Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare

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University of Minnesota

Early Care and Education Participation for Young Children in Foster Care:

Administrative and Contextual Insights - *Corrected*

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Authored by:
Amy Dorman, MPP
Debra Ingram, PhD
Frederique Corcoran, BS
Traci LaLiberte, PhD
Kristine Piescher, PhD
Ann Bailey, PhD

About the Authors

Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare (CASCW)

The Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare (CASCW) is located in the School of Social Work in the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Minnesota. CASCW works to improve the well-being of children and families involved in the child welfare system by educating and informing workers, policymakers, and the public.

Traci LaLiberte, PhD, is the Executive Director of CASCW and served as Principal Investigator for this study.

Kristine Piescher, PhD, is the Director of Research and Evaluation at CASCW and served as Co-Principal Investigator for this study.

Amy Dorman, MPP, is a Researcher at CASCW and a PhD student at the University of Minnesota School of Social Work.

Center for Early Education and Development (CEED)

The Center for Early Education and Development (CEED) is located in the Institute of Child Development at the University of Minnesota. CEED's mission is to improve developmental outcomes for children through applied research, training, and outreach.

Ann Bailey, PhD, is the Director of CEED and served as Co-Principal Investigator for this study.

Debra Ingram, PhD, is a Researcher at CEED.

Frederique Corcoran, BS, is a Graduate Research Assistant at CEED and a PhD student at the University of Minnesota Institute of Child Development.

Report Overview

Corrections to the December 2022 Report: *The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) submitted clarifications to the definition of Early Learning Scholarships that had been provided to the University research team by MDE. MDE also submitted clarifying language around the age of children included in the quantitative sample and the ECE programs examined in the quantitative analysis. These minor corrections can be found in Section I, B; Section I, D; and, Section V.*

Study Background
The Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare and the Center for Early Education and Development at the University of Minnesota were commissioned by the Minnesota Department of Human Services to conduct a study to better understand barriers and facilitators to early care and education (ECE) participation for young children in foster care in Minnesota.

Study Limitations
Some of the limitations of this study that prevented the complete fulfillment of the mandates laid out in the legislation include: challenges in analysis given the availability (or lack thereof) of quantitative data; issues integrating data across systems; and data reliability issues when including all ages and ECE programs as specified in the legislation.

Key Quantitative Findings
Data contained in the Early Childhood Longitudinal Data System (ECLDS) were analyzed by the Minnesota Departments of Human Services and Education; findings were provided to the University of Minnesota research team for interpretation.

- A majority (56.3%) of young children in foster care were not enrolled in any ECE program in academic year 2019. Participation rates for young children in foster care (43.7%) were comparable to participation rates of the general child population (44.1%) in Minnesota.
- African American/Black children had the highest rates of ECE participation (49.9%) and American Indian/Alaska Native children had the lowest rates of ECE participation (38.6%).
- Although children less than one year of age were the largest age group in foster care in Minnesota, they had the lowest rate of ECE participation (25.9%).
- Most counties (72%) had ECE participation rates for children in foster care under 50%.

Preliminary Qualitative Findings
Interviews with key stakeholders were conducted to qualitatively explore the broad-level data systems, policy, and practice context of ECE participation for young children in foster care.

- There is a need for increased and improved data collection and integration to help local and state authorities better reach, serve, and support families in accessing ECE.
- Barriers to ECE participation look different across locations because counties, districts, and programs often operate differently and have access to different resources.
- Families may experience barriers to ECE participation across different points in the process, including barriers to learning about, accessing, engaging in ECE, and maintaining continuity of care.

Remaining Qualitative Activities
In 2023, the University of Minnesota team will conduct focus groups across the state to center the voices, experiences, and recommendations of families of origin, families providing foster care, and child welfare workers and ECE providers regarding barriers and facilitators to participation in ECE programs for young children in foster care. Aggregate findings from this study will be shared in a final report to the Minnesota Legislature in June 2023.

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I. Executive Summary

A. Introduction

Participation in early care and education (ECE) programs has been found to increase the health and well-being of young children and families and could serve as an important tool to reduce educational disparities and long-term social inequities for disadvantaged children. Yet, many eligible children – like young children in foster care – are not enrolled in these programs and thus miss out on potential benefits. Despite research indicating that ECE participation can serve as a supportive pathway for achieving child welfare system goals (e.g., child safety and well-being), few studies have examined the low ECE participation rates for children in foster care, including barriers and facilitators to participation.

To address gaps in ECE participation rates for children in foster care, the Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare (CASCW) and the Center for Early Education and Development (CEED) at the University of Minnesota were commissioned by the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) to conduct a mixed-methods study on ECE participation for young children (aged 0-5) in foster care in Minnesota. The purpose of the study is to better understand the barriers and facilitators of participation in ECE programs for young children in foster care in Minnesota and to present findings in an interim report and a final report to the Minnesota Legislature.

For this interim report, the aim of the study was twofold:

- To quantitatively describe recent ECE participation rates for young children in foster care by race, ethnicity, age, and county; and
- To qualitatively explore the broad-level data systems, policy, and practice context of ECE participation for young children in foster care through interviews with key stakeholders.

Findings from the interim report will inform a second phase of qualitative data collection in 2023 (see *Section VII: Description of Remaining Qualitative Activities*), culminating in a final report to the Minnesota Legislature with recommendations for increasing access and engagement in ECE programs for young children in foster care in Minnesota.

B. ECE Program Descriptions

As defined by the legislation [*Laws of Minnesota 2021, 1st Spec. Sess., chapter 7, art. 14, section 20*], for purposes of this study "early care and education program" means: Early Head Start and Head Start under the federal Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007; special education programs under Minnesota Statutes, chapter 125A; early learning scholarships under Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.165; school readiness under Minnesota Statutes, sections 124D.15 and 124D.16; school readiness plus under Laws 2017, First Special Session chapter 5, article 8, section 9; voluntary prekindergarten under Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.151;

child care assistance under Minnesota Statutes, chapter 119B; and other programs as determined by the commissioner.

Brief descriptions of the publicly funded ECE programs included in this study are presented below. For detailed program descriptions, see *Appendix A: Description of ECE Programs.*

1. **Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE), Parts B and Part C:** Federally funded programs to provide support and services to infants, toddlers, and preschool children with disabilities and/or developmental delays and their families.
2. **Voluntary Pre-K (VPK)** and **School Readiness Plus (SRP):** Publicly funded prekindergarten programs designed to prepare eligible 4-year-old children for success as they enter kindergarten the following year.
3. **School Readiness:** Preschool program designed to help prepare 3- and 4-year-olds to enter kindergarten.
4. **Early Childhood Screening:** Screening program to identify possible health or developmental concerns in infants and young children who may need a health assessment, mental health assessment, or educational evaluation.
5. **Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE):** Program for families and children designed to enhance the ability of all parents, caregivers, and other family members to provide the best possible environment for their child's learning and development.
6. **Early Learning Scholarships:** Scholarships designed to increase access to high-quality ECE programs, improve school readiness for all young children, and close the opportunity gaps faced by many children in low-income households. Children must be three or four years of age by September 1st of a school year, though eligibility is 0-4 for children in the following prioritized categories: children of a teen parent pursuing a high school diploma or GED, children in foster care, children in need of child protection, or a child in a family who is or has been experiencing homelessness in the past 24 months.
7. **Head Start (HS)** and **Early Head Start (EHS)**: Federally funded preschool programs to help to prepare low-income families and children for success and their transition to public school kindergarten.
8. **Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP):** Provides financial assistance to help families with low incomes pay for child care so that parents may pursue employment or education leading to employment, and so that children are well cared for and can thrive as learners. Children in foster care are <u>not</u> eligible for CCAP benefits.

Data from the following seven programs are systematically entered into the Early Childhood Longitudinal Data System (ECLDS), which was the primary data source for the quantitative analysis in this report: Early Childhood Special Education Parts B and C, Voluntary Pre-K, School Readiness Plus, School Readiness, Early Childhood Screening, Early Childhood Family Education, and Early Learning Scholarships. Data from these programs were analyzed for young children in foster care by race, ethnicity, age, and county. Data from Head Start and Early Head Start are not systematically integrated with ECLDS. While CCAP data are available in ECLDS, children in foster care are not eligible for CCAP benefits; thus, CCAP data were not included in the quantitative analysis of this study.

C. Study Limitations

It is important to note some of the limitations of this study that prevented the complete fulfillment of the mandates laid out in the legislation. Study limitations include: challenges in analysis given the availability (or lack thereof) of quantitative data and issues integrating data across systems; data reliability issues when including all ages and programs as specified in the legislation; and stakeholder engagement limitations, which are acknowledged in the legislation. These limitations are presented in more detail as follows:

1. Although the legislation mandates an exploration of participation for children under six years of age, the University of Minnesota team received data from the state for **children aged 0-4.** MDE and DHS staff determined that because many kindergarten-aged children are not eligible for ECE programs, including 5-year-olds in the analysis would have presented inaccurate counts and rates. For example, 5-year-olds may be marked as "not enrolled" in ECE programs but may be in kindergarten and therefore ineligible for ECE (and already receiving educational programming through their kindergarten classroom).
2. The quantitative findings by race, ethnicity, age, and county **do not include children enrolled in Early Head Start or Head Start** because data from these programs are not systematically integrated with ECLDS.
3. The quantitative findings **do not include children enrolled in the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP)** as children in foster care are ineligible to receive CCAP benefits.
4. This study focuses on county-based foster care placements, which include indigenous children and may include children who were originally placed with counties that are now within a tribal system or whose case has been transferred for tribal oversight. **It is necessary to conduct culturally-sensitive research with tribal communities as partners** and central stakeholders; the final report will include recommendations for the state to fund and conduct additional community-engaged studies, in partnership with indigenous researchers, to better understand the intersection of foster care placement and participation in Tribal Early Childhood programs, such as the Tribal Early Learning Initiative and Tribal Home Visiting, and to explore strategies to reduce barriers and improve access to early care and education programs for young American Indian children in foster care.

D. Quantitative Methods and Findings

Quantitative Methods

The quantitative findings in this report are based on data contained in the Early Childhood Longitudinal Data System (ECLDS). The purpose of the quantitative analysis, as defined by legislation [*Laws of Minnesota 2021, 1st Spec. Sess., chapter 7, art. 14, section 20*] was to provide counts and rates of participation in early care and education (ECE) programs by young children (aged 0-5) who have experienced foster care and, to the extent practicable, to disaggregate the counts and rates of participation by children's race, ethnicity, age, and county of residence. To facilitate the analysis, data were integrated, cleaned, and analyzed by the Minnesota

Departments of Human Services and Education; findings were provided to the University of Minnesota research team for interpretation.

Limitations of the Quantitative Data

The quantitative analysis revealed several limitations in using ECLDS data. In addition to quantitative data challenges discussed as part of study limitations, additional limitations of these data must be taken into account when interpreting the quantitative findings. This section can also serve as a guide for ongoing efforts to improve existing administrative data systems. A complete discussion of the limitations of the ECLDS data used in this analysis appears in *Appendix D: Quantitative Methodology (Extended)*. A subset of these limitations most critical for interpreting the data presented in this summary are as follows:

1. Data were requested for three consecutive academic years (2019, 2020, and 2021), but there were concerns about the data integrity of academic years (AYs) 2020 and 2021, given changes in reporting and/or participation due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, **AY 2019 was analyzed to provide a pre-pandemic snapshot** of ECE participation for this population.
2. The quantitative analysis does not examine participation in privately funded ECE programs. Additionally, findings likely **overestimate the participation in publicly funded ECE programs** that provide educational programming or child care services by young children in foster care because the "enrolled in ECE" count in ECLDS includes children who have participated in Early Childhood Screening and Early Learning Scholarships. Neither of these programs offer educational programming or child care services. Future research should disaggregate Early Childhood Screening and Early Learning Scholarships data from ECE programs that provide educational and/or child care services.
3. **Enrollment data are not a true indicator that ECE educational and/or child care services were received, and received consistently.** ECLDS contains inconsistent attendance data: attendance data are not available for all programs and are also not included in all circumstances in ECLDS for programs that *do* have attendance data. Therefore, the amount of programming (dosage) received by each child could not be ascertained by ECLDS data.

Quantitative Findings and Considerations

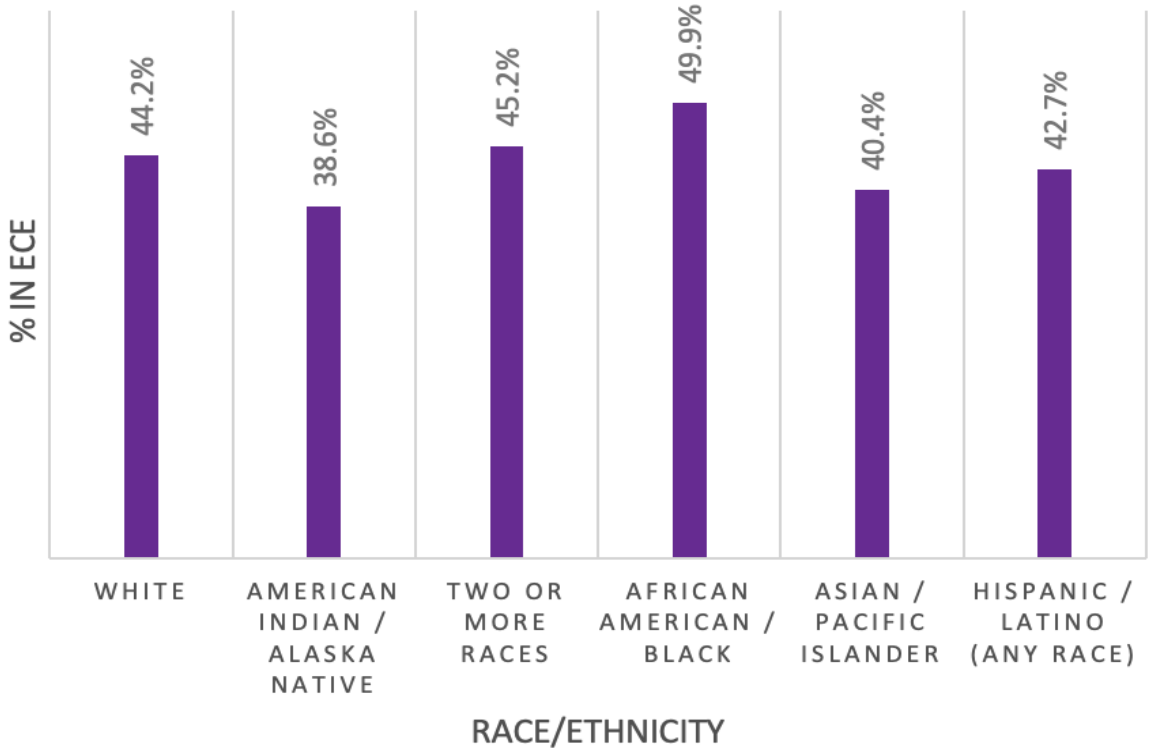
This section provides a high-level overview of the quantitative findings based on aggregate participation data across the seven ECE programs included in ECLDS (Early Childhood Special Education Parts B and C, Voluntary Pre-K, School Readiness Plus, School Readiness, Early Childhood Screening, Early Childhood Family Education, and Early Learning Scholarships) for academic year 2019 for children aged 0-4 in foster care. These data include Early Childhood Screening and Early Learning Scholarships, which do not provide educational programming or child care services.

- A majority (56.3%) of young children in foster care (n=5,404) were not enrolled in any ECE program in AY 2019. Participation rates for young children in foster care were comparable to participation rates of the general child population in Minnesota.

    - ***Consideration:*** *While these data indicate there may be shared experiences across families in Minnesota, given the limitations to the data and subsequent analysis noted above, we need the insights of people with lived experience in this area: foster and biological families, child welfare workers, and ECE providers.*
- For some of the programs with higher rates of participation among young children in foster care than children in the general population (e.g., Early Learning Scholarships), it could be that the categorical eligibility of children in foster care may be facilitating access to those benefits for families providing foster care.
    - ***Consideration:*** *Examining pathways to increase access and availability of ECE programs for young children in foster care – who may face more access barriers than other children and families – can help policymakers explore avenues to ultimately increase ECE program access for <u>all</u> young children in Minnesota.*
- A majority of counties (72%) had ECE participation rates for young children in foster care under 50%. All 11 Minnesota Association of County Social Service Administrators (MACSSA) regions in Minnesota had ECE participation rates under 50% for this population. Counties (n=78, as some public human service agencies serve multiple counties) with the lowest and highest ECE participation rates (min=0%, max=75%) also had small populations of young children in foster care (min=1 child in foster care, max=7 children in foster care).
    - ***Consideration:*** *When analyzing county-level data, it is important to examine counts (number of children in foster care) as well as rates (of ECE participation) to better understand sample size and how meaningful the rates may be in comparison to other counties.*
- African American/Black children had the highest rates of ECE participation (49.9%) and American Indian/Alaska Native children had the lowest rates of ECE participation (38.6%). American Indian/Alaska Native children, African American/Black children, and children of multiple races are disproportionately represented in the foster care system.
    - ***Consideration****: It is important that a culturally-sensitive and community-centered study on ECE participation for young children in foster care be conducted in partnership with the tribal nations of Minnesota, especially given the disproportionate number of American Indian/Alaska Native children in foster care and accompanying low rate of ECE participation for this group of children.*
- Although children less than one year of age were the largest age group in foster care in Minnesota, they had the lowest rate of ECE participation (25.9%). This is partially due to the small number of publicly funded early childhood programs in ECLDS that serve infants.
    - ***Consideration****: ECE participation for infants can support families by promoting community and parenting practices, providing relief from child care responsibilities, and allowing caregivers to continue and/or pursue gainful employment. Increased outreach for this age group could benefit families.*
- Data limitations ultimately impact what we are able to understand about ECE participation for young children in foster care. The way in which data were able to be analyzed for this report may be obscuring some existing patterns.

- ***Consideration**: Increasing data integration across systems and expanding uniform data collection practices in a way that can accurately track the services received by individual children can expand our understanding of ECE participation counts, rates, and outcomes for young children in foster care.*

ECE Participation for Young Children in Foster Care by Race and by Ethnicity during AY 2019



Note. ECE enrollment includes Early Childhood Screening and Early Learning Scholarships, which are programs that do not provide educational programming or child care services. *Also displayed as Figure 2 in Section V, D: Quantitative Findings.*

E. Qualitative Methods and Findings

Qualitative Methods

From September 2022 to October 2022, the University of Minnesota research team conducted a total of 18 interviews with 19 professionals from the Minnesota Department of Human Services, the Minnesota Department of Education, and relevant community organizations. Interviewees were asked questions about their professional background and current role as it relates to ECE participation and foster care, as well as broad-level (e.g., policy) barriers and facilitators to participation in ECE programs for young children in foster care in Minnesota and recommendations to increase participation. Interviewees with administrative data experience were also asked about their understanding of the strengths and challenges of working with state administrative data systems relating to ECE participation for this population, and

recommendations to improve current administrative data systems.

Researchers intentionally invited stakeholders with different areas of expertise to participate in the interviews to capture a broad-level (e.g., data systems, policy, and practice) context to better understand ECE participation for young children in foster care. Thus, the variance in the interviewees' level of expertise and experience in the areas examined is an important consideration when interpreting the qualitative results of this interim report.

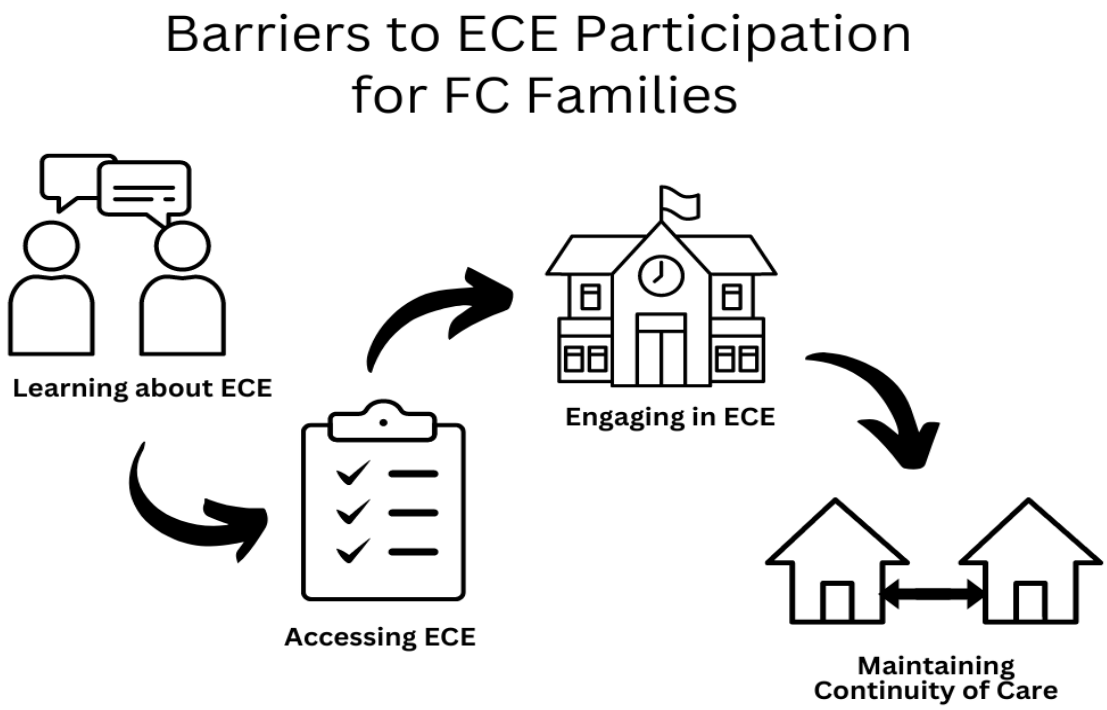
Qualitative Findings and Considerations

This section provides a high-level overview of the qualitative findings based on interviews with key stakeholders:

- There is a need for increased and improved data collection and integration to help local and state authorities better reach, serve, and support families in accessing ECE and maintaining continuity of care.
    - ***Consideration:*** *Data integration across systems is key to providing real-time data that can help state and local agencies better coordinate services for families. Prioritizing staff training could help bridge these gaps by increasing knowledge on the best data collection and interpretation practices.*
- Barriers to ECE participation look different across locations because counties, districts, and programs often operate differently and have access to different resources. These differences can create challenges to equitable access to ECE and continuity of care.
    - ***Consideration:*** *Strategic and sustainable investments by the state could help mitigate some of these differences across locations. Investments in the quality and accessibility of programs, as well as staff training and knowledge, could ultimately connect more children to ECE and provide higher quality services to children in foster care.*
- Families may experience barriers to ECE participation across different points in the process, including barriers to learning about, accessing, and engaging in ECE, and then maintaining continuity of care. Barriers may also be different across families (e.g., non-relative families providing foster care and kinship families, families with children with special needs).
    - ***Consideration:*** *It is important to consider and collect data on how barriers vary across different families with children in foster care.*
- Prioritization by individuals, programs, agencies, and the state helps create momentum for positive change.
    - ***Consideration:*** *Prioritization and collaboration is key to success in a siloed, county-administered system. There are opportunities to build upon current efforts, including eligibility and service coordination activities in Minnesota supported by the Preschool Development Grant[1], and to ensure that prioritization efforts are well-funded and sustainable long-term.*

[1] Minnesota's Preschool Development Birth through Five grant is a partnership of the Minnesota Departments of Education, Health, and Human Services, along with the Children's Cabinet to align education and care systems across the state. Learn more: https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/early/preschgr/

Barriers to ECE Participation for Foster Care (FC) Families



Note. Also displayed as Figure 9 in Section VI, B: Qualitative Findings.

