional earnings for Louisiana families, $5.3 billion in increased economic output for the state, and $129 million in new state tax collections.**

The United States is currently experiencing its lowest LFP rate, outside of the pandemic, in over 50 years.[29] The national trend lines highlight the enormous challenge facing Louisiana policymakers as they seek to increase the state's labor supply and, ultimately, its economic productivity. Meeting its labor supply goals will require a multipronged approach. The analysis in this report provides substantial evidence that policymakers should consider ECE as a key component in their effort to meet the growing demands of Louisiana's economy.

# Endnotes


1. Estimated "output" in this context represents "gross output." This is an aggregate figure of sales, including both final sales and sales at intermediate points (within the state) along the supply chain.
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10. NSCH question: "During the past 12 months/Since [subject child's birth] did you or anyone in the family have to quit a job, not take a job, or greatly change your job because of problems with child care for [subject child]?"
11. Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative. (n.d.). 2023-2024 National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH) data query. *Data Resource Center for Child and Adolescent Health supported by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), Maternal and Child Health Bureau (MCHB)*. Available online at: https://www.childhealthdata.org/.
12. Potential explanations for the difference in findings include differing survey dates, the focus of the LSU survey was child care and potentially primed respondents to a more accurately response, and the NSCH survey included 5-year-olds who are more likely to be in the more stable child care arrangement of kindergarten.
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27. From the RIMS II website (https://apps.bea.gov/regional/rims/rimsii/): "Regional Input-Output Modeling System (RIMS II) multipliers provide a measure of the effects of local demand shocks on total gross output, value added, earnings, and employment. The multipliers are used by investors, planners, and elected officials to objectively assess the potential economic impacts of various projects." For further information on construction or application of BEA's RIMS II multipliers, please see "Overview" and "RIMS II Framework" sections at: https://apps.bea.gov/regional/rims/rimsii/rimsii_user_guide.pdf.
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# APPENDICES

## Appendix A: Survey Methodology

### SURVEY #2026-065 METHODOLOGY STATEMENT

Verasight collected data for this project from April 13 - 21, 2026. The sample consisted of 500 Louisiana adults with children under the age of 5.

The sampling criteria for this survey were:

1. Louisiana resident
2. Adult (Age 18+)
3. Previous indication of parental status

The selection criteria for the final sample were:

1. Provided consent to participate
2. In-survey confirmation of residence in Louisiana
3. In-survey confirmation of being the parent, guardian, or the caretaker of children four years old or younger who live with the respondent
4. Passed all data quality assurance checks, outlined below

The margin of sampling error, which accounts for the design effect and is calculated using the classical random sampling formula, is +/- 4.4%.

95% of respondents were recruited via text message from L2 voter file records. An additional 5% of respondents were recruited via email from the Verasight Community, which is composed of individuals recruited via random address-based sampling, random person-to-person text messaging, and dynamic online targeting. All Verasight community members are verified via multi-step authentication, including providing an SMS response from a mobile phone registered with a major U.S. carrier (e.g., no VOIP or internet phones) as well as within-survey technology, including verifying the absence of non-human responses with technologies such as Google reCAPTCHA v3. Those who exhibit low-quality response behaviors over time, such as straight-lining or speeding, are also removed and prohibited from further participation in the community. Verasight Community members receive points for taking surveys that can be redeemed for Venmo or PayPal payments, gift cards, or charitable donations. Respondents are

never routed from one survey to another and receive compensation for every invited survey, so there is never an incentive to respond strategically to survey qualification screener questions.

To further ensure data quality, the Verasight data team implements a number of post-data collection quality assurance procedures, including confirming that all responses correspond with U.S. IP addresses, confirming no duplicate respondents, verifying the absence of non-human responses, and removing any respondents who failed in-survey attention and/or straight-lining checks. Respondents that completed the survey in less than 30% of the median completion time were removed. Unmeasured error in this or any other survey may exist. Verasight is a member of the American Association for Public Opinion Research Transparency Initiative.