F. Remaining Qualitative Data Activities

In January 2023, the University of Minnesota research team will begin a second phase of the qualitative study. The remaining qualitative data activities for this study will center the voices, experiences, and recommendations of families of origin, families providing foster care, and child welfare workers and ECE providers regarding barriers and facilitators to participation in ECE programs for young children in foster care.

The University of Minnesota research team, in consultation with the Minnesota Departments of Human Services and Education, will identify key regions across the state of Minnesota to serve as the focus of this second stage of the study. Key regions will be identified by their utilization (or lack thereof) of ECE programs by young children in Minnesota's foster care system. Beginning in early 2023, the University of Minnesota research team will partner with child welfare and ECE administrators in the identified regions to recruit child welfare workers, ECE providers, and foster and biological families of young children (0-5 years of age) in foster care to participate in a focus group to better understand barriers and facilitators to ECE participation for this population. Each participant will engage in one role- and region-specific focus group (e.g., families providing foster care in a specific county or region). Aggregate findings from this study will be shared in a final report to the Minnesota Legislature in June 2023.

II. Study Background

To address gaps in early care and education (ECE) participation rates for young children in foster care, the Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare (CASCW) and the Center for Early Education and Development (CEED) were commissioned by the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) to conduct a mixed-methods study on ECE participation for children under age six in foster care in Minnesota. The purpose of the study is to better understand the barriers and facilitators of participation in ECE programs for young children in foster care in Minnesota and to present findings in an interim and final report to the Minnesota Legislature. For this interim report, the aim of the study was twofold: to quantitatively describe recent ECE participation rates for young children in foster care by race, ethnicity, age, and county; and to qualitatively explore the broad-level data systems, policy, and practice context through interviews with key stakeholders.

Study findings shared in this interim report focus on administrative data systems, and broad-level policy and practice relating to ECE participation for young children in foster care. These findings are intended to inform considerations for state-level policies, such as improving 1) our understanding of ECE participation for children in foster care through administrative data systems, 2) outreach efforts to families with children in foster care, and 3) the quality and equitable accessibility of ECE programs. Findings from the interim report will also inform a second phase of qualitative data collection in 2023, incorporating the perspectives of foster and biological families, ECE providers, and child welfare workers, culminating in a final report to the Minnesota Legislature (see *Section VII: Description of Remaining Qualitative Activities*). The final report will include recommendations to the Minnesota Legislature on increasing access and engagement in ECE programs for young children in foster care in Minnesota.

III. Legislation

The following legislation describes the reporting requirement and content relevant to this interim report based on legislation from Laws of Minnesota 2021, 1st Spec Sess., Chapter 7, Article 14, Section 20.

Subd. 1. Reporting requirement

- The commissioner of human services shall report on the participation in early care and education programs by children under six years of age who have experienced foster care, as defined in Minnesota Statutes, section 260C.007, subdivision 18, at any time during the reporting period.
- For purposes of this study, "early care and education program" means Early Head Start and Head Start under the federal Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007; special education programs under Minnesota Statutes, chapter 125A; early learning scholarships under Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.165; school readiness under Minnesota Statutes, sections 124D.15 and 124D.16; school readiness plus under Laws 2017, First Special Session chapter 5, article 8, section 9; voluntary prekindergarten under Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.151; child care assistance under Minnesota Statutes, chapter 119B; and other programs as determined by the commissioner.

Subd. 2. Report content

- The report shall provide counts and rates of participation in early care and education programs disaggregated, to the extent practicable, by children's race, ethnicity, age, and county of residence.

Subd. 3. Data and collaboration

- The report shall use the most current administrative data and systems, including the Early Childhood Longitudinal Data System, and publicly available data. The report shall identify barriers to other potential data sources and make recommendations about accessing and incorporating the data in future reports.

IV. Issue Overview

This section provides an overview of what is currently known about ECE participation for young children in foster care.

A. ECE Participation for Young Children in Foster Care

Participation in ECE programs has been found to **positively impact school readiness** (Ansari et al., 2019; Lipscomb et al., 2013; Lipsey et al., 2018; Puma et al., 2012), child **cognitive development and health** (Camilli et al., 2010; Puma et al., 2010), and **early gains in school achievement** (Hill et al., 2015; Reynolds et al., 2010), as well as **increased education attainment** into adulthood (Campbell et al., 2012) and **reduced likelihood of engaging in criminal activity** in adulthood (Garcia et al., 2019). Studies have also shown that **participation in ECE programs can improve parenting practices** (Ansari et al., 2016; Vogel et al., 2013) and **parent involvement in their child's education** (Puma et al., 2010). Critically, participation in quality ECE programs has been found to be particularly **impactful for young children at a disadvantage** as measured by mothers' education level (Garcia et al., 2019), low-income status (Burger, 2010; Dinehart et al., 2012), child welfare system involvement (Dinehart et al., 2012; Hajal et al., 2019; Klein et al., 2018; Kovan et al., 2014), and/or living in foster care (Lipscomb et al., 2013; Pears et al., 2016, 2022).

Yet, the Minnesota Department of Education estimates there were **almost 41,000 children** who were eligible for, but not yet receiving Early Head Start or Head Start services in Minnesota last year (Minnesota Head Start Association, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic (school year 2020-2021) exacerbated under enrollment trends, as **enrollment rates declined for Minnesota children** across Early Childhood Special Education programs, Voluntary Pre-K and School Readiness Plus programs, and statewide enrollment in kindergarten generally (Minnesota Department of Education, 2021). ECE participation for children supervised by the child welfare system is **consistently and concerningly low**, even as federal guidelines have prioritized ECE program enrollment for child welfare services-supervised children (Klein et al., 2016).

Despite the categorical eligibility and low participation rates of young children in foster care, a large portion of research exploring barriers to ECE participation has focused on low-income families, and **few studies have examined the low participation rates for children with child welfare system involvement and/or living in foster care.** For example, research from a broad Wilder Research study examining the health and well-being of Minnesota children found that just 28% of eligible children living in poverty were enrolled in Early Head Start or Head Start programs in Minnesota in the 2015-2016 school year (Chase et al., 2018), but the data were not disaggregated to examine participation rates among children in foster care. It is essential that this gap in knowledge be addressed and that participation rates among young children in foster care be examined: Minnesota-based studies have found that when compared to children who are low-income but not involved in the child protection system, **children with child protection system-involvement have fared worse in terms of academic achievement** (Kovan et al., 2014;

Susman-Stillman et al., 2022 *unpublished manuscript*). Concerningly, young children in the child protection system often do not receive the early interventions they need to thrive in a school environment and beyond (Lipscomb et al., 2012; Ward et al., 2009), and studies have found that **children in foster care are particularly at-risk for lower school achievement** compared to their peers in parental care (Pears et al., 2005; Piescher et al., 2014; Trout et al., 2008).

Even as research findings have indicated that ECE participation can serve as a supportive pathway for achieving child welfare system goals, such as child safety and well-being (Klein, 2016), several **policy and structural challenges** to the integration of early learning systems and child welfare systems still exist at federal and local levels, creating system-level barriers to ECE participation (Brodowski et al., 2016; James Bell Associates, 2015; Lee et al., 2015; Meloy et al., 2012, 2015). Studies have identified that, for children in the general population, additional **barriers to ECE participation occur on the family level**, including cost, transportation limitations, and perceptions of discrimination (Ansari et al., 2020; Beatson et al., 2022; Mitchell et al., 2017). While these barriers may have some cross-over to those experienced by families providing foster care, ultimately **little is known specifically about barriers and facilitators to ECE participation for young children (aged 0-5) in foster care**, particularly in the United States (two recent international studies explored foster caregivers' decisions to participate or not participate in ECE programs: see Cameron et al., 2020 and Metoo et al., 2020).

B. Barriers and Facilitators to ECE Participation

To date, **existing research on ECE participation has rarely focused on young children in foster care and their families.** Much of what we know about participation in ECE programs for this population has come from randomized control trials and program evaluations, which often focus on one intervention or program (like Head Start). Additionally, these quantitative studies have often limited their samples to children aged 3 or 4 (e.g., Lipscomb et al., 2013; Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2016), because they would be eligible to enroll specifically in a pre-K program. This has resulted in **limited knowledge around ECE participation for children aged 0-2**. Yet, children less than one year old are the largest age group entering the foster care system in Minnesota, making up **15.9% of annual entries** (US Children's Bureau, 2020). These quantitative studies also often lack nuanced data collection, in-depth exploration of data, as well as sufficient population reach, which qualitative or mixed methods studies can more readily provide. The few studies that have used qualitative interviews to explore barriers and facilitators to ECE participation have restricted their examination to low-income families, families of a specific demographic or background (e.g., Latino/a immigrant families in Ansari et al., 2020), and/or have been conducted outside of the unique policy context of the United States (e.g., Beatson et al., 2022 in Australia; Meetoo et al., 2020 in England; and Mitchell et al., 2017 in New Zealand).

Among the few studies that have explored the barriers to ECE participation for young children in foster care, several **structural and systems elements** have emerged as themes in barriers to ECE participation, including: a **lack of vacancies in high-quality ECE programs** (James Bell

Associates, 2015; Mitchell & Meagher-Lundberg, 2017); a **lack of understanding of the benefits of high-quality ECE programs** among child welfare and court system workers, resulting in low referrals to ECE programs (James Bell Associates, 2015; Lee et al., 2015); challenges due to **limited collaboration** between ECE agencies and child welfare agencies, including a lack of historical collaboration and personnel turnover (James Bell Associates, 2015; Lee et al., 2015); and **issues with integrating data systems** to better understand gaps and needs around ECE participation for young children in foster care (James Bell Associates, 2015). Policies have also been found to serve as barriers to ECE participation, such as the **variation in receipt of and accommodations granted for child care subsidies** (specifically, the federal Child Care and Development Fund program) by state and family type (e.g., families providing foster care are less likely to receive child care subsidies; Lipscomb et al., 2012; Meloy et al., 2015); and **policies that restrict ECE program eligibility and availability based on family type** (e.g., family of origin or family providing foster care; Lee et al., 2015). A lack of stability in child care subsidies (Lipscomb et al., 2012) and foster placement changes and/or case closures (Lee et al., 2015) have also been found to create disruptions in ECE participation for children in foster care.

On the family level, two international studies found that **foster parent meaning-making around ECE** and foster parent roles as important attachment figures for children – often prioritizing attachment and emotional stability over formal education – as well as **hectic schedules**, served as barriers to ECE participation for families providing foster care (Cameron et al., 2020; Meetoo et al., 2020). One study of ECE participation among the general population in Australia found that similar beliefs around maternal roles and the value of ECE kept families from enrolling young children in ECE programs (Beatson et al., 2022). Additional studies outside of the United States context and not relating specifically to children in foster care identified barriers to ECE participation including: **direct and indirect costs**, such as fees and transportation (Beatson et al., 2022; Mitchell & Meagher-Lundberg, 2017); a **lack of cultural relevance in ECE programming** (Mitchell & Meagher-Lundberg, 2017); and **fear and mistrust of programs** that were perceived by families to be rooted in discrimination and/or educational inequality based on race/ethnicity (Ansari et al., 2020). Mitchell & Meagher-Lundberg (2017) also illustrated that a range of personal reasons and circumstances outside of aggregate study themes additionally played a role in facilitating or hindering participation in ECE programs for individual families.

Even less has been expressly identified in the literature in terms of facilitators to ECE participation for children in foster care. Studies in Australia and New Zealand highlight that the **effective promotion of the benefits of high-quality ECE programs** can positively influence participation (Beatson et al., 2022; Mitchell & Meagher-Lundberg, 2017). Similarly, Tilhou et al. (2021) identified that **collaboration across sectors** in local communities could increase access to educational and health and wellness programs for families with children in foster care**.**

Given the limitations of what is currently understood around the barriers and facilitators to ECE participation for young children in foster care, this study provides an important opportunity to expand our understanding of these barriers and facilitators within the unique local policy context of the state of Minnesota. Using **quantitative data analysis**, in partnership with analysts from the Minnesota Departments of Human Services and Education, to provide a

better understanding of the current context, and **qualitative interviews** with a wide range of stakeholders, the full span of this study (to be completed in spring 2023, see *Section VII: Description of Remaining Qualitative Data Activities*) will provide crucial insight into the barriers and facilitators to ECE participation for young children in foster care. By better understanding the **broad policy, practice, and data systems context** (shared in this interim report), in addition to the **experiences of families and workers** in this area (to be shared in the final report), Minnesota policymakers and administrators will be better equipped to improve access to the myriad benefits of ECE programming for young children in foster care.

V. Quantitative Findings and Considerations

This section presents the key findings from quantitative analysis of data sourced from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Data System (ECLDS), which integrates data elements from the Minnesota Department of Education and Minnesota Department of Human Services (Social Service Information System; SSIS). To facilitate the analysis, data were integrated, cleaned, and analyzed by the Minnesota Departments of Human Services and Education; findings were provided to the University of Minnesota research team for interpretation. The purpose of this quantitative analysis was to better understand the rates of ECE participation (measured by whether a child is enrolled in one of the seven publicly funded early childhood programs included in ECLDS in one academic year) for young children in foster care by race, ethnicity, age, county, and Minnesota Association of County Social Service Administrators (MACSSA) region.

A. Quantitative Data Limitations

Before discussing the quantitative methodology and findings, it is important to highlight what may be understood from these data and what remains unclear, given the limitations to the quantitative data available for the analysis shared in this report:

1. In this section, **ECE participation is defined as whether a child was enrolled** in any publicly funded early childhood program included in ECLDS in the same academic year they experienced a foster care placement. This study does not examine participation in privately funded ECE programs. There are several publicly funded early childhood programs in the ECLDS data system, including **Early Childhood Screening** and **Early Learning Scholarships**, which are programs that do not provide educational programming or child care services. For example, a child who was marked as having been screened through the Early Childhood Screening program may not have been enrolled in an educational or care setting, but would still be counted in the total "enrolled in ECE" count, resulting in an overcount of participation in educational programming and/or child care services for this population. As mentioned by interviewees in a subsequent section of this report (see *Section VI: Preliminary Qualitative Findings and Considerations*), Early Childhood Screening can serve as an entry point for families to hear about and understand ECE resources, but a completed screening is **not a guarantee that a child will participate** in a high-quality ECE setting. In another example, a child may be receiving an Early Learning Scholarship but not yet be enrolled in a high-quality ECE setting. Per analysis of the integrated data, this child would also be counted in the total "enrolled in ECE" counts and percentages, **even though they may not be receiving high-quality educational programming and/or child care services**.
2. **Enrollment data are not a true indicator that ECE educational and/or child care services were received, and received consistently.** Children may be enrolled in an educational or care setting but not be able to participate in that setting for a variety of reasons, many of which were discussed in our qualitative interviews with key

stakeholders (see *Section VI: Preliminary Qualitative Findings and Considerations*). In addition, ECLDS contains inconsistent attendance data: attendance data are not available for all programs and are also not included in all circumstances in ECLDS for programs that *do* have attendance data. Therefore, the amount of programming (dosage) received by each child could not be ascertained by these data.

3. **The structure of the data as provided to ECLDS made it difficult to identify program participation across academic years,** which limited the ability to analyze participation in the ECE program prior to foster care entry. Data are provided on participation rates for children in foster care where there was overlapping ECE program participation during the academic year, and where the participation in the ECE program for that particular academic year appeared to begin after the child was placed into foster care. While the timing of foster care placement and ECE program enrollment was examined, **it is difficult to determine whether foster care preceded ECE program involvement or whether it came after** because of inconsistencies in data reporting regarding enrollment dates across program types, and because data were analyzed separately for each academic year rather than being analyzed longitudinally**.** Thus, these data were ultimately not included in the report due to concerns around reliability of the data. Having a better understanding of the timeline of when children entered a foster placement and how, or if, that coincided with enrollment in an ECE educational or child care setting, and who was involved in this process and at what point, could have implications for increasing ECE participation for this population.
4. **Linking data between systems, including identification of unique individuals, is not perfect:** There may be some cases where the identity of a child was known in one or both systems but was not reconciled and flagged as the same individual when the data systems were integrated. The match rate was requested by the MDE team, but was not accessed by MDE prior to the publication of this report. However, data linking complexities go beyond the match rate. As records within SSIS are updated, DHS analysts saw instances where a single child showed multiple race values or multiple birth dates. Sometimes this was due to differing information from different counties. Other times, the same county provided differing information for the same child. This suggests the records were updated, leading to multiple values being stored in ECLDS. Attempts by the DHS and MDE team to reconcile this against live SSIS data often failed as PERSON_IDs had since changed (e.g., identity had been reconciled to another record).
5. **There are some concerns about the completeness and reliability of the data entered into the EESTUDENT data source**, which was used for School Readiness and Early Childhood Family Education program identification. These data are currently being moved into the new MDE Ed-Fi data system. MDE continues to work with school districts to ensure accurate data entry. These circumstances may limit the accuracy of these initial estimates of participation rate for School Readiness and Early Childhood Family Education.
6. The **School Readiness Plus** program serves a relatively small number of children statewide (approximately 500 four-year-old students per year on average) and is very similar to the Voluntary Prekindergarten program. These programs were combined for

analytic purposes, as small sample sizes make it difficult to conduct meaningful analyses.

7. Although the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) is included in the legislation surrounding this report and data on CCAP is available in ECLDS, **data on CCAP benefits were not included in this report, as children in foster care are ineligible for CCAP**. This ineligibility was confirmed by leadership from the CCAP program area in October 2022.
8. The **Early Childhood Screening** program is intended to screen children prior to or within 30 days of enrollment in kindergarten. Once a child is screened, they do not need to be screened again. The data included in this section present a single year snapshot of the number of children that were screened in that year. For example, a child who was four years of age and did not receive a screening during academic year 2019 could have been screened in the prior year and therefore did not need to be screened again, or a child could be screened in the next year and still meet state requirements. However, earlier access to screening (available at age 3) is encouraged because screening can facilitate access to additional ECE supports and services.
9. **Head Start (HS) and Early Head Start (EHS) data are not included in ECLDS**, as these "federal-to-local" programs are not required to report enrollment data to the state (although some programs do choose to report data to the state for inclusion in ECLDS). Head Start and Early Head Start enrollment numbers for children in foster care were not available for the analyses presented in this report by race, ethnicity, age, and county (using ECLDS data). Numbers from federal reporting requirements of these programs were used to the level practicable to determine general participation rates in the state.
10. The **data included in ECLDS are cohort-based data**, with each cohort of students changing from year-to-year; thus, **meaningful longitudinal analysis is challenging without additional analytic capacity**. Longitudinal analysis where data clearly follow individual children across several years can help identify trends over time which could then inform interventions to increase ECE participation. Program and child outcome data are important because they support stakeholders' understanding of program impacts on children's developmental and academic growth.

Going forward, it is important to note that **current data sharing agreements limit the use of ECLDS data for research** purposes without special permission from the governance process used to support ECLDS. This can inadvertently create barriers to better understanding ECE participation for young children in foster care and to integrating information and subsequent efforts across agencies at the state and local levels.

B. Description of Quantitative Methods

This report uses data contained in ECLDS, which combines select data collected by the state departments of Education, Human Services, and Health into one online, interactive database using a standardized matching process to connect children across programs. Data are linked at the level of the child and academic year so that program involvement is seen as occurring in the same academic year as the child experienced foster care. Data on foster care and relevant ECE

programs (Table 1), including Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) services, Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK), School Readiness Plus (SRP), School Readiness, Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE), Early Childhood Screening, and Early Learning Scholarships were analyzed. Because the School Readiness Plus program serves a relatively small number of children statewide, and is very similar to the Voluntary Prekindergarten program, these programs were combined by DHS and MDE staff for analytic purposes. For an expanded description of programs, see *Appendix A: Description of Programs*.

***Table 1**. Description of ECE Programs*

Program	Description	Age	Eligibility Criteria & Cost
Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE): Part B Part C	Federally funded programs to provide support and services to infants, toddlers and preschool children with disabilities and/or developmental delays and their families.	3-4 0-2	Free for eligible children regardless of income or immigration status.
Voluntary Pre-K (VPK) School Readiness Plus (SRP)	Publicly funded prekindergarten programs designed to prepare eligible 4-year-old children for success as they enter kindergarten the following year.	4	Free for all age-eligible children, pending availability of funding and capacity at the school district-level. Children in foster care are prioritized for available seats in VPK. Children in foster care are included as a required category for receiving SRP-funded seats.
School Readiness	Preschool program designed to help prepare 3- and 4-year-olds to enter kindergarten.	3-4	Sliding fee scales are used; however, no family can be turned away due to inability to pay for services. Children in foster care are included as a required category for receiving School Readiness-funded seats.
Early Childhood Screening	Screening identifies possible health or developmental concerns in infants and young children who may need a health assessment, mental health assessment, or educational evaluation.	3-4	Free for all age-eligible children.
Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE)	Program for families and children designed to enhance the ability of all parents, caregivers and other family members to provide the best possible environment for their child's learning and development.	0-4	All children who meet the age requirement are eligible. Sliding fee scales are used; however, no family can be turned away due to inability to pay for services.
Early Learning Scholarships	Scholarships designed to increase access to high-quality early childhood programs for 3- and 4-year-old children with the highest needs to improve school readiness for all young	0-4	Children in foster care are categorically eligible,

	children and close the opportunity gaps faced by many children in low-income households. Eligibility is 0-4 for children in the four prioritized categories discussed in Section 1,B: Program Descriptions.		pending availability of scholarships.
Head Start (HS) Early Head Start (EHS)	Federally funded preschool programs to help to prepare low-income families and children for success and their transition to public school kindergarten.	3-4 0-3	Children in foster care are categorically eligible, pending availability of open seats.
Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP)	Provides financial assistance to help families with low incomes pay for child care so that parents may pursue employment or education leading to employment, and so that children are well cared for and can thrive as learners.	0-4	Children in foster care are <u>not</u> eligible.

Note. Ages displayed in Table 1 are from 0-4 in alignment with the data analyzed in ECLDS for this report. Some programs listed in this table serve children older than age 4.

C. Description of Quantitative Data

Data were requested by DHS and MDE staff for **cohorts of children who experienced foster care** in academic years 2019, 2020, and 2021 and were **five years old or younger** at the time of the reporting. Given the ages of children served in each program, data for **children aged 0-4** were analyzed and provided by DHS and MDE to the University team for interpretation. Although not shown here, five-year-old children, and some children older than five, can receive services for some of these programs. This would occur in cases where children are in classrooms where ECE services are provided, but the district does not directly receive funding for the program. An exception would be five-year-olds who are age-eligible for early childhood special education services, but could also be counted under different special education services once the child is enrolled in kindergarten. Because of this, **it was determined by the DHS and MDE team that including children who turn 5 years old (by September 1st of the school year) in the analysis would create percentages that are not meaningful**: non-participation by a 5-year-old could mean they were in kindergarten and therefore ineligible for ECE programming, not that they were *eligible* for ECE programming but were not *accessing* ECE. Therefore, for the purposes of this report, the focus was on children not yet age-eligible for kindergarten (children aged 0-4).

For all identified children in foster care, data were provided on program participation in any of the seven ECE programs included in ECLDS for each academic year, including child enrollment dates. **Children may have been enrolled in more than one ECE program** in one academic year (e.g., the child participated in an Early Childhood Screening or received an Early Learning Scholarship and was also enrolled in another ECE program). Therefore, the total enrollment counts per program do not add up to the total number of young children in foster care enrolled across all ECE programs in ECLDS: **duplicate counts were removed to present an accurate "total" statistic**. The data for analysis contained participation rates for each program and subprogram shown by statutorily required factors, including: **race of the child** (using census categories), **ethnicity of the child** (Hispanic, non-Hispanic), **age of the child**, and **county**.

Although DHS and MDE staff obtained three years of data (AY 2019, AY 2020, AY 2021) from the ECLDS data system, the main analysis provided to the University team for interpretation centered on academic year 2019. **Focusing on AY 2019 data provides a snapshot of ECE participation prior to the COVID-19 pandemic**, which impacted participation rates across the state and may have created issues in data reliability due to changes in required data collection practices during the pandemic. Although there was some fluctuation in ECE participation across years for given programs, participation rates were relatively stable (Table 2). *For complete quantitative methodology, see Appendix D: Quantitative Methodology (Extended). Aggregate ECE participation counts and rates for young children in foster care from AYs 2020 and 2021 (by race, ethnicity, age, and county) are available in Appendix E: Data Tables. For program-specific tables for AYs 2020 and 2021, contact Amy Dorman at dorm0039@umn.edu.*

***Table 2**. ECE Participation for Young Children in Foster Care for AYs 2019, 2020, and 2021 by Program*

ECE Program	% in Program (2019)	% in Program (2020)	% in Program (2021)
Any ECE program	*43.7%*	*45.0%*	*43.9%*
ECSE	25.5%	23.2%	24.4%
ECSE (Part B)	23.9%	24.5%	22.4%
ECSE (Part C)	18.0%	17.3%	16.1%
VPK/SRP	11.3%	14.4%	12.4%
School Readiness	9.9%	10.9%	9.9%
ECFE	2.0%	1.8%	1.1%
Early Childhood Screening	26.4%	23.8%	20.7%
Early Learning Scholarships	16.1%	22.0%	19.1%

*Note. "*Any ECE program" includes enrollment in at least one early childhood program in ECLDS, including Early Childhood Screening and Early Learning Scholarships. Reporting for ECFE during AY 2021 was especially impacted by the pandemic.

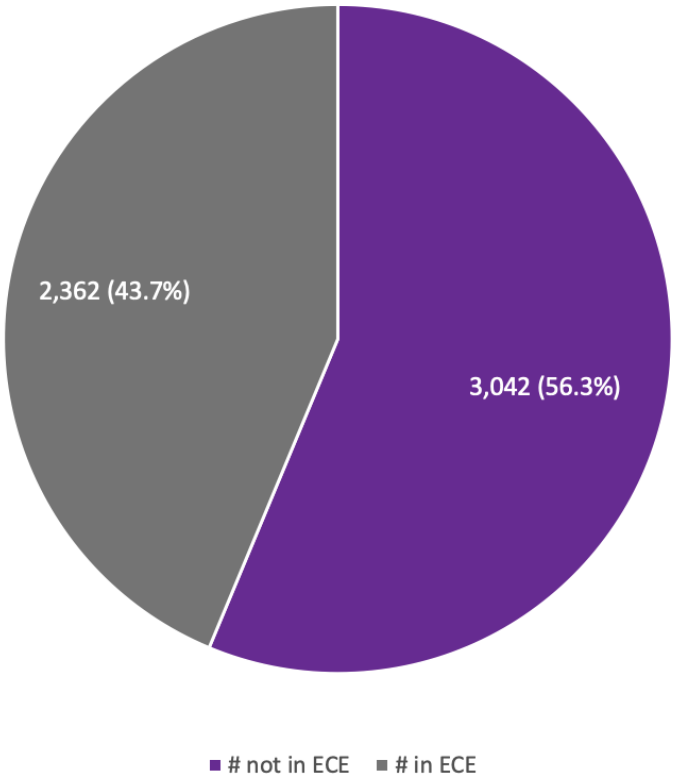
D. Quantitative Findings

This section provides findings based on aggregate participation data for academic year 2019 across the seven publicly funded early childhood programs included in ECLDS for children aged 0-4 in foster care. As mentioned earlier, although Early Learning Scholarships and Early Childhood Screening do not provide educational programming or child care services directly, they were included for the purposes of this report in the "any ECE" category. Additionally, Early Head Start and Head Start are not included in the main analysis of this section because program data are not available in ECLDS. Data on CCAP are also not included in this section because children in foster care are ineligible for the program.

Overall ECE Participation Rates of Young Children in Foster Care

Of the 5,404 children reported as having a foster care placement in AY 2019, **43.7% (2,362) of children in foster care were reported as enrolled** in one of the seven early childhood programs included in ECLDS (Figure 1). It is estimated that **56.3% (3,042) of eligible children in foster care were <u>not</u> enrolled** in any ECE program during AY 2019.

Figure 1. *Number of Children in Foster Care Enrolled in an ECE Program During AY 2019.*



Note. ECE enrollment data include Early Childhood Screening and Early Learning Scholarships, which are programs that do not provide educational programming or child care services.

ECE Participation for Young Children in Foster Care by Race/Ethnicity

As depicted in Table 3, rates of ECE participation for young children in foster care across racial groups (excluding *Unknown/Declined, n=146*) and ethnicity (*Hispanic/Latino*, across any race) **vary by 11.3 percentage points** from the highest rate of participation to the lowest rate of participation. **African American/Black children** (n=772) experienced the **highest rate** of ECE participation at **49.9%** and **American Indian/Alaska Native children** (n=1,142) experienced the **lowest rate** of ECE participation at **38.6%.** In comparison, **44.2% of white children** (n=2,133) participated in ECE, **45.2% of children of two or more races (n=1,102)** participated in ECE, and **40.4% of Asian/Pacific Islander children** (n=109) participated in ECE. The percentage of **Hispanic/Latino children** (across any race, n=510) who participated in ECE was **42.7%.**

Table 3. *ECE Participation for Young Children in Foster Care by Race and by Ethnicity during AY 2019.*

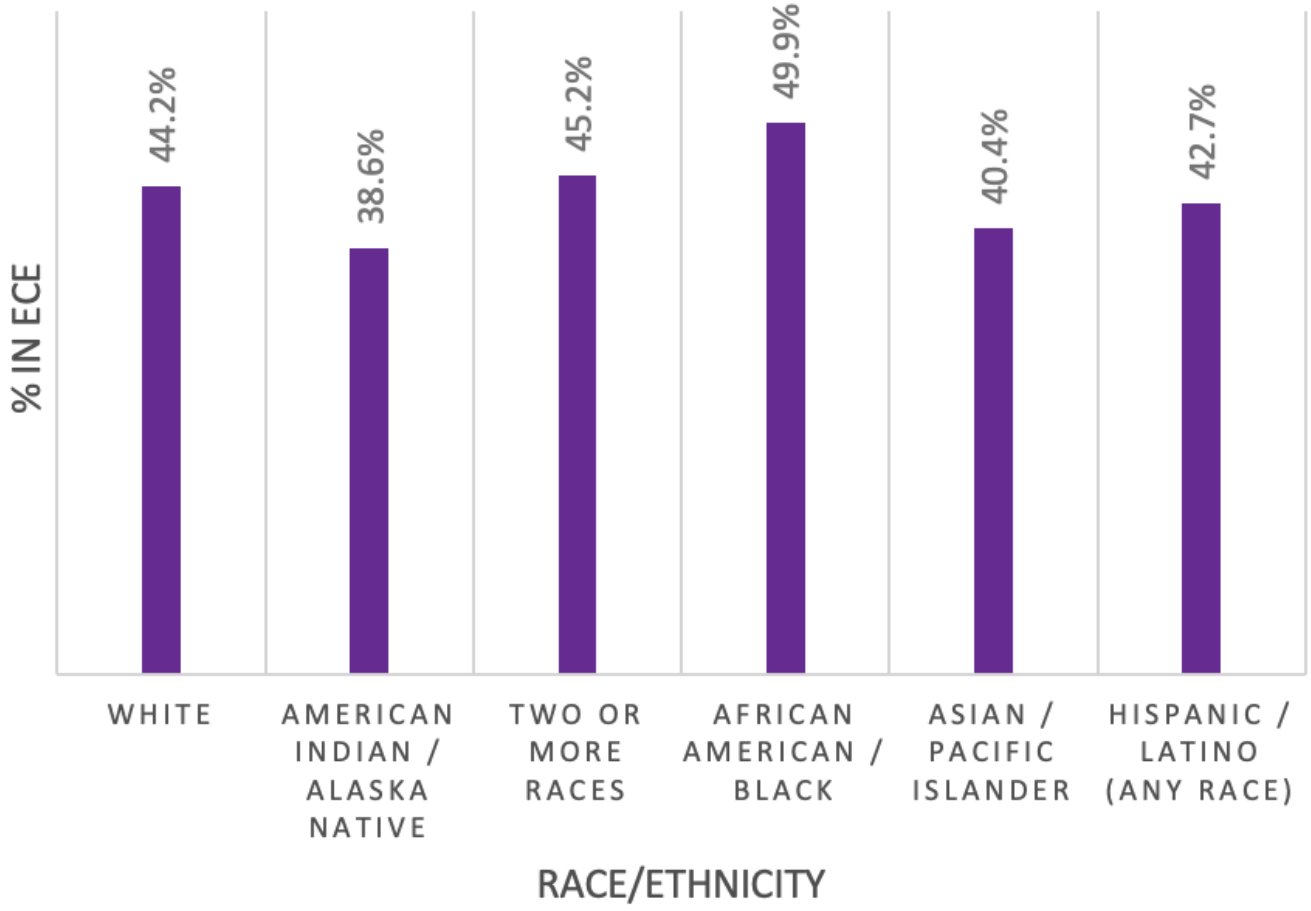
Race/Ethnicity	# in FC	# in ECE	% in ECE
White	2,133	943	44.2%
American Indian/Alaska Native	1,142	441	38.6%
Two or more races	1,102	498	45.2%
African American/Black	772	385	49.9%
Asian/Pacific Islander	109	44	40.4%
Hispanic/Latino (any race)	*510*	*218*	*42.7%*

Note. ECE enrollment data include Early Childhood Screening and Early Learning Scholarships, which are programs that do not provide educational programming or child care services.

These numbers are further depicted in Figures 2 and 3. Figure 2 shows the percentage of young children in foster care within each racial and ethnic group who were enrolled in ECE in AY 2019. Figure 3 illustrates participation by race and ethnicity by the total number of children in foster care (shown in gray) alongside the number of children in foster care enrolled in ECE (shown in purple). When we break down the sample of young children in foster care who are eligible for ECE programming by racial and/or ethnic groups (excluding *Unknown/Declined, n=146*), we see that, depending on the racial or ethnic group, **between 50.1-61.4%** of children in foster care were **not enrolled in ECE programs in AY 2019 (mean≈56%).**

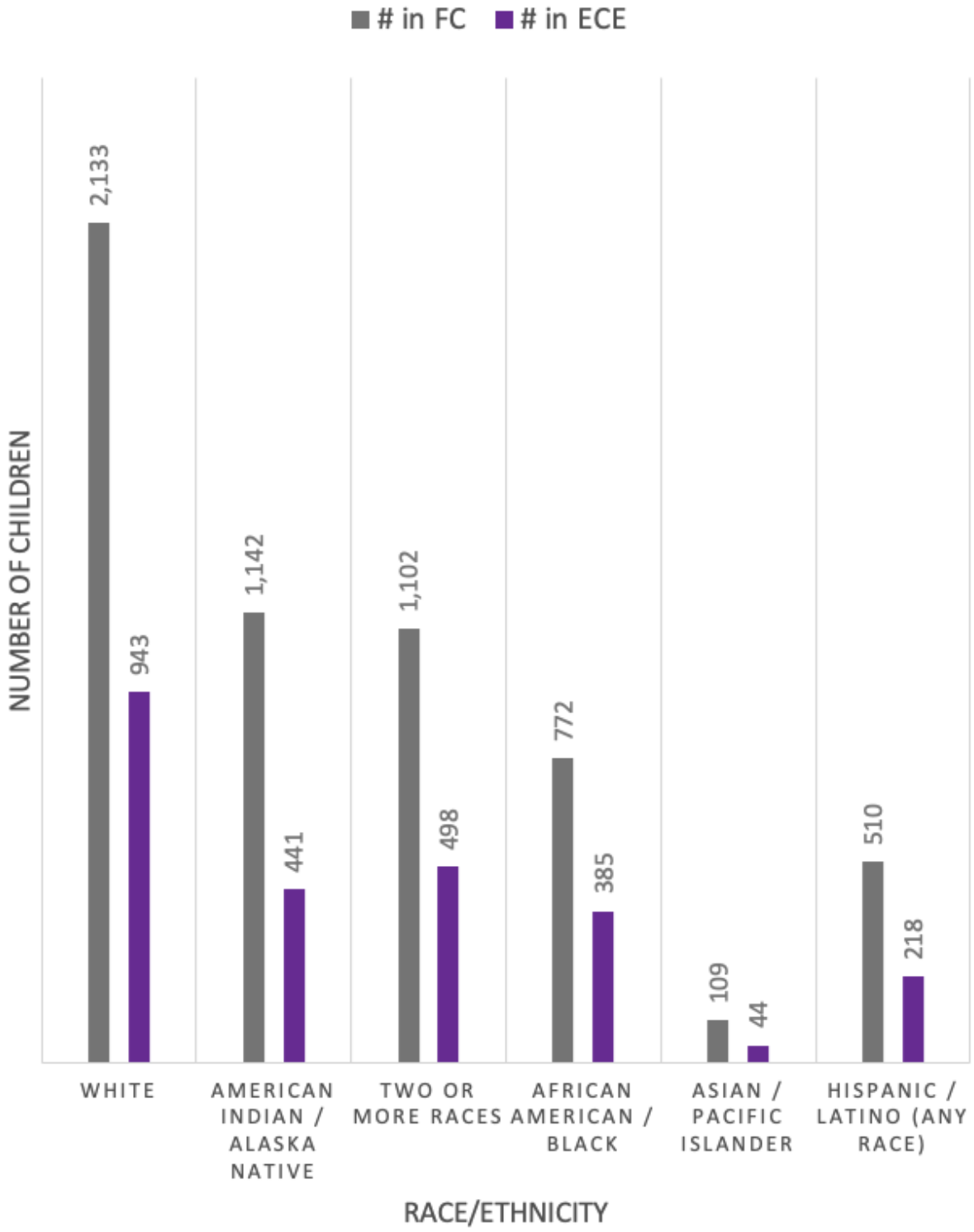
It is important to note that while white children make up the majority of children in foster care in Minnesota, **American Indian/Alaska Native** children, **African American/Black** children, and children of **multiple races** are **disproportionately represented in the foster care system**, a reality that is not made evident from the data presented in Figure 3. Data from Child Trends show that in fiscal year 2020, **white children** made up **67%** of the general child population in Minnesota, and **34% of the foster care population**. In contrast, **American Indian/Alaska Native children** made up closer to **1%** of the general child population, but **21% of the foster care population** in Minnesota. **African American children** and **children of multiple races** made up **10%** and **5%** of the general child population, respectively, but **15% and 19% of the foster care population**, respectively (Williams, 2020).

Figure 2. *ECE Participation for Young Children in Foster Care by Race and by Ethnicity (percent) during AY 2019.*



Note. ECE enrollment data include Early Childhood Screening and Early Learning Scholarships, which are programs that do not provide educational programming or child care services.

Figure 3. *ECE Participation for Young Children in Foster Care by Race and by Ethnicity (count) during AY 2019.*



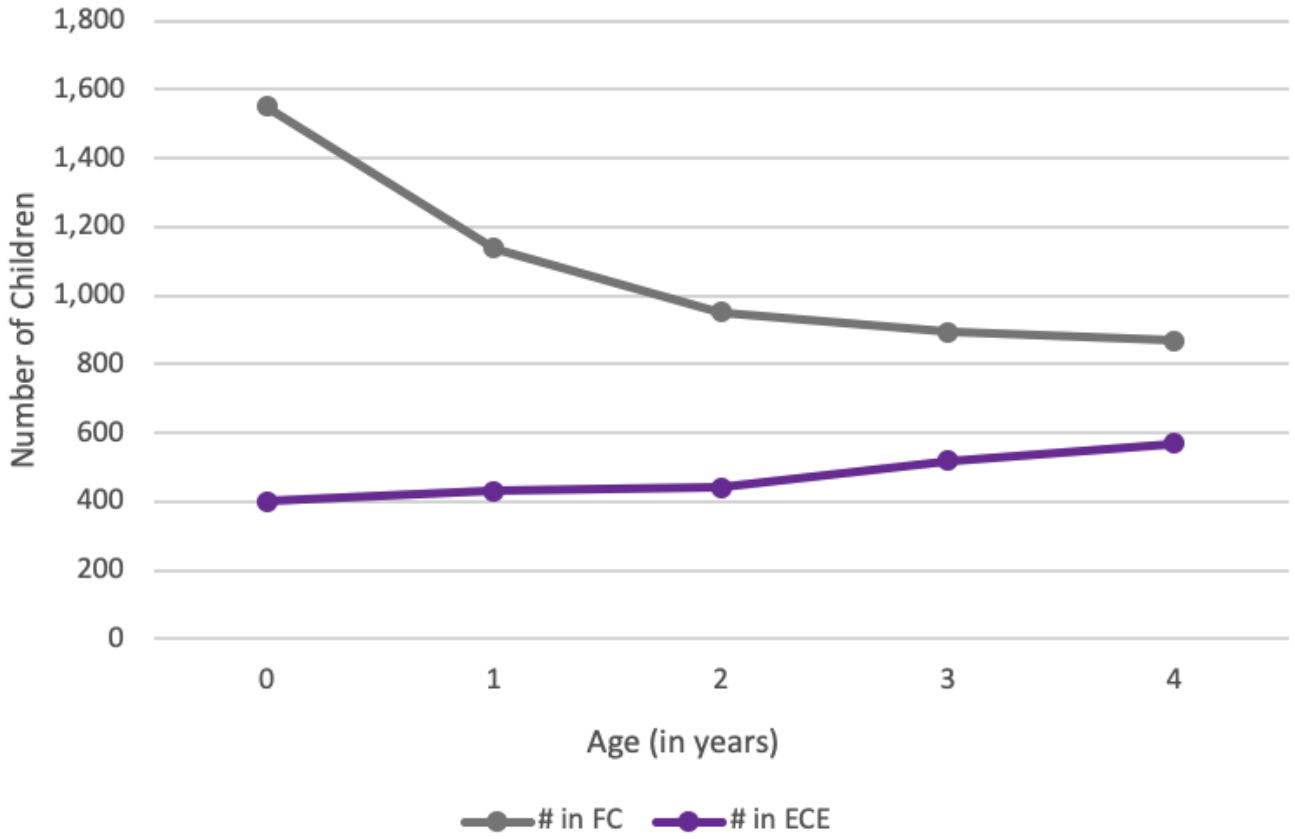
Note. ECE enrollment data include Early Childhood Screening and Early Learning Scholarships, which are programs that do not provide educational programming or child care services.

ECE Participation for Young Children in Foster Care by Age

Examining publicly funded ECE participation data by age reveals a potential gap in services, particularly for children aged 0-2. **Children under one year of age** are consistently the **largest group entering the foster care system** in Minnesota, making up **15.9% of entries in 2020** (US Children's Bureau, 2020). This concentration of infants (age <1) in foster care can be seen in Figure 4, where the number of children in foster care declines by ascending age group (indicated in gray). Despite this, of the 1,551 infants in foster care, **infants** were the age group with the **lowest rate of ECE participation**: Just **401 (25.9%)** infants were involved in ECE programming in AY 2019. Children aged 0-2 are eligible for **ECFE programs and Early Learning Scholarships**, which can be used at eligible ECE centers. These programs can support families with infant children in foster care by promoting community and parenting practices, providing relief from child care responsibilities, and allowing caregivers to continue or pursue employment, to the betterment of their families.

Given that there are more ECE programs that serve children at ages 3 and 4, it is not surprising that we see **more children in foster care enrolled in ECE programming as they approach 3-4 years of age** (indicated in purple). Of the seven programs included in ECLDS analyzed in this report, four (57%) are intended to serve only 3- and/or 4-year-olds. Included in this group is the **Early Childhood Screening** program, which begins at 3 years old and although it is not an educational program in itself, can often serve as a tool to **raise awareness of ECE programs and resources for families.**

Figure 4. *ECE Participation for Young Children in Foster Care by Age during AY 2019.*



Note. ECE enrollment data include Early Childhood Screening and Early Learning Scholarships, which are programs that do not provide educational programming or child care services.