# Appendix B: Income of Most Common Occupations in Louisiana

*Occupations highlighted in green have a median income high enough to cover basic household expenses for a family of four in Louisiana.*

| Occupation | Total Workers | Median Hourly Wage | Annual Income* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Driver/Sales Workers and Truck Drivers | 59,063 | $25.87 | $51,740.00 |
| Registered Nurses | 56,728 | $35.63 | $71,260.00 |
| Elementary and Middle School Teachers | 45,482 | $24.41 | $48,820.00 |
| Retail Salespersons | 39,067 | $17.08 | $34,160.00 |
| First-Line Supervisors of Retail Sales Workers | 38,643 | $24.41 | $48,820.00 |
| Cashiers | 38,200 | $11.71 | $23,420.00 |
| Stockers and Order Fillers | 34,773 | $14.64 | $29,280.00 |
| Secretaries and Administrative Assistants, Except Legal, Medical, and Executive | 34,417 | $18.55 | $37,100.00 |
| Cooks | 30,193 | $10.74 | $21,480.00 |
| Customer Service Representatives | 28,926 | $18.06 | $36,120.00 |
| Waiters and Waitresses | 27,093 | $11.71 | $23,420.00 |
| Construction Laborers | 26,311 | $19.52 | $39,040.00 |
| Carpenters | 24,050 | $15.23 | $30,460.00 |
| Miscellaneous Production Workers, Including Equipment Operators and Tenders | 23,866 | $35.14 | $70,280.00 |
| Janitors and Building Cleaners | 22,893 | $15.13 | $30,260.00 |
| Personal Care Aides | 22,838 | $9.76 | $19,520.00 |
| Teaching Assistants | 21,307 | $12.69 | $25,380.00 |
| Lawyers, Judges, Magistrates, and Other Judicial Workers | 21,052 | $63.45 | $126,900.00 |
| Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand | 20,668 | $14.15 | $28,300.00 |
| Accountants and Auditors | 20,332 | $36.61 | $73,220.00 |

*Annual Income is calculated by multiplying the median hourly wage by 40 hours a week over 50 weeks
Source: United For ALICE. (2026). *The State of ALICE in Louisiana: 2026 Update on Financial Hardship*. Available online at: https://www.unitedforalice.org/Attachments/AllReports/state-of-alice-report-louisiana-2026.pdf.

# Appendix C

### Table C1: Number of Days in Previous Three Months Late to Work or Class Due to Child Care Issues, by Household Income Band

| | Under $35,000 | $35,000 - $74,999 | $75,000 - $149,000 | $150,000 or more | Overall |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Never | 34.4% | 32.7% | 95.1% | 85.0% | 62.1% |
| One to Two Days | 4.4% | 45.6% | 2.9% | 3.6% | 15.3% |
| Three to Four Days | 10.9% | 16.7% | 1.9% | 7.4% | 8.7% |
| Five to Six Days | 21.7% | 1.5% | 0.0% | 1.0% | 5.7% |
| Seven or More | 28.6% | 3.5% | 0.0% | 3.1% | 8.1% |
| *Number of Observations* | *99* | *92* | *106* | *88* | *388* |

### Table C2: Number of Days in Previous Three Months Left Work or Class Early Due to Child Care Issues, by Household Income Band

| | Under $35,000 | $35,000 - $74,999 | $75,000 - $149,000 | $150,000 or more |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Never | 26.9% | 26.6% | 95.4% | 71.4% |
| One to Two Days | 4.9% | 47.7% | 2.2% | 7.7% |
| Three to Four Days | 14.4% | 17.7% | 9.4% | 2.7% |
| Five to Six Days | 1.7% | 4.1% | 1.4% | 0.4% |
| Seven or More | 52.0% | 4.0% | 0.1% | 17.8% |
| *Number of Observations* | *99* | *90* | *105* | *87* |