ECE Participation for Young Children in Foster Care by County and Region

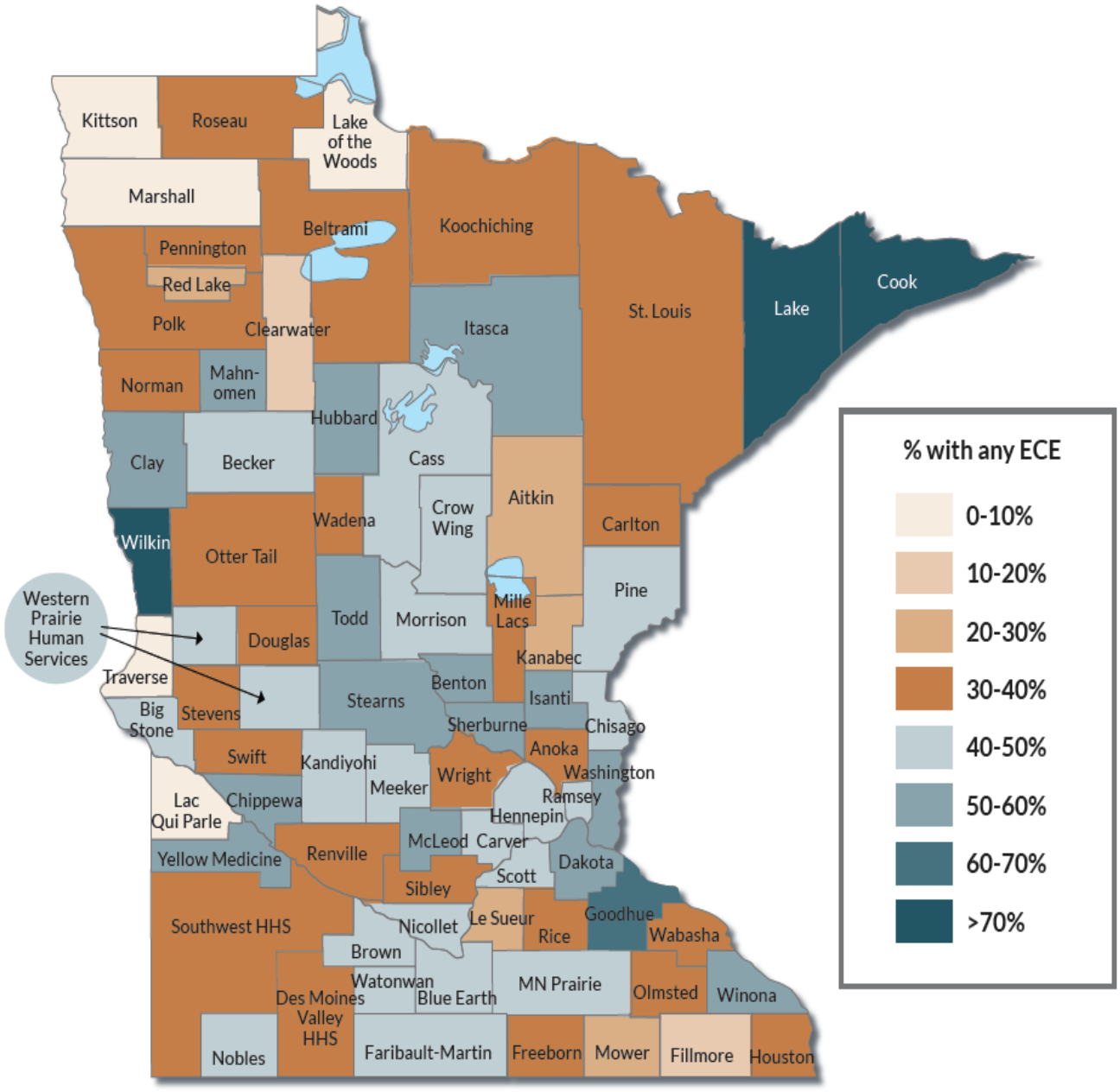
Examining ECE participation rates by county (n=78, as some public human service agencies serve multiple counties) and by MACSSA region (n=11) presents a few difficulties. Some counties, and therefore some regions, have lower numbers of children in foster care, which can greatly **impact the meaningfulness of the ECE participation rate.** Particularly at the county level, some of the lowest (min=0%) and highest (max=75%) rates of ECE participation coincide with a small number of young children in foster care in that county (Figure 5). For example, the **five counties with a 0% ECE participation rate** had **less than six** young children in foster care; Two of these counties had only one young child in foster care. The same can be said for the highest rates of participation by county: Of the **three counties with participation rates over 70%**, one had only **seven** young children in foster care and the other two had just **four** young children in foster care. Thus, it is important to consider counts of children in foster care as well as ECE participation rates at the county level.

Of the **19 counties** with ECE participation rates **between 50-70%** (max=61.5%), the range in number of young children in foster care in each county varied widely, from **2 to 202 children.**

The counties with ECE participation rates **between 50-70%** and numbers of young children in foster care **over 100** were **Dakota County** (52%, n=105 out of 202 young children in foster care) and **Stearns County** (51.2%, n=66 out of 129 young children in foster care). Dakota County is in MACSSA Region 11 and Stearns County is in MACSSA Region 7. The remaining **51 counties** had participation rates **under 50%** (min=16.7%, max=49.1%).

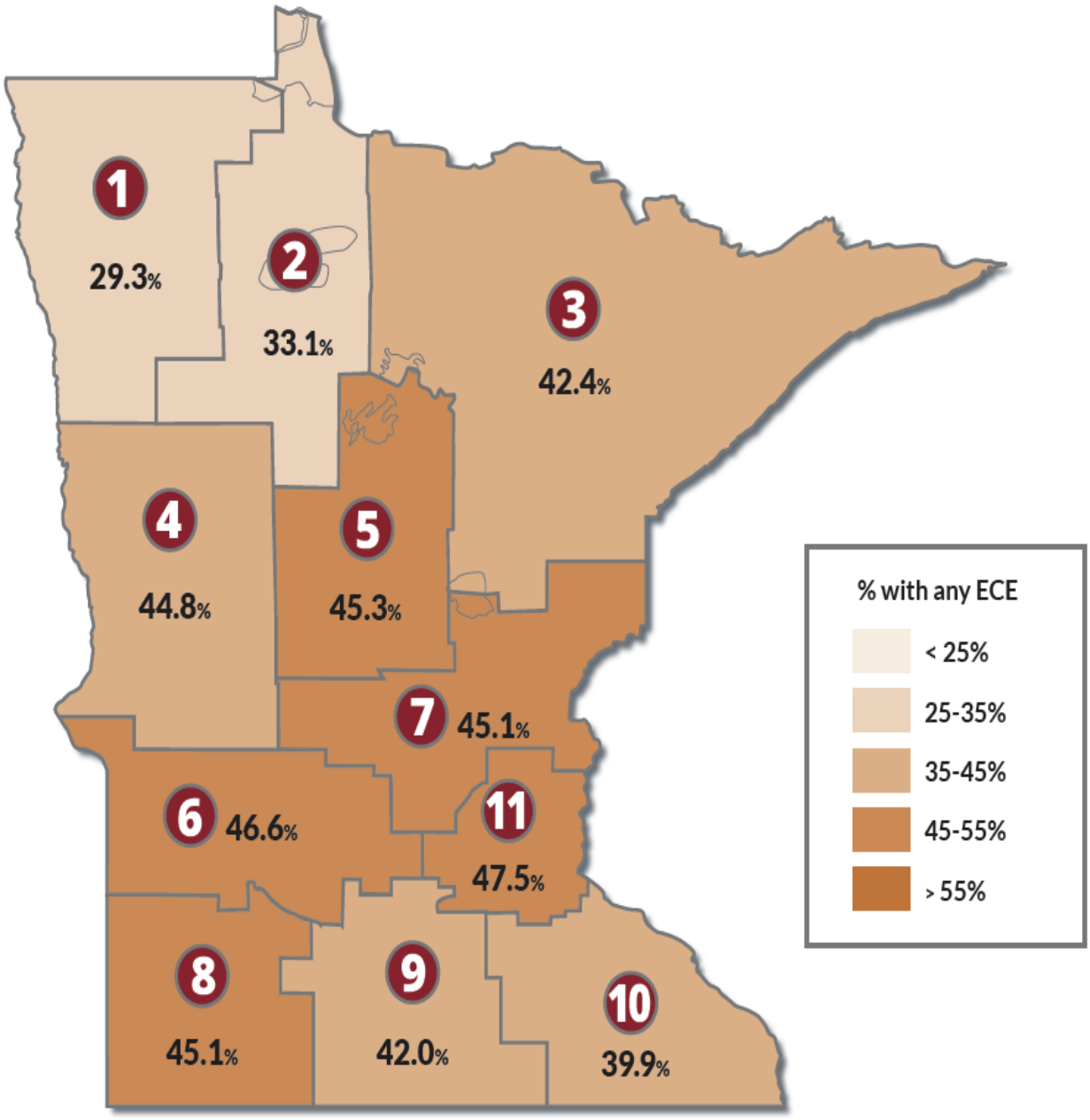
Regionally, we see that **none of the 11 MACSSA regions had an ECE participation rate over 50%** for young children in foster care (Figure 6, see *Appendix E: Data Tables* for county data by MACSSA regions). **Region 11** had the **highest rate of ECE participation** for young children in foster care at **47.5%** (n=1,027 out of 2,161 young children in foster care in the region), while **Region 1** had the **lowest participation rate at 29.3%** (n=22 out of 75 young children in foster care in the region). Despite limitations to what can be understood about these data given the variability in number of young children in foster care across counties, which also impacts regional averages, findings estimate that **all 11 MACSSA regions** and the **majority of Minnesota counties** have a **less than 50% rate** of ECE participation for young children in foster care.

Figure 5. *ECE Participation Rates for Young Children in Foster Care by County during AY 2019.*



Note. ECE enrollment data include Early Childhood Screening and Early Learning Scholarships, which are programs that do not provide educational programming or child care services. Western Prairie Human Services serves Pope and Grant Counties. Des Moines Valley Health and Human Services (Des Moines Valley HHS) serves the counties of Cottonwood and Jackson. Southwest Health and Human Services (Southwest HHS) serves the counties of Lincoln, Lyon, Murray, Pipestone, Redwood, and Rock. Minnesota Prairie Council Alliance (MN Prairie) serves the counties of Dodge, Steele, and Waseca. Data used in this map fall in the 0-75% range. There were no county percentages above 75% in the data set.

Figure 6. *ECE Participation Rates for Young Children in Foster Care by MACSSA Region during AY 2019.*



Note. ECE enrollment data include Early Childhood Screening and Early Learning Scholarships, which are programs that do not provide educational programming or child care services. Minnesota Prairie Council Alliance (MN Prairie) includes counties from both Regions 9 and 10 and is included under both regions. Data used in this map fall in the 25-50% range. There were no regional percentages below 25% or above 50% in the data set.

ECE Participation Rates for the General Child Population Compared to Young Children in Foster Care

This section provides population-level comparisons of ECE participation rates by the general child population and young children in foster care in Minnesota, disaggregated by ECE program, including Head Start and Early Head Start. Population-level comparisons were conducted using publicly available state population estimates by age from the US Census Bureau[2] (denominator) and population-level participation rates by program, provided by MDE staff (numerator). Head Start (HS) and Early Head Start (EHS) data for the general child population used in this analysis are from state fiscal year 2018-2019. Head Start data for young children in foster care also include counts for the Migrant and Seasonal Head Start (MSHS)[3] program, so comparisons between the general child population and the foster care population for Head Start may not be exact. The total number of children in foster care in ECE and the subsequent participation rate could not be calculated to include Head Start and Early Head Start, as these data were not available in ECLDS and duplicate counts could not be accounted for in this population-level calculation. This section therefore uses the total count and rate of ECE participation for young children in foster care determined in the ECLDS data (under TOTAL: # FC in ECE, % FC in ECE). As with the previous findings shared in this section, analysis was conducted at the population level for children aged 0-4, although some programs may have eligibility criteria for children older than 4 years of age.

Table 4. *ECE Participation for Young Children in Foster Care Compared to the General Child Population, by Program during AY 2019.*

ECE Program	Age Eligibility	General Child Population (GCP)	# GCP in ECE	% GCP in ECE	Foster Care (FC) Population	# FC in ECE	% FC in ECE
ECSE Part B	3-4	144,711	17,008	11.8%	1,763	422	23.9%
ECSE Part C	0-2	206,911	12,143	5.9%	3,641	657	18.0%
ECFE	0-4	351,622	17,701	5.0%	5,404	109	2.0%
School Readiness	3-4	144,711	20,382	14.1%	1,763	175	9.9%
VPK / SRP	4	72,717	7,350	10.1%	864	98	11.3%
EHS	0-3	278,905	3,522	1.3%	4,535	324	7.1%

[2] Population estimates used in this analysis were from the US Census Bureau estimates updated July 2019. US Census Bureau data for Minnesota are publicly accessible through the US Census Bureau website, here: https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/popest/2010s-state-detail.html

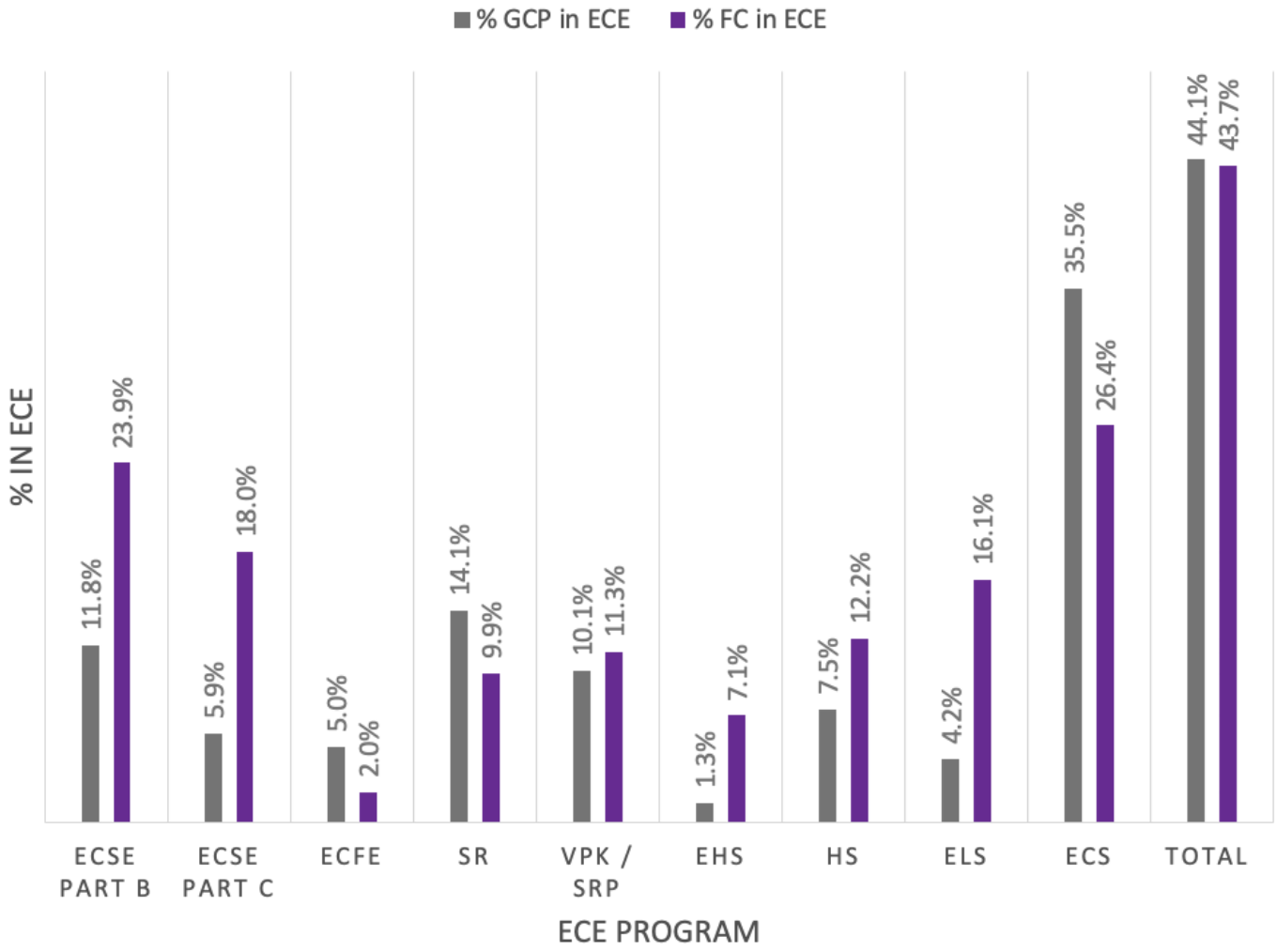
[3] Migrant and Seasonal Head Start is a 0-5 grant and does not report separately for Early Head Start and Head Start like other Head Start grantees. Program information and eligibility criteria for the Migrant and Seasonal Head Start program is available here: https://mnheadstart.org/eligiblity/

HS	3-4	351,622	10,803	7.5%	5,404	659	12.2%
Early Learning Scholarships	0-4	351,622	14,825	4.2%	5,404	868	16.1%
Early Childhood Screening	3-4	144,711	55,390	35.5%	1,763	466	26.4%
TOTAL	0-4	351,622	155,124	44.1%	5,404	*2,362*	*43.7%*

Note. Total ECE participation includes enrollment in at least one ECE program, including Early Childhood Screening and Early Learning Scholarships. Age eligibility displayed in Table 4 are from 0-4 in alignment with the data analyzed in ECLDS for this report. Some programs listed in this table serve children older than age 4.

When examining participation rates across individual programs (Table 4, Figure 7), the **general child population** had **higher rates of participation** for **ECFE** (5% to 2%), **School Readiness** (14.1% to 9.9%), and **Early Childhood Screening** (35.5% to 26.4%). As indicated in the qualitative findings of this report and existing literature, a higher enrollment in ECFE for the general child population may be due to the often complex schedules and competing demands of families providing foster care compared to other families. The lower rates of Early Childhood Screening for young children in foster care highlights an opportunity for additional outreach to families providing foster care. There were much **higher rates of children in foster care** in **ECSE Part B** and **Part C** compared to the general child population, which may be a reflection of the impact that foster care placement, and separation from families of origin, have on children. It is worth noting that children who are receiving Early Childhood Special Education services often do not receive an Early Childhood Screening because they are already receiving services, making the screening duplicative. Therefore, the higher rates of ECSE participation for children in foster care may explain the somewhat lower rates of Early Childhood Screening for young children in foster care. Children in foster care also had higher rates of Early Learning Scholarship receipt, an indication that the **categorical eligibility of young children in foster care** for Early Learning Scholarships may be facilitating access to this benefit. Children in foster care are also categorically eligible for Head Start and Early Head Start programs. Children in foster care had higher rates of participation for both of these programs compared to the general child population (Figure 7).

Figure 7. *ECE Participation for Young Children in Foster Care Compared to the General Child Population, by Program, during AY 2019.*



Note. Total ECE participation includes enrollment in at least one ECE program, including Early Childhood Screening and Early Learning Scholarships.

Comparing the rates of ECE participation for young children in foster care to the general child population reveals broadly that **less than 50% of the overall child population participated in ECE**, regardless of whether the child was in foster care. In fact, young children in foster care had **on average had comparable rates of ECE participation** to the general child population in Minnesota (**43.7%** for young children in foster care compared to **44.1%** for the general child population). Qualitative interviews included in this study emphasized that **accessing ECE programs is difficult for all Minnesota families**, and these data support that reality. The Child Care Assistance Program is one publicly funded program that facilitates access to child care for families in Minnesota, but CCAP data are not included in this report as children in foster care are ineligible. Additionally, many Minnesota children in ECE programs are in private pay programs as opposed to the publicly funded programs analyzed here. By examining pathways to increase access and availability of ECE programs for young children in foster care – who may

face more access barriers than other children and families – policymakers can use the findings from this study to explore avenues that could increase ECE access for all young children in Minnesota.

Key Takeaways:
ECE Participation Rates for Young Children in Foster Care

- Most young children in foster care were not enrolled in ECE programs in AY 2019. This was seen across a majority of counties as well as MACSSA regions.
    - African American/Black children had the highest rates – and American Indian/Alaska Native children had the lowest rates – of ECE participation among young children in foster care.
    - Although children less than one year of age were the largest age group in foster care in Minnesota, they had the lowest rate of ECE participation. This is partially due to the small number of publicly funded early childhood programs in ECLDS that serve infants.
- Participation rates for young children in foster care were comparable to participation rates of the general child population in Minnesota.
    - While these data indicate there may be shared experiences across families in Minnesota, given the limitations to the data and subsequent analysis noted above, we need the insights of people with lived experience in this area: foster and biological families, child welfare workers, and ECE providers.
    - For some of the programs with higher rates of participation among young children in foster care (e.g., Early Learning Scholarships), it could be that the categorical eligibility of children in foster care may be facilitating access to those benefits for families providing foster care.
- Data limitations ultimately impact what we are able to understand about ECE participation for young children in foster care. The way in which data were able to be analyzed for this report may be obscuring some patterns.
    - Increasing data integration across systems and expanding uniform data collection practices in a way that can accurately track the services received by individual children can expand our understanding of ECE participation counts, rates, and outcomes for young children in foster care. Utilizing other data sources available in Minnesota coupled with a longitudinal design may also help to identify patterns that may be obscured by the cohort-based analysis presented in this report.

VI. Preliminary Qualitative Findings and Considerations

This section presents the preliminary findings from qualitative interviews with key stakeholders from the Minnesota Departments of Human Services and Education and the community. Data shared in this report have been de-identified to protect interviewee confidentiality. Interviewee quotes were edited for clarity.

A. Description of Qualitative Methods

Participant Recruitment

From September 2022 to October 2022, the University of Minnesota research team conducted a total of 18 interviews with 19 professionals from the Minnesota Department of Human Services, the Minnesota Department of Education, and relevant community organizations. The University research team, in consultation with the Minnesota Departments of Human Services and Education, identified stakeholders based on their direct experience with any, or all, of the following areas: administrative data systems, ECE programs and policies, foster care services and policies. In addition to the 15 administrators initially identified for inclusion in the study, at the close of each interview, the University research team used the snowball method of recruitment and asked for recommendations of other relevant professionals to interview, resulting in three additional interviews. Stakeholders were invited via email from a member of the research team to participate in the study. The research team did not offer participants any compensation for their involvement in the study. All qualitative data utilized in this project came directly from interviews with professionals working within child- and family-serving systems. This study was determined exempt from Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight by the University of Minnesota IRB (STUDY00016937).

Data Collection and Analysis

In each interview, researchers asked questions about the following: interviewees' professional background, current role and job functions as they relate to ECE participation/foster care; interviewees' understanding of barriers and facilitators to participation in ECE for young children in foster care in Minnesota with respect to broad-level policy and practice contexts; interviewees' understanding of strengths and challenges of working with state administrative data systems relating to these topics and this population; and interviewees' considerations for steps the state should take to better understand barriers and facilitators to, and encourage, participation in ECE for young children in foster care and/or improve current administrative data systems. The research team used the qualitative data analysis software NVivo to complete analysis of the de-identified interview transcripts. The data analysis process was iterative with the researchers moving through several cycles of coding transcripts based on a collaboratively designed codebook; meeting to discuss potential new codes or clarifications to existing codes; revising the codebook; and then coding additional transcripts. Two research team members

(one from CASCW and one from CEED) analyzed and coded each transcript. *For a copy of the interview protocols used for this study, contact Amy Dorman at dorm0039@umn.edu.*

About the Qualitative Data

In the design of this study, the researchers intentionally decided to invite stakeholders with different areas of expertise and experience to participate in the interviews to capture a broad-level (e.g., data systems, policy, and practice) context to better understand ECE participation for young children in foster care. Although each interviewee was given an opportunity to respond to the same set of interview questions, some participants may not have provided information about one area of the interview protocol or another because they did not have knowledge or experience in that area. For example, some interviewees did not have experience with administrative data systems and some interviewees did not have direct knowledge of ECE programs and/or foster care at the local level. The variance in the interviewees' level of expertise and experience in the areas examined in the study is an important consideration when interpreting the results. For example, if five of the 18 interviewees noted that transportation was a barrier for foster families to access ECE programs, it would be inaccurate to conclude that the stakeholders in the other 13 interviewees thought transportation was not a barrier. Based on the study design and the process researchers used to analyze the interview data, it is not possible to differentiate between an interviewee who thought transportation was not a barrier and an interviewee who did not mention transportation as a barrier, for whatever reason. In the next phase of the study, researchers will explore the barriers and facilitators to participation in ECE for children in foster care in more depth by conducting focus groups with families and workers involved in the ECE and foster care systems.

This study focuses on county-based foster care placements, which include indigenous children and may include children who were originally placed with counties that are now within a tribal system or whose case has been transferred for tribal oversight. It is necessary to conduct culturally-sensitive research with tribal communities as partners and central stakeholders; the final report will include recommendations for the state to fund and conduct additional community-engaged studies, in partnership with indigenous researchers, to better understand the intersection of foster care placement and participation in Tribal Early Childhood programs, such as the Tribal Early Learning Initiative and Tribal Home Visiting, and to explore strategies to reduce barriers and improve access to early care and education programs for young American Indian children in foster care.

B. Qualitative Findings

Qualitative findings are organized into four sections: working with administrative data systems; challenges coordinating ECE access across location-based systems; barriers to ECE participation for families with young children in foster care; and facilitating factors and opportunities to build upon existing efforts. Data from the joint interview with two professionals is expressed in this report as one "interviewee." The qualitative analysis found no disagreement expressed

between the two interviewees during the data collection process; thus these two interviewees will be counted as one point of data collection, or one "interviewee," for clarity. This clarification brings the total number of interviewees in alignment with the total number of interviews (n=18).

Working with Administrative Data Systems

Findings in this section are based on data from 10 of the 18 total interviews (56%) conducted for this interim report. These 10 interviewees shared specific insight into the administrative data systems and data collection processes used to better understand participation rates of young children in foster care within Minnesota's ECE system.

Challenges in Using Existing Administrative Data Systems

Five of the 10 interviewees (50%) described changes needed to improve existing administrative data systems**.** Identified changes include the need to **integrate and maintain integration** across data systems at the state and local levels and to **fund staff training and time** to be able to use these data accurately. This is consistent with previous research about the barriers to ECE participation for children in foster care, which identified **issues with integrating data systems** and the need for improvements to better understand gaps and needs around ECE participation for young children in foster care. The quantitative findings in this report illustrate the significant challenges present in using ECLDS to quantitatively describe recent ECE participation rates for young children in foster care as a whole, as well as by race, ethnicity, age, and county. *The limitations of ECLDS for this purpose are described fully in Appendix D: Quantitative Methodology (Extended).*

Although there has been some **progress toward integrating data systems** across agencies since 2019 through the Preschool Development Grant, interviewees described **ongoing gaps in data integration** that continue to present barriers to children and their families. For example, current limitations on how a child's foster care status can be shared across agencies and data systems impact how quickly that child can engage in ECE programs. And, when workers do not have information about a family's language and culture, they are unable to help the family access ECE programming that addresses those family characteristics.

Insufficient data integration presents **barriers at both the state and local levels.** One interviewee provided examples of barriers that result from a lack of integration between the data systems for the Child Care Assistance Program and Early Learning Scholarships. Families providing foster care are not eligible to receive CCAP benefits, but some kinship families caring for children in foster care may be eligible for CCAP.

> *We don't have data integration between our Child Care Assistance Program Data System. . . and our Early Learning Scholarships data, so that serves as a barrier both at the local level for providers who have to request funding or reimbursement for children in their care from two different payment systems, but also creates barriers for us [at the state level] in being*

able to actually look at what children are receiving CCAP and Early Learning Scholarships and how we can better align those services or funding streams.

Interviewees also described changes needed to **improve the use of data systems,** including **training staff** on how to correctly use integrated data, and prioritizing and **funding positions** responsible for accessing and analyzing data.

There's also a challenge of misinterpretation, or less than knowledgeable use of the data and a potential risk of bad decision-making because data wasn't used correctly. ... And a challenge of having enough – and the right – analysis of the data to draw conclusions from.

Interviewees explained that the quality of the data in administrative systems is diminished when local staff are not provided user-friendly software, sufficient training, and/or paid time for data entry. These challenges are compounded when **data systems are out-of-date**.

We don't have modern data systems, which would make it easier for people to enter data. It gives a better front-end experience. Modern data systems also have a better back-end user experience, which makes it easier for us to integrate and share data and report on [that data], and we just cannot get investment to build or purchase modern data systems.

Challenges with Accessing Real-Time Data

Five of the 10 interviewees (50%) highlighted the need for **real-time data** at the local level that are not currently available in existing data systems.

A number of our early learning programs have kids in foster care either as part of their priority group or they're categorically eligible, but verifying the status of the child in foster care is complicated at the local level, so case workers may have to produce paperwork. Anything that adds burden on caseworkers for kids in foster care is problematic.

Nine of the 10 interviewees (90%) noted that certain **data were not being collected** systematically in one or more data systems, including race/ethnicity and other demographic information, whether children are in foster care, family-level risk factors, and other longitudinal data across ECE programs that could provide outcome data for each individual child. Data gaps **limit our understanding** of ECE participation for young children in foster care**,** and thus can **limit outreach efforts** and potentially hinder families who are prioritized for ECE programs from receiving these care benefits.

With our current data system structure, we don't have the story before they become enrolled in their resident district. We have some of the information in our referral system, but we only have the data that's referred through our referral and intake system. We don't have data that is referred directly to the school district, so that's missing data.

Integrated data systems that provide local staff with real-time data can also support and enhance **collaboration across sectors in local communities**, which previous research has

identified as an important factor in improving access to ECE services for children in foster care.

Although the Early Childhood Longitudinal Data System (ECLDS) includes some data on young children who participate in **Head Start programs**, local decisions about whether to submit data for ECLDS and, if so, which data to submit, **limit the thoroughness of the data** that are provided**.** Because Head Start is a federal-to-local program, the state currently lacks authority to systematically collect data from local programs.

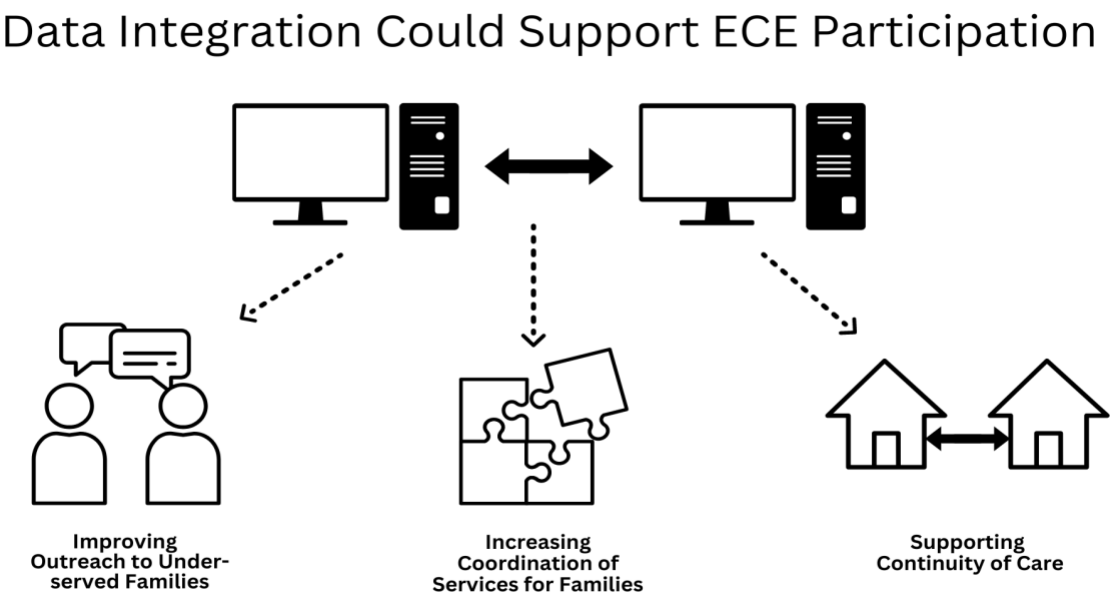
Interviewees also emphasized that the existing administrative data systems do not provide **sufficient longitudinal data** across ECE programs that could provide outcome data for each individual child. Program and child outcome data are important because they allow administrators, teachers, and other stakeholders to understand the program's impact on children's developmental and academic growth. One interviewee explained by saying,

> *I think it's just the opportunity to be able to over time understand which interventions end up supporting the child's optimal growth and development. It's whether or not the experience they receive is meeting their needs. That's some of the richness that over time we'll be able to get from longitudinal data.*

Increase and Improve Data Collection and Integration to Help Local and State Authorities Better Serve Families

Ten of the 18 total interviewees (56%) emphasized that **better data collection** and **integration** helps local and state authorities serve families by identifying where programs intersect in families' lives and addressing gaps accordingly (Figure 8). These interviewees identified that better data collection and integration could help **improve outreach efforts** to families, **increase coordination of services**, and **contribute to continuity of care** for young children in foster care.

Figure 8. *Data Integration Could Support ECE Participation*



Building connections across administrative data systems can also help children and families access ECE services by increasing the **coordination of those services,** a primary goal of the Preschool Development Grant. Interviewees discussed how the **continuity of care** for young children can be strengthened when improvements are made to data collection and integration processes across data systems at both the state and local levels.

> *If we think about the system as a whole, it would be useful for us to be able to track the journey that a child takes in our system and what they're connected to or not connected to. That would be helpful information in terms of ensuring that families and children are supported in all the ways that they can be supported, but they're not missing services somewhere and that they're not be[ing] redundantly served. That's an advantage that could come into play if we were able to build a system that demonstrated what children were actively enrolled in or what families were actively involved in.*

Key Takeaways:
Working with Administrative Data Systems

- It is necessary to increase and improve data collection and integration to help local and state authorities better understand how to reach, serve, and support families in accessing ECE and maintaining continuity of care:
    - Increased data integration is needed across systems to improve the use of real-time data for purposes of outreach to families and coordination of services for families.
    - Additional data collection, including child-specific longitudinal data, is needed to increase our understanding of ECE participation for children in foster care as well as the outcomes of ECE participation for individual children.
    - Increases in staff training are needed to ensure the accurate interpretation of administrative data.

Challenges Coordinating ECE Access across Location-based Systems

All 18 (100%) interviewees identified the differences across ECE and foster care systems in Minnesota, often based on location, as a factor that can impact ECE participation for young children in foster care. In line with existing literature, interviewees identified differences across **agencies and disciplines** (e.g., child welfare and early care and education), **regions** (e.g., Greater Minnesota and the Twin Cities Metro), **counties, school districts,** and **individual ECE programs** as potential challenges to ECE participation.

Different Challenges for Greater Minnesota and the Twin Cities Metro

Six of the 18 interviewees (33%) explicitly mentioned differences across ECE and foster care systems between **Greater Minnesota** and the **Twin Cities Metro** as an important consideration when examining ECE participation for young children in foster care. From program availability,

geographic distance, and costs, families in Greater Minnesota and the Twin Cities Metro may experience different barriers. This becomes particularly complex when a child moves from the Twin Cities Metro to a foster family placement in Greater Minnesota, creating challenges to maintaining continuous program access for that child. **Ten of the 18 (56%)** interviewees identified differences across systems and/or locations as a challenge to **continuity of care**, which can be impacted when the child moves from one Minnesota region to another.

> *There is a scarcity of foster homes in some of our areas of the state. It's easier to go from Hennepin County to Ramsey County. It's not that far. But if you're thinking more rural and that region of our state, whereas the nearest foster home could be six, seven, eight hours away, how does a family stay involved? There are some pretty significant geographical impacts in a family's ability to maintain involvement in the educational process.*

> *If you're in very rural outstate Minnesota, there may not be options. Maybe there's one provider or no providers, and if there's one provider, they're full. Whether a kinship [family] or someone else, they can't [transport the child to the ECE program] because of a work commitment or whatever the reason is. Then the child loses access.*

> *We have [Head Start and Early Head Start] programs in every county in Minnesota, but it's county-based. So, if a child moves out of the area where they're getting services, those services have to restart. They have to be re-engaged.*

Differences across Counties and Programs

Beyond regional differences, the challenges of Minnesota's **county-administered system** were highlighted by interviewees, including **variance in funding**, inconsistent **information-sharing practices**, and contrasts in **availability of ECE programming**. Given what can be vast differences from county to county, interviewees noted **barriers to equitable access to ECE** based on the resources available in and/or prioritized by some counties compared to others. One interviewee expressed how **county property taxes** influence the resources available to children based on county, and how a state-level investment in child welfare systems broadly may be needed to reduce inequities across counties.

> *It's county property dollars that are determinative around the level of support that's accessed within each county of origin, and that's a system that is unfair. That leaves the state in a challenging place of having authority, but little actual practical support.*

Another interviewee highlighted how differences in the ways counties operate can impact the **information shared** by counties to school districts (and ECE programs run by school districts) that may allow for better outreach to families with young children in foster care.

> *Every county operates a little bit differently, even though they're also doing the same according to statute. That has often been a struggle that has been articulated by school districts: There isn't a uniform way of managing that communication [around children in foster care] and clarity in guardianship [for those children].*

Interviewees also emphasized that **differences in how Head Start programs are operated** and what each program offers can make it difficult for child welfare staff and families to connect with their local Head Start program.

> *If you know about the way one Head Start program in Minnesota does something, then you know one of 34 ways that a Head Start Program operates in Minnesota… You layer on top of that the number of school districts that each of these programs works with, there are so many relationships that each Head Start grantee has to have and nurture. Sometimes we're talking about upwards of 30-plus school districts.*

Investing in ECE Availability, Quality, and Connection to Families

Investment limitations at the state level trickle down to impact processes, programs, and families. **Twelve of the 18 (67%)** interviewees explicitly identified that investment was needed to **increase ECE program availability**, **quality, and accessibility** (including through funding options for families). Considering the unique needs of children in foster care, program availability and quality were often mentioned by interviewees in connection to the **need for more, and specialized, ECE program staff**.

> *Even if [families] are on the priority list because their children are in foster care, they may not be able to find a program that actually has seats available. There are major problems with child care access, child care shortages, and an overburdened workforce right now.*

> *There's a significant child care crisis right now in Minnesota – not enough seats for all the children that need it. Then when you add the urgency of foster care, that compounds [the issue]. Some of it has to do with a shortage of qualified staff to work in these settings. Even if there physically might be space, there may not be staffing to fill a classroom.*

Twelve out of 18 (67%) interviewees noted, in alignment with previous studies, that investment was needed to **increase training** for ECE program staff and child welfare workers**,** particularly around how ECE can support young children in foster care and their families. Interviewees noted that it was important to **invest specifically in training for ECE program staff** to equip them to better engage and partner with families providing foster care, and to provide trauma-informed care for young children in foster care.

> *Whether it's the child care workers or the [ECE] providers, it's important that they have some level of training: What does it mean for a child to be in foster care? How do we best work with children in foster care? The trauma-informed approach and training is critical to this workforce so that they're prepared to serve all the children that come in their doors, and in particular, children who've experienced adversity like children in foster care.*

> *We want teachers to have the skills to understand children in the context of their lives. How you lace together supports and instructional trajectories for kids really is dependent on that child in the context of their lives.*

On the child welfare side, interviewees noted that the **breadth of information child welfare workers are expected to know** and understand, particularly for newer workers, was a challenge.

> *With the high turnover nationwide ongoing for decades in the field of child protection, a lot of workers are pretty new to the field constantly, and it does in some ways feel like [ECE information and referrals] are extra. It feels like an add-on versus all the millions of requirements that [workers] are trying to meet.*
>
> *It's important to work with social workers to help them understand why early care and education is so important. A lot of people still don't understand how important those first years are [for child development].*
>
> *There are always opportunities to have workers understand the power of their role. How can they use their role to connect [families to] opportunities, resources, services, and supports? It doesn't mean they have to know every single detail, [but instead that] part of their role is to truly help to make those connections.*

Key Takeaways:
Challenges Coordinating ECE Access across Location-based Systems

- Barriers to ECE participation look different across locations because counties, districts, and programs often operate differently and/or have different levels of resources.
- Differences across counties and programs lead to inconsistencies, impacting equitable access to ECE and continuity of care.
- State-level investments trickle down to impact processes, programs, and families. Strategic and sustainable investments by the state could help improve:
    - Program availability, quality, and accessibility.
    - Staff training and knowledge, which can connect more children to ECE and provide higher quality services to children in foster care.

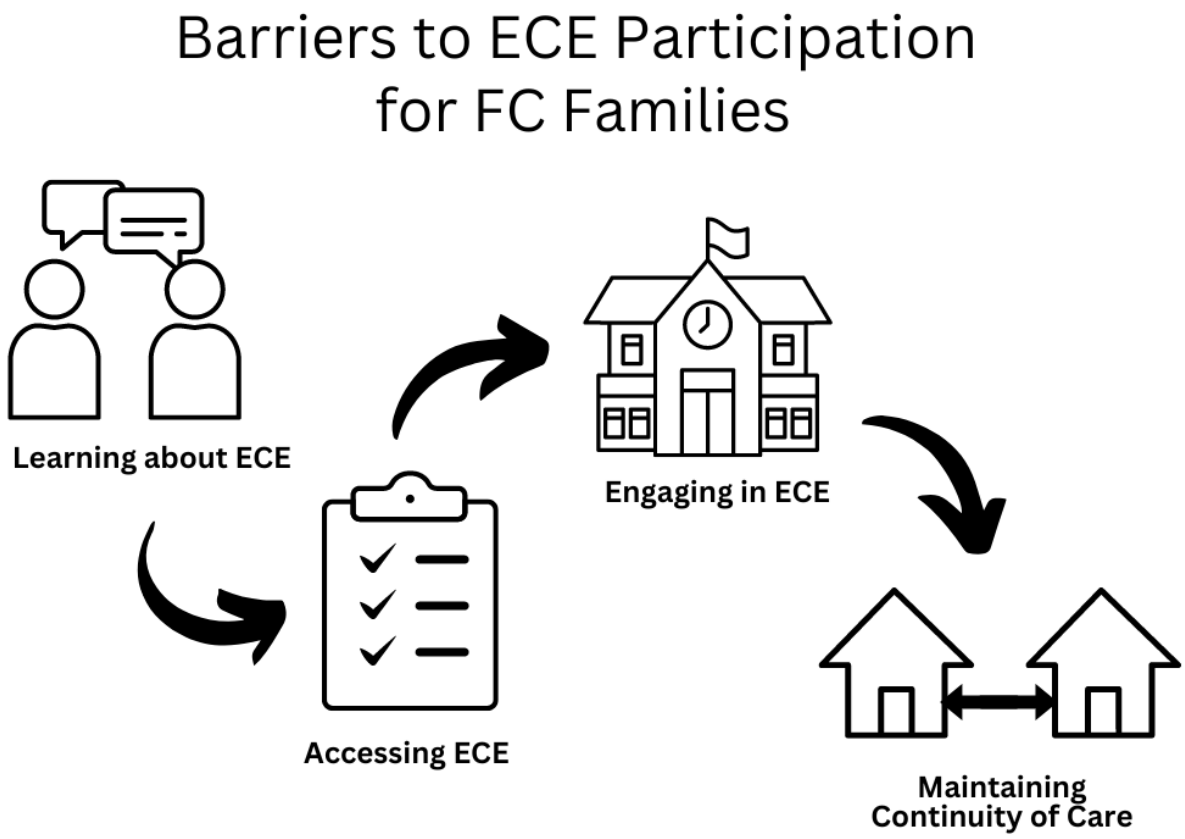
Barriers to ECE Participation for Families with Young Children in Foster Care

> *One day of disruption in a young child's life, one day of missing child care for an unexpected reason, even the most stable child who has not experienced trauma, can cause disruption. For most young children who are in the foster system, for many of their few days that they've been alive, there has been some type of disruption to their routine, to their services. That obviously causes barriers for [ECE] providers and families to access [ECE] services.*

All 18 (100%) **interviewees** highlighted that **challenges to ECE participation may vary** or be exacerbated by differences across families with children in foster care. Specifically, **13 of the 18 (72%) interviewees** identified different challenges for families with **additional and intersecting needs** (e.g., special needs, trauma, cultural background), **11 of the 18 (61%)** identified different challenges experienced by **kinship compared to non-relative families providing foster care**, and **7 of the 18 (39%)** identified different challenges for families with **multiple children** and/or **children of different ages**.

For foster care families in general, interviewees identified several family-level barriers to ECE participation, including **barriers to learning about, accessing,** and **engaging in ECE,** as well as **maintaining continuity of care** (Figure 9)**.**

Figure 9. *Barriers to ECE Participation for Foster Care (FC) Families*



Barriers to Learning About ECE

Although many children in foster care are categorically eligible to receive funding and participate in ECE programming, it was made clear by interviewees that *"it's hard for foster parents to even know about [ECE] programs."* In fact, **13 of the 18 (72%) interviewees** identified **barriers to learning about ECE**, including **lack of knowledge on ECE** programming, eligibility, and funding, as well as **lack of awareness around the positive impact** of participating in ECE programs for children and families.

"Navigating and understanding possible benefits...is a pretty big problem in Minnesota" and thus even families that know about ECE programming may **struggle to find accurate information on eligibility** for ECE funding.

> *I think sometimes people think that 100% poverty is the only way that you qualify for Head Start, but it's not true. But being in foster care, being a child or family who's experiencing homelessness, and receiving some type of public assistance [are qualifiers]. People don't realize that eligibility is beyond income.*

Interviewees also discussed the importance of family-level awareness on the **positive impact of ECE participation** for children and families, including **messaging around ECE's potential to support the well-being of the child** (e.g., social emotional learning) and **caregivers** (e.g., respite from caregiving responsibilities, additional income through employment). These findings align with evidence from other studies suggesting that foster parents may hold different beliefs about the value of ECE, and prioritize attachment and emotional stability over formal education.

> *The other big thing is really the awareness of the significance of [ECE], and the impact – the 'why,' right? Do our folks in the [foster care] system know that [these programs are] for them?*

Increasing family-level awareness and knowledge is the first step to increasing participation in ECE. Awareness efforts can be amplified through an increased investment in **early childhood screening**, particularly for 3-year-olds**.** Given the quantitative finding that the general child population had higher rates of screening than young children in foster care, there is a clear opportunity to increase outreach to families providing foster care. Screening connects families to other free ECE programs and services, and thus an increase in the number of young children in foster care screened could increase the number of these children participating in ECE programs at a younger age. Screening processes should be **culturally and linguistically sensitive** to the families they aim to target: *"there could be language issues: If districts are supposed to provide the outreach and screeners who are bilingual, or hire interpreters… but it's possible that there isn't enough funding to do that."*

Barriers to Accessing ECE

Even for families with knowledge of ECE programs, "*the barriers that one needs to go through to actually enroll in a program are pretty hefty.*" **Seventeen of the 18 (94%) interviewees** mentioned additional **barriers to accessing ECE** services, including challenges **navigating ECE applications, high program cost,** and **low program availability.**

Interviewees emphasized how navigating **confusing and/or inaccessible application** processes**,** including understanding who is required to fill out the application (e.g., biological parent, foster parent)**,** can be challenging and hinder ECE access. To increase accessibility, one interviewee discussed *"figuring out what relationship allows a qualified foster care family to access state*

resources more directly" and "*expanding the definition [on ECE applications] of who is family, who is caregiver, so that while a child is in out-of-home placement, there are more resources directly available to the family providing the foster care."* Another interviewee shared:

> *What we heard from families was, 'I have to tell my story over and over. I have to fill out 15 different applications and submit my birth certificate to eight different places.' [Families may] think that [the program] is only for biological parents or that the program doesn't fit their needs. One concern of mine is how well are the [programs] designed to meet the needs of families and special circumstances? And then, how well are they articulated or marketed to those families with programming that is tailored to special populations?*

Navigating the ECE system may be particularly difficult for **families from diverse backgrounds** when information is not **culturally sensitive** and navigation tools are not available in **appropriate languages**.

> *If you're searching the Parent Aware website, it's very hard to navigate…And even if you pick a language…Maybe one person in that center will speak some Spanish, and they'll click 'yes' to Spanish. It doesn't mean it's spoken there or that your child's provider will [speak Spanish], or that you'll be able to converse with them.*

Interviewees also discussed difficulties with **program availability** and **cost** as primary family-level barriers to ECE access**.**

> *If you're a foster parent and you don't live in a county that will pay for your child care costs, then those costs have to come out of the foster care payment that you're provided... If you can't afford to have a child in foster care be in a child care setting, then [you're] not going to go to a child care setting.*

Lastly, there may be increased barriers to accessing **specialized programming** for children in foster care with **unique needs**. For instance, even if a family has funding and access to ECE programs, there may not be any ECE programs in a child's service area that have the resources to care for a child with **special needs** (e.g., specialized medical care, trauma-informed care). As emphasized in previous research, barriers may also be heightened for **children from diverse cultural backgrounds** as *"a lot of school districts have been challenged on meeting the needs of children that speak other languages and children that are from BIPOC communities."*

Barriers to Engaging in ECE

Consistent with the literature on barriers to ECE participation, **12 out of 18 (67%) interviewees** noted that even for families with knowledge of and access to programming, there are additional **barriers to actually engaging in ECE**, including **challenges with scheduling, competing demands,** and **transportation.** For example, transitioning into structured ECE programming may be challenging for a foster child who has multiple needs that need to be addressed through multiple appointments with different providers.

Kids with trauma, including separation from being in foster care, need even more control of their lives than typical for children their age... So [as a foster parent], when you're weighing all of that on top of the visitation and private services and even getting into the doctor and sometimes having higher medical needs and needing to go from multiple appointments, [ECE participation] just doesn't fit well.

Interviewees also underlined that foster parents may have **competing demands (e.g., employment)** that create barriers to engaging in ECE. Given that some ECE programs (e.g., Head Start) do not provide full-day or full-week care, parents may struggle to integrate ECE programming into their work schedules and/or secure additional child care. Further obstacles may exist for **kinship caregivers** who were perhaps not expecting to serve as caregivers for a relative child, compared to non-relative foster care providers.

I think of it from relative care providers' [perspective] who are not signing up to provide foster care, and then just happened to have a relative child enter care and then they become the care providers. So, they have existing families, their own kids they take care of. They might have shift work, whatever their job schedules might be, where they can't attend, for example, [Early Childhood Family Education] courses, because [the classes are] typically during the day, which is not convenient for parents that have to work during the day.

As identified by interviewees and existing literature, **transportation constraints** also exist for many families providing foster care who require support safely transporting their children to and from available ECE programming. These constraints may be particularly salient for **kinship families and families with younger children**.

If you want a child to be with kin, and the kin doesn't live within that service area, what do you do? You really need the child to go to live with their kinfolk, because that is less traumatic when you're placing the child. So then if you want to keep this child in their educational setting, then the child is going to need transportation. But what's reasonable transportation back to that educational setting, especially when you have young children? What's really in the best interest of the kiddo? … And particularly with younger children, a lot of times it's the family that is going to have to be transporting. Or you need a very specialized [transportation] service provider.

Barriers to Maintaining Continuity of Care

Lastly, and in alignment with prior research, **barriers maintaining continuity of care** were identified in **11 of the 18 (61%) interviewees**. Children in foster care who are **moving into care across county lines and/or school districts** risk losing ECE access based on **program availability and location**, including transportation, as discussed above. Disruptions to care can also occur during reunification or adoption, when a **child is no longer in foster care and priority funding is eliminated for that child**.

The other issue is if you don't have continuity of care, even if you do access those programs while in foster care. So, if you have a family where the child is removed, placed in foster care, they get access to early childhood educational programs or child care… And when they exit foster care either to be reunified or placed in a permanent family home, there isn't a guarantee that that programming will remain… And so the continuity of care gets disrupted… I think if anything could be focused on, it needs to be that kids need to have access before foster care, during foster care and after foster care, and allow for that continuum to be in place. There shouldn't be a disruption at any of those points.

Key Takeaways:
Barriers to ECE Participation for Families with Young Children in Foster Care

- Families experience barriers to ECE participation across different points in the process:
  - Barriers to learning about ECE
  - Barriers to accessing ECE
  - Barriers to engaging in ECE
  - Barriers to maintaining continuity of care
- When addressing barriers, it is important to consider and collect data on how barriers vary across different families with children in foster care (e.g., kinship compared to non-relative families providing foster care; by race/ethnicity, county of residence)

Facilitating Factors and Opportunities to Build Upon Existing Efforts

Prioritization by individuals, programs, agencies, and the state helps create momentum for positive change. **Sixteen of the 18 (89%) interviewees** emphasized the importance of **current and future prioritization** for increasing participation in ECE for young children in foster care.

I think right now it's coming down to the individual social worker or caseworker who makes it a priority. Within the county system I think it comes down to individual people being committed to it… A lot of the early [care and education] providers are highly motivated and understand [the importance of] working with these families and children. I think that system is pretty prepared and willing to work with these kids.

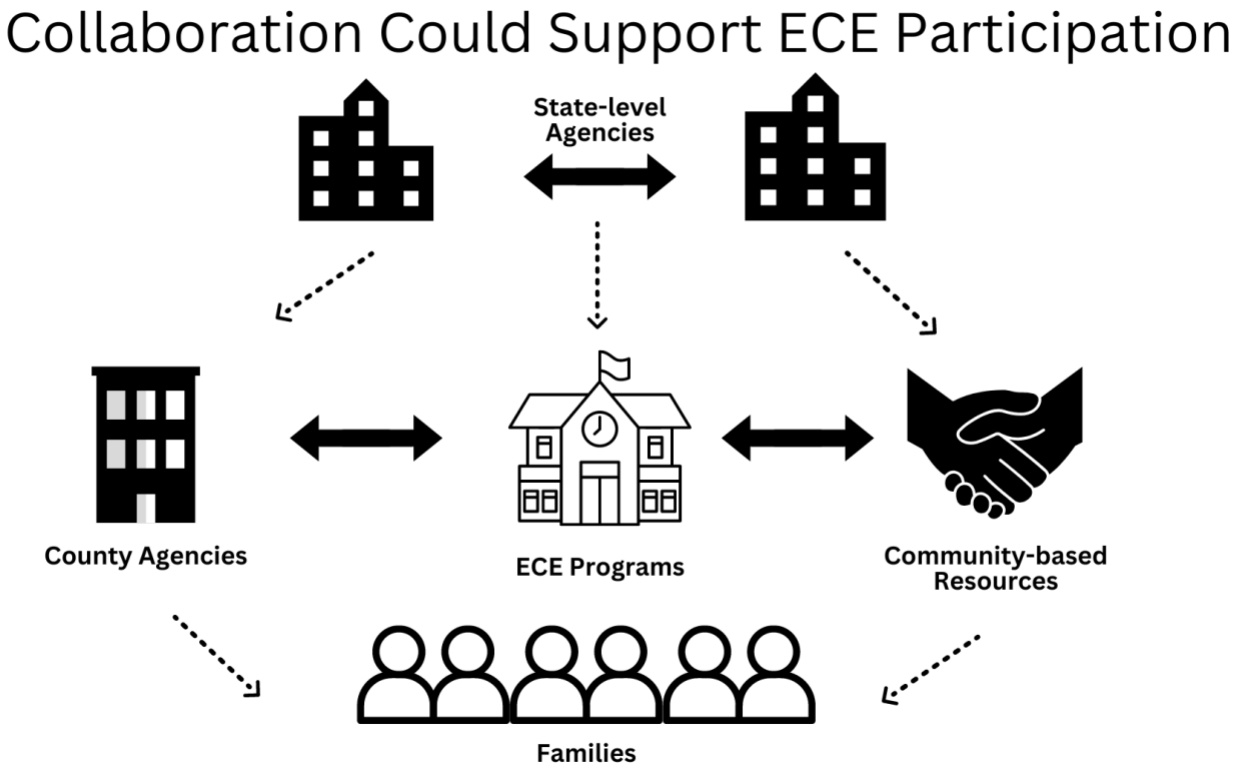
It was refreshing to see stakeholder groups [at the Minnesota Department of Education] so invested in getting foster care children into early care and education at higher rates and getting them into high-quality settings so that is the rule, not the exception. Hearing about the work they were doing with DHS and some of the intersectionality and breaking of the silos… to hear [about] this buy-in and recognition of the importance of early care and education for children in foster care was wonderful.

Interviewees noted there are opportunities to **build upon current efforts,** including eligibility and service coordination activities in Minnesota supported by the **Preschool Development Grant,** and to ensure that prioritization efforts are **well-funded and sustainable** long-term.

> *One of the barriers is [the need for] funding at the state level to be able to do more collaboration with foster care programs as well as [ECE] programs to improve our systems. That's a system-level change.*
>
> *We often don't make progress because we give an issue attention, think that something has happened, and then it goes back to the status quo after a few years. How is [ECE participation for young children in foster care] being sustained in Minnesota as far as it being a topic that needs to be addressed?*

Interviewees emphasized that **collaboration is key to success** in a siloed, county-administered system: **Fifteen of the 18 (83%) interviewees** expressed the importance of **current and future collaboration** and **relationship-building** across systems and/or locations.

Figure 10*. Collaboration Between Agencies at the State and Local Levels could Support ECE Participation*



Collaboration across several systems was mentioned, including: between **state-level agencie**s, such as MDE and DHS; between **state-level agencies and county-level agencies**; between **counties, local ECE programs, and local community-based resources**; and between these **local level organizations and families** (Figure 10).

There's been a partnership established between the Department of Education and the Department of Human Services to support this work. That partnership is a significant piece of building [these efforts] and thinking about how to continue to build.

What we've been doing, and we'll continue to do, is having opportunities to talk to the people at the county level that work with foster care, helping them connect to their local Head Start program to let them build those relationships at the local level.

One of the indicators we hear about that makes coordination work best on a local level is when there's an ability to draw on pre-existing relationships and trust in the other partners.

It's critical to build capacity from all parties [child welfare workers and ECE program staff] that are involved in the work of supporting children to understand what each other's roles and responsibilities are.

Key Takeaways:
Facilitating Factors and Opportunities to Build Upon Existing Efforts

- Prioritization by individuals, programs, agencies, and the state helps create momentum for positive change.
- Collaboration is key to success in a siloed, county-administered system.
- There are opportunities to:
    - Build upon current efforts, including eligibility and service coordination activities in Minnesota supported by the Preschool Development Grant.
    - Ensure that prioritization efforts are well-funded and sustainable long-term.

VII. Description of Remaining Qualitative Data Activities

The remaining qualitative data activities for this study will center the voices, experiences, and recommendations of families of origin, families providing foster care, child welfare workers, and ECE providers.

The University of Minnesota research team, in consultation with the Minnesota Departments of Human Services and Education will identify key regions across the state of Minnesota to serve as the focus of this second stage of the study. Key regions will be identified by their utilization (or lack thereof) of ECE programs by young children in Minnesota's foster care system. Beginning in early 2023, the University of Minnesota research team will partner with child welfare and ECE administrators in the identified regions to recruit child welfare workers, ECE providers, and foster and biological families of young children (0-5 years of age) in foster care to participate in a 90-minute focus group to better understand barriers and facilitators to ECE participation for this population. Each participant will participate in one role- and region-specific focus group (e.g., families providing foster care in a specific county or region).

Focus groups will be conducted in person at a local, neutral location (e.g., a private room in a local library) or via the video call software Zoom. At the end of each focus group, we will allocate time for participants to fill out a brief survey to capture participant demographic characteristics. Identifiable information (e.g., name, job title and workplace) will not be collected as part of the survey. At the end of the focus group and as part of the consent process, participants will also be asked whether they can be contacted for a brief 30-minute virtual interview after the focus group, if further clarification is needed. Foster and biological families will be offered compensation for their participation in the study.

The University of Minnesota research team anticipates approximately 100-200 participants will be recruited and consented to participate in the focus groups across the identified regions in the state of Minnesota. Our aim is that the participant population will consist of approximately equivalent numbers of foster and biological family participants and child welfare workers and ECE provider participants.

Aggregate findings from this study will be shared in a final report to the Minnesota Legislature in June 2023.

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Appendix A: Description of ECE Programs

This section was provided by MDE and DHS staff. The descriptions include the eligibility requirements for each program, including age requirements and if foster care involvement is a relevant eligibility factor. Because the School Readiness Plus program serves a relatively small number of children statewide (approximately 500 four-year-old students per year on average), and is very similar to the Voluntary Prekindergarten program, these programs were combined for analytic purposes and in their description.

1. Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE)

Infant and Toddler Intervention services and Preschool Special Education services are federal programs under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). In Minnesota, Early Intervention services and Preschool Special Education services are provided through local school districts and cooperatives. These services are free to eligible children and families regardless of income or immigration status.

Early Intervention services are provided in the child's home or community settings by local districts or cooperatives. The families/caregivers of children found eligible are central to the planning and delivery of services as well as for determining the outcomes. Children are eligible for early intervention services through Part C IDEA if they are under the age of three, and have: 1) Demonstrated a developmental delay of 1.5 SD in at least one area of development (physical, communication, cognitive, social or functional), have a diagnosed condition that is known to have a high correlation with delays in development, or based on informed clinical opinion. They do not need to demonstrate an educational need.

Preschool Special Educations services are most commonly provided within district programs but may also be provided in community care settings as well as the child's home. School districts or cooperatives provide instructional and therapy services according to the educational needs of the child that has been found eligible for services. Children receiving early childhood special education programming and services (ages 3 through 6) receive services under PART B/619 of IDEA. They have qualified for a categorical disability based on eligibility criteria or they have met criteria for developmental delay. Developmental delay criteria for children age 3 to age 7 must show a delay of at least 1.5 SD in at least 2 areas of development. Children receiving services and supports under IDEA Part B must demonstrate an educational need.

Link: https://education.mn.gov/MDE/fam/ECSE/

2. Voluntary Prekindergarten and School Readiness Plus (VPK/SRP)

Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) and School Readiness Plus (SRP) are publicly funded prekindergarten programs designed to prepare eligible 4-year-old children for success as they enter kindergarten the following year. Programs use play-based learning, coordinated transitions to kindergarten and family-centered program planning to create high-quality early learning opportunities that meet the needs of each child. Programs offer free transportation.

Link: https://education.mn.gov/MDE/fam/elsprog/vpk/

3. School Readiness

School Readiness is a preschool program designed to help prepare 3- and 4-year-olds to enter kindergarten. All Minnesota school districts provide a School Readiness program. Programming and services vary between districts, with class options for different days of the week and half-day or full-day options. Some School Readiness programs also offer services like home visiting or wrap-around care.

4. Early Childhood Screening

Early Childhood Screening supports children's learning and promotes health and development. Screening is a way for schools to meet with parents/guardians and children in order to listen to their successes and concerns. Screening in districts and some charter schools is offered between the ages of 3 and the start of kindergarten or first grade (through age 7). Screening is required within the first 90 days of attendance for many prekindergarten programs and within the first 30 days of kindergarten or first grade. Parents/guardians may conscientiously object to screening. Screening may link families to free early learning opportunities and resources such as Head Start, Early Childhood Family Education, prekindergarten programs, Early Childhood Special Education, Early Learning Scholarships, home visiting programs, or other resources.

Link: https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/early/elprog/scr/

5. Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE)

Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) is a program for families and children. ECFE is based on the idea that families provide their children's first and most significant learning environment and parents/caregivers are children's first and most enduring teachers. ECFE works to support parents/caregivers and to strengthen and empower families. The goal is to enhance the ability of all parents/caregivers and other family members to provide the best possible environment for their child's learning and development.

ECFE is a program offered through school districts and is available to all Minnesota families with children ages birth to kindergarten entrance. Some ECFE programs also serve pregnant mothers and families with children up to third grade. Each ECFE program offers different programming and services, which are designed based on the needs identified in communities.

Link: https://education.mn.gov/MDE/fam/elsprog/ECFE/

6. Early Learning Scholarships

Early Learning Scholarships support access to high-quality child care and early education as one way to close the opportunity gaps faced by many children in households with low incomes. Families with children at or below 185% of federal poverty guidelines, or participating in one of eight public programs, one of which is foster care, are eligible. Children must be three or four years of age by September 1 of a school year, though eligibility is birth through age four for children in the following four prioritized categories: children of a teen parent pursuing a high school diploma or GED, children in foster care, children in need of child protection, or a child in a family who is or has been experiencing homelessness in the past 24 months. A scholarship must be used at a Parent Aware-Rated program. Parent Aware is a rating tool to help parents select high-quality child care and early education programs.

Link: https://education.mn.gov/MDE/fam/elsprog/elschol/

7. Head Start (HS)

Head Start services and programs help to prepare low-income families and preschool children (ages 3-5) for their transition to public school kindergarten. Head Start programs promote children's development through services that support early learning, health, and family well-being. The program helps children with early learning, health, nutrition and social services while being responsive to each family's ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds.

8. Early Head Start (EHS)

Early Head Start helps families with infants, toddlers (ages 0-3) and expectant families prepare for success. Programs promote children's development through services that support early learning, health, and family well-being. The program helps children with physical, cognitive, social and emotional development while being responsive to each family's ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds.

9. Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP)

The Child Care Assistance Program provides financial assistance to help families with low incomes pay for child care so that parents may pursue employment or education leading to employment, and so that children are well cared for and can thrive as learners. Minnesota counties and two tribal nations provide child care assistance services to 23,024 children and 11,359 families during an average month.

Families at or below 67% of the state's annual median income and receiving cash assistance (or who have received cash assistance in the past 12 months) are eligible. All other families must be at or below 47% of the state's annual median income to be eligible. Parents must participate in authorized activities, such as work, school or looking for a job, and cooperate with child support for all children with an absent parent. Child care assistance serves children age 12 or younger, or age 14 or younger if the child has special needs. Children in foster care are not eligible.

Families can choose any legal child care provider registered to receive child care assistance in the county or tribal nation (for White Earth and Red Lake Nations) where the family lives. This includes licensed and certified child care centers, licensed family child care providers, and legal nonlicensed providers (commonly known as family, friend, or neighbor).

Link: https://mn.gov/dhs/child-care/

Appendix B: Description of Administrative Data Systems

This section includes a brief description of the administrative data systems mentioned in this report that are related to early childhood education and children in foster care.

Managed by the Minnesota Department of Education:

1. Early Childhood Longitudinal Data System (ECLDS)

The ECLDS is designed for educators, local planners, early childhood program administrators, and other early care and education professionals in Minnesota. Its purpose is to provide integrated data, gathered from across multiple sources, on young children served in publicly funded programs. The information is intended to help with community needs assessments and in monitoring child status over time at multiple geographic levels. The content of each set of charts and graphs are informed by research on child development and the longstanding questions from Minnesota policymakers and administrators.

Link: https://eclds.mn.gov/#about

2. Early Learning Scholarships Administrative System (ELSA)

The Early Learning Scholarship Administration System (ELSA) is a secure system that was created to support implementation and oversight of the Early Learning Scholarships Program. Grantees of the state who are administrators of scholarships, MDE staff with direct program involvement, and resident school district staff with a State Student Identification Number (SSID) Maintainer role in a partner system work within ELSA.

Link: https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/datasub/ELSA/index.html

Managed by the Minnesota Department of Human Services:

3. Social Service Information System (SSIS)

The Social Service Information System (SSIS) is a data entry and case management system used by over 10,000 state and county workers in a variety of different human service program areas.

Link: https://mnchildwelfaretraining.com/more/ssis-training-unit/

Appendix C: Qualitative Methodology (Extended)

Data Sources

From September 2022 to October 2022, the University of Minnesota research team conducted a total of 18 interviews with 19 professionals from the Minnesota Department of Human Services, the Minnesota Department of Education, and relevant community organizations. The University of Minnesota research team, in consultation with the Minnesota Departments of Human Services and Education, identified stakeholders based on their direct experience with any, or all, of the following areas: administrative data systems, ECE programs and policies, foster care services and policies. In addition to the 15 staff initially identified for inclusion in the study, at the close of each interview we used the snowball method of recruitment and asked for recommendations of other professionals to interview. As a result of this process, we invited three additional professionals to participate in an interview. All 19 of the total stakeholders who were invited to participate in an interview agreed to be involved. One stakeholder invited a team member to join their interview because the team member had knowledge that was important for inclusion in the study. All qualitative data utilized in this project came directly from interviews with professionals working within child and family serving systems. No additional data and/or specimens were incorporated. This study was determined exempt from Institutional Review Board oversight by the University of Minnesota IRB (STUDY00016937).

This study focuses on county-based foster care placements, which include indigenous children and may include children who were originally placed with counties that are now within a tribal system or whose case has been transferred for tribal oversight. It is necessary to conduct culturally-sensitive research with tribal communities as partners and central stakeholders; the final report will include recommendations for the state to fund and conduct additional community-engaged studies, in partnership with indigenous researchers, to better understand the intersection of foster care placement and participation in Tribal Early Childhood programs, such as the Tribal Early Learning Initiative and Tribal Home Visiting, and to explore strategies to reduce barriers and improve access to early care and education programs for young American Indian children in foster care.

Participant Recruitment

The stakeholders were invited via email from a member of the research team to participate in the study. The email described the purpose of the study; how the study data would be used and who would have access to the data; the content and expected length of the interview (30-45 minutes); and then explained that the interview would be conducted via the video call software Zoom or by phone, based on interviewee preference and availability. The email also emphasized that stakeholder participation in the study was voluntary, and the identity of the study participants would remain confidential. An attachment to the email described the study in further detail. The research team did not offer participants any compensation for their involvement in the study.

Data Collection

Data Collection Procedures

Researchers used the video call software Zoom to conduct and record the interviews. Two research team members were present for each interview (one CASCW and one CEED); one researcher spoke with the interviewee, based on the interview protocol, and the second team member took running notes of the interview as a precaution in case the Zoom recording was accessible. To conduct the interviews, researchers used one of two interview protocols (one in-depth protocol for professionals with an extensive range of knowledge in the topic area; one shorter protocol tailored to more specialized professionals) that the research team designed specifically for this study. In each interview, researchers asked questions about the following: interviewees' professional background, current role and job functions as they relate to ECE participation/foster care; interviewees' understanding of barriers and facilitators to participation in ECE for young children in foster care in Minnesota with respect to broad-level policy and practice contexts; interviewees' understanding of strengths and challenges of working with state administrative data systems relating to these topics and this population; and interviewees' considerations for steps the state should take to better understand barriers and facilitators to, and encourage, participation in ECE for young children in foster care and/or improve the current administrative data systems. *For a copy of the interview protocols, contact Amy Dorman at dorm0039@umn.edu.*

Recording and Data Transformation

An mp3 audio file was extracted from each Zoom recording and sent out for professional and transcription. One team member reviewed each transcript for accuracy and to de-identify the transcript. Zoom video recordings were saved on a password protected digital drive accessible only by the research team. After transcripts were validated and de-identified, all Zoom video recordings were destroyed.

Data Analysis

Data-Analytic Strategies

The research team used the qualitative data analysis software NVivo to complete analysis of the interview transcripts. The data analysis process was iterative. Two research team members (one from CASCW and one from CEED) drafted an initial codebook based on initial analysis of the first two interview transcripts. Then, the initial codebook was reviewed, revised, and consensed by the full study research team. Revisions may have included the addition or deletion of a code, or clarification of a code's definition. Then, two research team members (one from CASCW and one from CEED) used the revised initial codebook to analyze each subsequent transcript using the preliminary codebook and adding to that codebook as needed. The three-member (two researchers from CEED, one from CASCW) coding team met regularly throughout the analysis process to clarify definitions of the codes and document areas that needed further exploration or discussion with the full research team. Midway through the

coding process, the full study research team convened again and made a final round of revisions to the codebook. The research team then used this new version of the codebook to complete the analysis of the transcripts.

After analyzing and coding the content of all 18 interviews, researchers developed an outline for presenting the qualitative findings. The outline was based on the purposes of the study, the content of the interview protocols, and the analysis of the qualitative interview data. The outline delineated three areas of findings: administrative data system findings, system-level and policy findings, and family-level findings. Then, within each area, the researchers used codes from the qualitative analysis to distinguish between barriers and facilitators to participation in ECE programs for young children in foster care, and opportunities and considerations to increase their participation in ECE programs. Through this process the researchers identified a set of key themes present in the qualitative interview data. After reviewing the interview excerpts coded to each theme for accuracy, researchers calculated the number and percentage of interviews in which each theme was present at least one time. If a theme occurred more than once within an interview, it was given the same weight in the calculations as an interview in which the theme occurred only once.

Methodological Integrity

After each researcher confirmed the accuracy of the codes they had assigned within each interview transcript, the researchers used the coding comparison query function in the NVivo software to calculate interrater reliability between the two researchers (one CEED, one CASCW) who had coded each transcript. Per methodological recommendations set forth by O'Connor and Joffe (2020), ≈10-20% of transcripts were used in the coding comparison query for each pair of research analysts. Interrater reliability was run at the character level, which is considered the most precise. Pair One had a Kappa coefficient of 0.68 (two of the 11 transcripts tested, or 18% of the shared transcript set), and Pair Two had a Kappa coefficient of 0.53 (two out of 7 transcripts tested, or 28% of the shared transcript set). The interrater reliability average between the two pairs of analysts was 0.61. NVivo notes[4] that Kappa coefficients of 0.4-0.75 are considered fair to good. This tool of interrater reliability was used to further discussion between researchers and to come to consensus where agreement was not found initially.

About the Qualitative Data

In the design of this study, the researchers intentionally decided to invite stakeholders with different areas of expertise and experience to participate in the interviews to capture a broad-level (e.g. data systems, policy, and practice) context to better understand ECE participation for young children in foster care. Although each interview participant was given an opportunity to respond to the same set of interview questions, some participants may not have provided information about one area of the interview protocol or another because they did not have

[4] For more on Kappa coefficients and NVivo's coding comparison query tool, visit NVivo's information page at https://help-nv11mac.qsrinternational.com/desktop/procedures/run_a_coding_comparison_query.htm.

knowledge or experience in that area. For example, some interviewees did not have experience with administrative data systems and some interviewees did not have direct knowledge of ECE programs and/or foster care at the local level. The variance in the interviewees' level of expertise and experience in the areas examined in the study is an important consideration when interpreting the results. For example, if five of the 18 interviewees noted that transportation was a barrier for families with children in foster care to access ECE programs, it would be inaccurate to conclude that the stakeholders in the other 13 interviewees thought transportation was not a barrier. Based on the study design and the process researchers used to analyze the interview data, it is not possible to differentiate between an interviewee who thought transportation was not a barrier and an interviewee who did not mention transportation as a barrier, for whatever reason.

Appendix D: Quantitative Methodology (Extended)

The following description of the quantitative methodology was submitted by staff members from DHS and MDE who received the data from the ECLDS committee and cleaned the data for analysis by the University of Minnesota research team.

For this study of early care and education (ECE) participation of young children in foster care, a request was made to the ECLDS Research and Data Committee to use the data contained in ECLDS on foster care and relevant early learning programs, including Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) services, Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK), School Readiness Plus (SRP), School Readiness, Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE), Early Childhood Screening, and Early Learning Scholarships. Head Start data are not included in ECLDS, but federal reporting requires Head Start and Early Head Start to report on the number of enrolled children who were in foster care during the academic year. These data were used to estimate participation rates. This request was recommended by the Research and Data Committee and forwarded to the ECLDS Governance Body. The Governing Body is comprised of leadership from participating state agencies and affiliated organizations, and exists to articulate the parameters for ECLDS and approve recommendations from the Research and Data Committee. The ECLDS Governing Body approved the request.

Data files were created from ECLDS database in October 2022 by Minnesota Information Technology Services (MN.IT) using a matching process based on name and birthdate; match rates were requested by MDE but were not accessed by MDE staff prior to the publication of this report. Data were requested for cohorts of children who experienced foster care in academic years 2019, 2020, and 2021 and were five years old or younger at the time of the reporting. For all identified children in foster care, data were provided on program participation in any of the seven early learning programs available in ECLDS for each academic year, including enrollment dates. Birth date, race (using census categories) and Hispanic ethnicity, and county of foster care placement data were also provided.

Prior to analysis, DHS staff and MDE staff discussed logic to determine participation and/or enrollment in programs and reviewed data files and methods to ensure correct usage of available program data.

ECLDS Coding Methodology and Variable Definitions

Table 5. *Program determination based on ECLDS data and fieldnames*

Program	Source	Ages	Criteria
ECSE	K12_ENROLL	<1, 1, 2, 3, 4	GRADE = 'EC'
ECSE – Part B	K12_ENROLL	3, 4	Part B: GRADE = 'EC' and SPECIALEDINSTRUCTIONALSETTING in ('11','12','13','14','15','16','17')
ECSE – Part C	K12_ENROLL	<1, 1, 2	Part C: GRADE = 'EC' and SPECIALEDINSTRUCTIONALSETTING in ('30','31','32','33','34','39','41','42','43','44','45')

Program	Source	Ages	Criteria
VPK / SR+	K12_ENROLL	4	GRADE like 'P%' and GRADE <> 'PS' (VPK) or GRADE like 'R%' (SR+)
School Readiness	EESTUDENT	3, 4	STUDENTPROGRAMNAME in ('SR', 'SR/ABE', 'Other School Readiness')
Early Childhood Screening	K12_ENROLL	3, 4	GRADE = 'PS'
ECFE	EESTUDENT	<1, 1, 2, 3, 4	STUDENTPROGRAMNAME in ('ECFE', 'ECFE/ABE')
Early Learning Scholarships	ELSA	<1, 1, 2, 3, 4	AWARDAMOUNT > 0

Note. Age calculated on September 1st of academic year, regardless of out-of-home care status

Table 6. *Dates for program and foster care timing comparisons*

Program	Source	Program date used
OHC	CW	Earliest episode start date for episodes that touched the AY
ECSE	K12_ENROLL	DATEOFENTRY
VPK/SR+	K12_ENROLL	DATEOFENTRY
School Readiness	EESTUDENT	STUDENTREGISTRATIONDATE
Early Childhood Screening	K12_ENROLL	DATEOFENTRY
ECFE	EESTUDENT	STUDENTREGISTRATIONDATE
Early Learning Scholarships	ELSA	AWARDSTARTDATE

Appendix E: Data Tables

For the purpose of this report, “Any ECE Program” means any early childhood program that is included in the ECLDS data system for which children in foster care are eligible (ESCE Parts B and C, Early Childhood Screening, Early Learning Scholarships, ECFE, VPK/SRP, School Readiness). Early Childhood Screening and Early Learning Scholarships do not provide educational programming or child care services.

Description of data elements as shown in data tables	
Column name	**Column description**
# in FC	The number of children in foster care (FC). All data are limited to those children who were under 5 as of September 1st of the corresponding academic year. Each program has specific age requirements that may be more defined, and those requirements will be reflected in the age breakdown on each tab.
# in ECE	A subset of "# in FC"; the number of children who were enrolled in the given early care and education (ECE) program.
% in ECE	A rate calculated by dividing "# in ECE" by "# in FC"; the rate shows the estimate of the number of eligible children in FC who were also participants in the given ECE program in the particular academic year.

Table 7. *Any ECE Program AY 2019, by MACSSA Region*

		#in foster care	#w/any ECE	% w/any ECE
Region 1	Kittson	1	0	0.0%
	Marshall	6	0	0.0%
	Norman	3	1	33.3%
	Pennington	19	6	31.6%
	Polk	34	11	32.4%
	Red Lake	4	1	25.0%
	Roseau	8	3	37.5%
Region 2	Beltrami	330	103	31.2%
	Clearwater	11	2	18.2%
	Hubbard	28	15	53.6%
	Lake of the Woods	1	0	0.0%
	Mahnomen	11	6	54.5%
Region 3	Aitkin	10	3	30.0%
	Carlton	42	15	35.7%
	Cook	4	3	75.0%
	Itasca	88	48	54.5%
	Koochiching	19	7	36.8%
	Lake	7	5	71.4%
	St. Louis	415	166	40.0%
Region 4	Becker	70	33	47.1%
	Clay	54	31	57.4%
	Douglas	21	7	33.3%
	Otter Tail	78	30	38.5%
	Stevens	10	4	40.0%
	Traverse	3	0	0.0%
	Western Prairie Human Services	21	9	42.9%
	Wilkin	4	3	75.0%
Region 5	Cass	26	13	50.0%
	Crow Wing	108	47	43.5%
	Morrison	45	20	44.4%
	Todd	31	18	58.1%
	Wadena	26	9	34.6%
Region 6	Big Stone	2	1	50.0%
	Chippewa	10	6	60.0%
	Kandiyohi	46	20	43.5%
	Lac qui Parle	2	0	0.0%
	McLeod	39	23	59.0%
	Meeker	17	8	47.1%
	Renville	11	4	36.4%
	Swift	27	9	33.3%
	Yellow Medicine	9	5	55.6%

		#in foster care	#w/any ECE	% w/any ECE
Region 7	Benton	41	21	51.2%
	Chisago	58	27	46.6%
	Isanti	28	15	53.6%
	Kanabec	11	3	27.3%
	Mille Lacs	98	39	39.8%
	Pine	43	18	41.9%
	Sherburne	53	26	49.1%
	Stearns	129	66	51.2%
	Wright	78	28	35.9%
Region 8	Des Moines Valley HHS	29	11	37.9%
	Nobles	12	5	41.7%
	Southwest HHS	81	27	33.3%
Region 9	Blue Earth	75	35	46.7%
	Brown	20	10	50.0%
	Faribault-Martin	46	21	45.7%
	Freeborn	56	19	33.9%
	Le Sueur	12	3	25.0%
	MN Prairie	70	29	41.4%
	Nicollet	24	10	41.7%
	Sibley	14	5	35.7%
	Watonwan	16	8	50.0%
Region 10	Fillmore	6	1	16.7%
	Goodhue	26	16	61.5%
	Houston	24	8	33.3%
	MN Prairie	70	29	41.4%
	Mower	37	8	21.6%
	Olmsted	63	23	36.5%
	Rice	75	29	38.7%
	Wabasha	12	4	33.3%
	Winona	55	29	52.7%
Region 11	Anoka	176	69	39.2%
	Carver	36	16	44.4%
	Dakota	202	105	52.0%
	Hennepin	1,083	523	48.3%
	Ramsey	530	249	47.0%
	Scott	71	30	42.3%
	Washington	63	35	55.6%

Note: Western Prairie Human Services serves Pope and Grant Counties. Des Moines Valley Health and Human Services (Des Moines Valley HHS) serves the counties of Cottonwood and Jackson. Southwest Health and Human Services (Southwest HHS) serves the counties of Lincoln, Lyon, Murray, Pipestone, Redwood, and Rock. Minnesota Prairie Council Alliance (MN Prairie) serves the counties of Dodge, Steele, and Waseca and includes counties from both Regions 9 and 10, and is included under both regions.

Table 8. *Participation in any ECE program by Race, Ethnicity, Age and County during AY 2019*

	# in FC	# in ECE	% in ECE
Total	**5,404**	**2,362**	**43.7%**
Race			
African American / Black	772	385	49.9%
American Indian / Alaska Native	1,142	441	38.6%
Asian / Pacific Islander	109	44	40.4%
Two or more races	1102	498	45.2%
Unknown / declined	146	51	34.9%
White	2,133	943	44.2%
Ethnicity			
Hispanic / Latino	510	218	42.7%
Non Hispanic / Unknown	4,894	2,144	43.8%
Age			
0	1,551	401	25.9%
1	1,139	431	37.8%
2	951	441	46.4%
3	894	519	58.1%
4	869	570	65.6%
County			
Aitkin	10	3	30.0%
Anoka	176	69	39.2%
Becker	70	33	47.1%
Beltrami	330	103	31.2%
Benton	41	21	51.2%
Big Stone	2	1	50.0%
Blue Earth	75	35	46.7%
Brown	20	10	50.0%
Carlton	42	15	35.7%
Carver	36	16	44.4%
Cass	26	13	50.0%
Chippewa	10	6	60.0%
Chisago	58	27	46.6%
Clay	54	31	57.4%
Clearwater	11	2	18.2%
Cook	4	3	75.0%
Crow Wing	108	47	43.5%
Dakota	202	105	52.0%
Des Moines Valley HHS	29	11	37.9%
Douglas	21	7	33.3%
Faribault-Martin	46	21	45.7%
Fillmore	6	1	16.7%
Freeborn	56	19	33.9%

Goodhue	26	16	61.5%
Hennepin	1,083	523	48.3%
Houston	24	8	33.3%
Hubbard	28	15	53.6%
Isanti	28	15	53.6%
Itasca	88	48	54.5%
Kanabec	11	3	27.3%
Kandiyohi	46	20	43.5%
Kittson	1	0	0.0%
Koochiching	19	7	36.8%
Lac qui Parle	2	0	0.0%
Lake	7	5	71.4%
Lake of the Woods	1	0	0.0%
Le Sueur	12	3	25.0%
Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe	85	33	38.8%
Mahnomen	11	6	54.5%
Marshall	6	0	0.0%
McLeod	39	23	59.0%
Meeker	17	8	47.1%
Mille Lacs	98	39	39.8%
MN Prairie	70	29	41.4%
Morrison	45	20	44.4%
Mower	37	8	21.6%
Nicollet	24	10	41.7%
Nobles	12	5	41.7%
Norman	3	1	33.3%
Olmsted	63	23	36.5%
Otter Tail	78	30	38.5%
Pennington	19	6	31.6%
Pine	43	18	41.9%
Polk	34	11	32.4%
Ramsey	530	249	47.0%
Red Lake	4	1	25.0%
Renville	11	4	36.4%
Rice	75	29	38.7%
Roseau	8	3	37.5%
Scott	71	30	42.3%
Sherburne	53	26	49.1%
Sibley	14	5	35.7%
Southwest HHS	81	27	33.3%
St. Louis	415	166	40.0%
Stearns	129	66	51.2%
Stevens	10	4	40.0%
Swift	27	9	33.3%

Todd	31	18	58.1%
Traverse	3	0	0.0%
Wabasha	12	4	33.3%
Wadena	26	9	34.6%
Washington	63	35	55.6%
Watonwan	16	8	50.0%
Western Prairie Human Services	21	9	42.9%
White Earth Band of Ojibwe	165	63	38.2%
Wilkin	4	3	75.0%
Winona	55	29	52.7%
Wright	78	28	35.9%
Yellow Medicine	9	5	55.6%

Note. ECE enrollment data include Early Childhood Screening and Early Learning Scholarships, which are programs that do not provide educational programming or child care services.

Table 9. *Participation in ECSE by Race, Ethnicity, Age and County during AY 2019*

	# in FC	# in ECE	% in ECE
Total	**5,404**	**1,379**	**25.5%**
Race			
African American / Black	772	192	24.9%
American Indian / Alaska Native	1,142	280	24.5%
Asian / Pacific Islander	109	23	21.1%
Two or more races	1102	292	26.5%
Unknown / declined	146	26	17.8%
White	2,133	566	26.5%
Ethnicity			
Hispanic / Latino (any race)	510	126	24.7%
Non Hispanic / Unknown	4,894	1,253	25.6%
Age			
0	1,551	281	18.1%
1	1,139	311	27.3%
2	951	293	30.8%
3	894	230	25.7%
4	869	264	30.4%
County			
Aitkin	10	2	20.0%
Anoka	176	41	23.3%
Becker	70	28	40.0%
Beltrami	330	57	17.3%

Benton	41	12	29.3%
Big Stone	2	1	50.0%
Blue Earth	75	29	38.7%
Brown	20	6	30.0%
Carlton	42	14	33.3%
Carver	36	4	11.1%
Cass	26	11	42.3%
Chippewa	10	4	40.0%
Chisago	58	16	27.6%
Clay	54	28	51.9%
Clearwater	11	1	9.1%
Cook	4	3	75.0%
Crow Wing	108	40	37.0%
Dakota	202	57	28.2%
Des Moines Valley HHS	29	7	24.1%
Douglas	21	6	28.6%
Faribault-Martin	46	13	28.3%
Fillmore	6	1	16.7%
Freeborn	56	12	21.4%
Goodhue	26	10	38.5%
Hennepin	1,083	227	21.0%
Houston	24	7	29.2%
Hubbard	28	5	17.9%
Isanti	28	7	25.0%
Itasca	88	33	37.5%
Kanabec	11	2	18.2%
Kandiyohi	46	11	23.9%
Kittson	1	0	0.0%
Koochiching	19	4	21.1%
Lac qui Parle	2	0	0.0%
Lake	7	2	28.6%
Lake of the Woods	1	0	0.0%
Le Sueur	12	3	25.0%
Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe	85	23	27.1%
Mahnomen	11	2	18.2%
Marshall	6	0	0.0%
McLeod	39	10	25.6%
Meeker	17	7	41.2%

Mille Lacs	98	30	30.6%
MN Prairie	70	24	34.3%
Morrison	45	11	24.4%
Mower	37	7	18.9%
Nicollet	24	8	33.3%
Nobles	12	3	25.0%
Norman	3	1	33.3%
Olmsted	63	16	25.4%
Otter Tail	78	19	24.4%
Pennington	19	3	15.8%
Pine	43	12	27.9%
Polk	34	7	20.6%
Ramsey	530	137	25.8%
Red Lake	4	1	25.0%
Renville	11	2	18.2%
Rice	75	21	28.0%
Roseau	8	2	25.0%
Scott	71	13	18.3%
Sherburne	53	13	24.5%
Sibley	14	2	14.3%
Southwest HHS	81	15	18.5%
St. Louis	415	116	28.0%
Stearns	129	38	29.5%
Stevens	10	2	20.0%
Swift	27	6	22.2%
Todd	31	14	45.2%
Traverse	3	0	0.0%
Wabasha	12	2	16.7%
Wadena	26	8	30.8%
Washington	63	25	39.7%
Watonwan	16	5	31.3%
Western Prairie Human Services	21	6	28.6%
White Earth Band of Ojibwe	165	31	18.8%
Wilkin	4	1	25.0%
Winona	55	14	25.5%
Wright	78	16	20.5%
Yellow Medicine	9	2	22.2%

Table 10. *Participation in ECSE Part B by Race, Ethnicity, Age and County during AY 2019*

	# in FC	# in ECE	% in ECE
Total	**1,763**	**422**	**23.9%**
Race			
African American / Black	254	51	20.1%
American Indian / Alaska Native	383	95	24.8%
Asian / Pacific Islander	35	4	11.4%
Two or more races	323	72	22.3%
Unknown / declined	41	5	12.2%
White	727	195	26.8%
Ethnicity			
Hispanic / Latino (any race)	183	38	20.8%
Non Hispanic / Unknown	1,580	384	24.3%
Age			
0	--	--	--
1	--	--	--
2	--	--	--
3	894	190	21.3%
4	869	232	26.7%
County			
Aitkin	3	1	33.3%
Anoka	56	7	12.5%
Becker	19	10	52.6%
Beltrami	122	22	18.0%
Benton	15	4	26.7%
Big Stone	1	1	100.0%
Blue Earth	17	6	35.3%
Brown	7	1	14.3%
Carlton	10	1	10.0%
Carver	16	2	12.5%
Cass	5	3	60.0%
Chippewa	4	1	25.0%
Chisago	23	9	39.1%
Clay	18	13	72.2%
Clearwater	2	0	0.0%
Cook	2	1	50.0%
Crow Wing	34	14	41.2%
Dakota	51	18	35.3%

Des Moines Valley HHS	12	5	41.7%
Douglas	6	0	0.0%
Faribault-Martin	20	8	40.0%
Fillmore	2	1	50.0%
Freeborn	17	3	17.6%
Goodhue	6	2	33.3%
Hennepin	331	51	15.4%
Houston	8	1	12.5%
Hubbard	17	1	5.9%
Isanti	14	3	21.4%
Itasca	36	5	13.9%
Kanabec	3	1	33.3%
Kandiyohi	13	3	23.1%
Koochiching	10	2	20.0%
Lake	4	0	0.0%
Lake of the Woods	1	0	0.0%
Le Sueur	4	1	25.0%
Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe	35	12	34.3%
Mahnomen	2	0	0.0%
Marshall	1	0	0.0%
McLeod	17	5	29.4%
Meeker	3	2	66.7%
Mille Lacs	31	10	32.3%
MN Prairie	25	7	28.0%
Morrison	18	7	38.9%
Mower	4	0	0.0%
Nicollet	6	1	16.7%
Nobles	3	2	66.7%
Olmsted	20	7	35.0%
Otter Tail	33	8	24.2%
Pennington	5	2	40.0%
Pine	12	4	33.3%
Polk	11	3	27.3%
Ramsey	158	31	19.6%
Red Lake	3	0	0.0%
Renville	4	1	25.0%
Rice	20	5	25.0%
Roseau	3	1	33.3%

Scott	26	5	19.2%
Sherburne	19	6	31.6%
Sibley	7	1	14.3%
Southwest HHS	31	6	19.4%
St. Louis	139	33	23.7%
Stearns	43	11	25.6%
Stevens	3	1	33.3%
Swift	10	3	30.0%
Todd	11	5	45.5%
Traverse	1	0	0.0%
Wabasha	5	1	20.0%
Wadena	6	5	83.3%
Washington	18	8	44.4%
Watonwan	7	3	42.9%
Western Prairie Human Services	9	3	33.3%
White Earth Band of Ojibwe	58	15	25.9%
Wilkin	2	0	0.0%
Winona	17	3	17.6%
Wright	23	2	8.7%
Yellow Medicine	5	2	40.0%

Table 11. *Participation in ECSE Part C by Race, Ethnicity, Age and County during AY 2019*

	# in FC	# in ECE	% in ECE
Total	**3,641**	**657**	**18.0%**
Race			
African American / Black	518	104	20.1%
American Indian / Alaska Native	759	142	18.7%
Asian / Pacific Islander	74	11	14.9%
Two or more races	779	129	16.6%
Unknown / declined	105	14	13.3%
White	1,406	257	18.3%
Ethnicity			
Hispanic / Latino (any race)	327	59	18.0%
Non Hispanic / Unknown	3,314	598	18.0%
Age			
0	1,551	190	12.3%
1	1,139	252	22.1%

2	951	215	22.6%
3	--	--	--
4	--	--	--
County			
Aitkin	7	1	14.3%
Anoka	120	27	22.5%
Becker	51	16	31.4%
Beltrami	208	30	14.4%
Benton	26	5	19.2%
Big Stone	1	0	0.0%
Blue Earth	58	19	32.8%
Brown	13	5	38.5%
Carlton	32	9	28.1%
Carver	20	2	10.0%
Cass	21	6	28.6%
Chippewa	6	2	33.3%
Chisago	35	5	14.3%
Clay	36	10	27.8%
Clearwater	9	1	11.1%
Cook	2	1	50.0%
Crow Wing	74	19	25.7%
Dakota	151	24	15.9%
Des Moines Valley HHS	17	0	0.0%
Douglas	15	3	20.0%
Faribault-Martin	26	2	7.7%
Fillmore	4	0	0.0%
Freeborn	39	3	7.7%
Goodhue	20	8	40.0%
Hennepin	752	123	16.4%
Houston	16	4	25.0%
Hubbard	11	1	9.1%
Isanti	14	2	14.3%
Itasca	52	13	25.0%
Kanabec	8	1	12.5%
Kandiyohi	33	7	21.2%
Kittson	1	0	0.0%
Koochiching	9	1	11.1%
Lac qui Parle	2	0	0.0%

Lake	3	2	66.7%
Le Sueur	8	0	0.0%
Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe	50	11	22.0%
Mahnomen	9	2	22.2%
Marshall	5	0	0.0%
McLeod	22	2	9.1%
Meeker	14	3	21.4%
Mille Lacs	67	17	25.4%
MN Prairie	45	13	28.9%
Morrison	27	3	11.1%
Mower	33	6	18.2%
Nicollet	18	6	33.3%
Nobles	9	1	11.1%
Norman	3	1	33.3%
Olmsted	43	8	18.6%
Otter Tail	45	7	15.6%
Pennington	14	0	0.0%
Pine	31	8	25.8%
Polk	23	3	13.0%
Ramsey	372	75	20.2%
Red Lake	1	0	0.0%
Renville	7	0	0.0%
Rice	55	10	18.2%
Roseau	5	0	0.0%
Scott	45	2	4.4%
Sherburne	34	3	8.8%
Sibley	7	0	0.0%
Southwest HHS	50	6	12.0%
St. Louis	276	49	17.8%
Stearns	86	19	22.1%
Stevens	7	1	14.3%
Swift	17	1	5.9%
Todd	20	5	25.0%
Traverse	2	0	0.0%
Wabasha	7	1	14.3%
Wadena	20	3	15.0%
Washington	45	7	15.6%
Watonwan	9	0	0.0%

Western Prairie Human Services	12	2	16.7%
White Earth Band of Ojibwe	107	11	10.3%
Wilkin	2	1	50.0%
Winona	38	9	23.7%
Wright	55	9	16.4%
Yellow Medicine	4	0	0.0%

Table 12. *Participation in VPK or SRP by Race, Ethnicity, Age and County during AY 2019*

	# in FC	# in ECE	% in ECE
Total	**869**	**98**	**11.3%**
Race			
African American / Black	126	12	9.5%
American Indian / Alaska Native	188	23	12.2%
Asian / Pacific Islander	17	2	11.8%
Two or more races	170	21	12.4%
Unknown / declined	15	1	6.7%
White	353	39	11.0%
Ethnicity			
Hispanic / Latino (any race)	94	16	17.0%
Non Hispanic / Unknown	775	82	10.6%
Age			
0	--	--	--
1	--	--	--
2	--	--	--
3	--	--	--
4	869	98	11.3%
County			
Aitkin	1	0	0.0%
Anoka	19	1	5.3%
Becker	6	0	0.0%
Beltrami	55	3	5.5%
Benton	12	2	16.7%
Big Stone	1	0	0.0%
Blue Earth	9	0	0.0%
Brown	3	0	0.0%
Carlton	6	0	0.0%
Carver	10	1	10.0%

Cass	1	0	0.0%
Chippewa	1	0	0.0%
Chisago	11	0	0.0%
Clay	10	1	10.0%
Clearwater	1	0	0.0%
Crow Wing	15	0	0.0%
Dakota	26	5	19.2%
Des Moines Valley HHS	5	0	0.0%
Douglas	5	0	0.0%
Faribault-Martin	8	2	25.0%
Freeborn	8	3	37.5%
Goodhue	3	0	0.0%
Hennepin	167	20	12.0%
Houston	6	1	16.7%
Hubbard	8	2	25.0%
Isanti	7	0	0.0%
Itasca	18	4	22.2%
Kanabec	3	0	0.0%
Kandiyohi	4	1	25.0%
Koochiching	8	1	12.5%
Lake	1	0	0.0%
Le Sueur	2	0	0.0%
Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe	22	4	18.2%
Mahnomen	1	1	100.0%
McLeod	8	0	0.0%
Meeker	2	0	0.0%
Mille Lacs	24	2	8.3%
MN Prairie	14	3	21.4%
Morrison	9	1	11.1%
Mower	2	0	0.0%
Nicollet	2	0	0.0%
Nobles	3	1	33.3%
Olmsted	9	0	0.0%
Otter Tail	17	1	5.9%
Pennington	3	0	0.0%
Pine	8	2	25.0%
Polk	7	1	14.3%
Ramsey	70	14	20.0%

Red Lake	3	0	0.0%
Renville	2	0	0.0%
Rice	10	0	0.0%
Roseau	2	0	0.0%
Scott	13	0	0.0%
Sherburne	10	1	10.0%
Sibley	3	1	33.3%
Southwest HHS	13	1	7.7%
St. Louis	67	7	10.4%
Stearns	21	1	4.8%
Stevens	3	0	0.0%
Swift	6	1	16.7%
Todd	6	0	0.0%
Traverse	1	0	0.0%
Wabasha	3	0	0.0%
Wadena	3	0	0.0%
Washington	8	1	12.5%
Watonwan	3	2	66.7%
Western Prairie Human Services	4	0	0.0%
White Earth Band of Ojibwe	25	6	24.0%
Wilkin	1	0	0.0%
Winona	9	0	0.0%
Wright	9	0	0.0%
Yellow Medicine	3	0	0.0%

Table 13. *Participation in School Readiness by Race, Ethnicity, Age and County during AY 2019*

	# in FC	# in ECE	% in ECE
Total	**1,763**	**175**	**9.9%**
Race			
African American / Black	254	18	7.1%
American Indian / Alaska Native	383	29	7.6%
Asian / Pacific Islander	35	4	11.4%
Two or more races	323	32	9.9%
Unknown / declined	41	4	9.8%
White	727	88	12.1%
Ethnicity			
Hispanic / Latino (any race)	183	17	9.3%

Non Hispanic / Unknown	1,580	158	10.0%
Age			
0	--	--	--
1	--	--	--
2	--	--	--
3	894	60	6.7%
4	869	115	13.2%
County			
Aitkin	3	0	0.0%
Anoka	56	2	3.6%
Becker	19	3	15.8%
Beltrami	122	3	2.5%
Benton	15	2	13.3%
Big Stone	1	0	0.0%
Blue Earth	17	3	17.6%
Brown	7	1	14.3%
Carlton	10	1	10.0%
Carver	16	1	6.3%
Cass	5	0	0.0%
Chippewa	4	3	75.0%
Chisago	23	8	34.8%
Clay	18	1	5.6%
Clearwater	2	0	0.0%
Cook	2	0	0.0%
Crow Wing	34	1	2.9%
Dakota	51	6	11.8%
Des Moines Valley HHS	12	0	0.0%
Douglas	6	0	0.0%
Faribault-Martin	20	3	15.0%
Fillmore	2	0	0.0%
Freeborn	17	4	23.5%
Goodhue	6	1	16.7%
Hennepin	331	39	11.8%
Houston	8	0	0.0%
Hubbard	17	2	11.8%
Isanti	14	0	0.0%
Itasca	36	7	19.4%
Kanabec	3	1	33.3%

Kandiyohi	13	3	23.1%
Koochiching	10	0	0.0%
Lake	4	0	0.0%
Lake of the Woods	1	0	0.0%
Le Sueur	4	0	0.0%
Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe	35	1	2.9%
Mahnomen	2	0	0.0%
Marshall	1	0	0.0%
McLeod	17	1	5.9%
Meeker	3	1	33.3%
Mille Lacs	31	1	3.2%
MN Prairie	25	2	8.0%
Morrison	18	0	0.0%
Mower	4	0	0.0%
Nicollet	6	0	0.0%
Nobles	3	2	66.7%
Olmsted	20	4	20.0%
Otter Tail	33	7	21.2%
Pennington	5	1	20.0%
Pine	12	0	0.0%
Polk	11	0	0.0%
Ramsey	158	6	3.8%
Red Lake	3	0	0.0%
Renville	4	0	0.0%
Rice	20	6	30.0%
Roseau	3	0	0.0%
Scott	26	1	3.8%
Sherburne	19	4	21.1%
Sibley	7	0	0.0%
Southwest HHS	31	5	16.1%
St. Louis	139	9	6.5%
Stearns	43	6	14.0%
Stevens	3	1	33.3%
Swift	10	0	0.0%
Todd	11	4	36.4%
Traverse	1	0	0.0%
Wabasha	5	0	0.0%
Wadena	6	4	66.7%

Washington	18	1	5.6%
Watonwan	7	3	42.9%
Western Prairie Human Services	9	1	11.1%
White Earth Band of Ojibwe	58	6	10.3%
Wilkin	2	0	0.0%
Winona	17	0	0.0%
Wright	23	2	8.7%
Yellow Medicine	5	1	20.0%

Table 14. *Participation in Early Childhood Screening by Race, Ethnicity, Age and County during AY 2019*

	# in FC	# in ECE	% in ECE
Total	**1,763**	**466**	**26.4%**
Race			
African American / Black	254	68	26.8%
American Indian / Alaska Native	383	71	18.5%
Asian / Pacific Islander	35	19	54.3%
Two or more races	323	89	27.6%
Unknown / declined	41	11	26.8%
White	727	208	28.6%
Ethnicity			
Hispanic / Latino (any race)	183	52	28.4%
Non Hispanic / Unknown	1,580	414	26.2%
Age			
0	--	--	--
1	--	--	--
2	--	--	--
3	894	272	30.4%
4	869	194	22.3%
County			
Aitkin	3	0	0.0%
Anoka	56	14	25.0%
Becker	19	4	21.1%
Beltrami	122	22	18.0%
Benton	15	2	13.3%
Big Stone	1	0	0.0%
Blue Earth	17	5	29.4%
Brown	7	3	42.9%

Carlton	10	1	10.0%
Carver	16	10	62.5%
Cass	5	0	0.0%
Chippewa	4	1	25.0%
Chisago	23	8	34.8%
Clay	18	5	27.8%
Clearwater	2	0	0.0%
Cook	2	0	0.0%
Crow Wing	34	6	17.6%
Dakota	51	23	45.1%
Des Moines Valley HHS	12	3	25.0%
Douglas	6	0	0.0%
Faribault-Martin	20	6	30.0%
Fillmore	2	0	0.0%
Freeborn	17	6	35.3%
Goodhue	6	1	16.7%
Hennepin	331	96	29.0%
Houston	8	0	0.0%
Hubbard	17	4	23.5%
Isanti	14	3	21.4%
Itasca	36	9	25.0%
Kanabec	3	1	33.3%
Kandiyohi	13	6	46.2%
Koochiching	10	1	10.0%
Lake	4	0	0.0%
Lake of the Woods	1	0	0.0%
Le Sueur	4	1	25.0%
Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe	35	6	17.1%
Mahnomen	2	1	50.0%
Marshall	1	0	0.0%
McLeod	17	5	29.4%
Meeker	3	2	66.7%
Mille Lacs	31	3	9.7%
MN Prairie	25	5	20.0%
Morrison	18	3	16.7%
Mower	4	0	0.0%
Nicollet	6	3	50.0%
Nobles	3	2	66.7%

Olmsted	20	5	25.0%
Otter Tail	33	9	27.3%
Pennington	5	2	40.0%
Pine	12	3	25.0%
Polk	11	3	27.3%
Ramsey	158	54	34.2%
Red Lake	3	0	0.0%
Renville	4	1	25.0%
Rice	20	3	15.0%
Roseau	3	1	33.3%
Scott	26	7	26.9%
Sherburne	19	4	21.1%
Sibley	7	2	28.6%
Southwest HHS	31	9	29.0%
St. Louis	139	44	31.7%
Stearns	43	10	23.3%
Stevens	3	0	0.0%
Swift	10	3	30.0%
Todd	11	3	27.3%
Traverse	1	0	0.0%
Wabasha	5	2	40.0%
Wadena	6	1	16.7%
Washington	18	4	22.2%
Watonwan	7	1	14.3%
Western Prairie Human Services	9	5	55.6%
White Earth Band of Ojibwe	58	6	10.3%
Wilkin	2	1	50.0%
Winona	17	4	23.5%
Wright	23	8	34.8%
Yellow Medicine	5	0	0.0%

Table 15. *Participation in ECFE by Race, Ethnicity, Age and County during AY 2019*

	# in FC	# in ECE	% in ECE
Total	**5,404**	**109**	**2.0%**
Race			
African American / Black	772	12	1.6%
American Indian / Alaska Native	1,142	11	1.0%

Asian / Pacific Islander	109	0	0.0%
Two or more races	1102	19	1.7%
Unknown / declined	146	5	3.4%
White	2,133	62	2.9%
Ethnicity			
Hispanic / Latino (any race)	510	8	1.6%
Non Hispanic / Unknown	4,894	101	2.1%
Age			
0	1,551	27	1.7%
1	1,139	33	2.9%
2	951	30	3.2%
3	894	13	1.5%
4	869	6	0.7%
County			
Aitkin	10	0	0.0%
Anoka	176	20	11.4%
Becker	70	1	1.4%
Beltrami	330	5	1.5%
Benton	41	0	0.0%
Big Stone	2	0	0.0%
Blue Earth	75	2	2.7%
Brown	20	0	0.0%
Carlton	42	0	0.0%
Carver	36	0	0.0%
Cass	26	0	0.0%
Chippewa	10	0	0.0%
Chisago	58	2	3.4%
Clay	54	0	0.0%
Clearwater	11	0	0.0%
Cook	4	0	0.0%
Crow Wing	108	0	0.0%
Dakota	202	2	1.0%
Des Moines Valley HHS	29	0	0.0%
Douglas	21	0	0.0%
Faribault-Martin	46	1	2.2%
Fillmore	6	0	0.0%
Freeborn	56	0	0.0%
Goodhue	26	2	7.7%

Hennepin	1,083	12	1.1%
Houston	24	0	0.0%
Hubbard	28	0	0.0%
Isanti	28	0	0.0%
Itasca	88	0	0.0%
Kanabec	11	0	0.0%
Kandiyohi	46	0	0.0%
Kittson	1	0	0.0%
Koochiching	19	0	0.0%
Lac qui Parle	2	0	0.0%
Lake	7	0	0.0%
Lake of the Woods	1	0	0.0%
Le Sueur	12	0	0.0%
Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe	85	1	1.2%
Mahnomen	11	0	0.0%
Marshall	6	0	0.0%
McLeod	39	1	2.6%
Meeker	17	0	0.0%
Mille Lacs	98	2	2.0%
MN Prairie	70	0	0.0%
Morrison	45	0	0.0%
Mower	37	0	0.0%
Nicollet	24	0	0.0%
Nobles	12	0	0.0%
Norman	3	0	0.0%
Olmsted	63	2	3.2%
Otter Tail	78	1	1.3%
Pennington	19	0	0.0%
Pine	43	1	2.3%
Polk	34	0	0.0%
Ramsey	530	13	2.5%
Red Lake	4	0	0.0%
Renville	11	0	0.0%
Rice	75	7	9.3%
Roseau	8	0	0.0%
Scott	71	1	1.4%
Sherburne	53	2	3.8%
Sibley	14	0	0.0%

Southwest HHS	81	0	0.0%
St. Louis	415	7	1.7%
Stearns	129	3	2.3%
Stevens	10	1	10.0%
Swift	27	1	3.7%
Todd	31	1	3.2%
Traverse	3	0	0.0%
Wabasha	12	0	0.0%
Wadena	26	0	0.0%
Washington	63	1	1.6%
Watonwan	16	0	0.0%
Western Prairie Human Services	21	0	0.0%
White Earth Band of Ojibwe	165	1	0.6%
Wilkin	4	0	0.0%
Winona	55	15	27.3%
Wright	78	1	1.3%
Yellow Medicine	9	0	0.0%

Table 16. *Participation in Early Learning Scholarships by Race, Ethnicity, Age and County during AY 2019*

	# in FC	# in ECE	% in ECE
Total	**5,404**	**868**	**16.1%**
Race			
African American / Black	772	193	25.0%
American Indian / Alaska Native	1,142	141	12.3%
Asian / Pacific Islander	109	17	15.6%
Two or more races	1102	198	18.0%
Unknown / declined	146	18	12.3%
White	2,133	301	14.1%
Ethnicity			
Hispanic / Latino (any race)	510	73	14.3%
Non Hispanic / Unknown	4,894	795	16.2%
Age			
0	1,551	132	8.5%
1	1,139	153	13.4%
2	951	147	15.5%
3	894	189	21.1%
4	869	247	28.4%

County			
Aitkin	10	2	20.0%
Anoka	176	17	9.7%
Becker	70	10	14.3%
Beltrami	330	28	8.5%
Benton	41	12	29.3%
Big Stone	2	0	0.0%
Blue Earth	75	3	4.0%
Brown	20	4	20.0%
Carlton	42	1	2.4%
Carver	36	7	19.4%
Cass	26	3	11.5%
Chippewa	10	0	0.0%
Chisago	58	7	12.1%
Clay	54	11	20.4%
Clearwater	11	2	18.2%
Cook	4	3	75.0%
Crow Wing	108	4	3.7%
Dakota	202	46	22.8%
Des Moines Valley HHS	29	3	10.3%
Douglas	21	1	4.8%
Faribault-Martin	46	2	4.3%
Fillmore	6	0	0.0%
Freeborn	56	1	1.8%
Goodhue	26	8	30.8%
Hennepin	1,083	306	28.3%
Houston	24	1	4.2%
Hubbard	28	6	21.4%
Isanti	28	7	25.0%
Itasca	88	6	6.8%
Kanabec	11	1	9.1%
Kandiyohi	46	4	8.7%
Kittson	1	0	0.0%
Koochiching	19	2	10.5%
Lac qui Parle	2	0	0.0%
Lake	7	4	57.1%
Lake of the Woods	1	0	0.0%
Le Sueur	12	0	0.0%

Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe	85	13	15.3%
Mahnomen	11	2	18.2%
Marshall	6	0	0.0%
McLeod	39	11	28.2%
Meeker	17	2	11.8%
Mille Lacs	98	11	11.2%
MN Prairie	70	1	1.4%
Morrison	45	7	15.6%
Mower	37	1	2.7%
Nicollet	24	1	4.2%
Nobles	12	3	25.0%
Norman	3	0	0.0%
Olmsted	63	6	9.5%
Otter Tail	78	7	9.0%
Pennington	19	3	15.8%
Pine	43	6	14.0%
Polk	34	1	2.9%
Ramsey	530	99	18.7%
Red Lake	4	0	0.0%
Renville	11	1	9.1%
Rice	75	4	5.3%
Roseau	8	0	0.0%
Scott	71	19	26.8%
Sherburne	53	13	24.5%
Sibley	14	1	7.1%
Southwest HHS	81	8	9.9%
St. Louis	415	27	6.5%
Stearns	129	33	25.6%
Stevens	10	0	0.0%
Swift	27	3	11.1%
Todd	31	3	9.7%
Traverse	3	0	0.0%
Wabasha	12	1	8.3%
Wadena	26	3	11.5%
Washington	63	16	25.4%
Watonwan	16	1	6.3%
Western Prairie Human Services	21	1	4.8%

White Earth Band of Ojibwe	165	32	19.4%
Wilkin	4	2	50.0%
Winona	55	6	10.9%
Wright	78	5	6.4%
Yellow Medicine	9	3	33.3%

Table 17. *Participation in any ECE Program by Race, Ethnicity, Age and County during AY 2020*

	# in FC	# in ECE	% in ECE
Total	**4,683**	**2,108**	**45.0%**
Race			
African American / Black	662	315	47.6%
American Indian / Alaska Native	945	357	37.8%
Asian / Pacific Islander	74	28	37.8%
Two or more races	1076	535	49.7%
Unknown / declined	115	47	40.9%
White	1,811	826	45.6%
Ethnicity			
Hispanic / Latino (any race)	437	168	38.4%
Non Hispanic / Unknown	4,246	1940	45.7%
Age			
0	1,344	342	25.4%
1	954	376	39.4%
2	930	454	48.8%
3	753	444	59.0%
4	702	492	70.1%
County			
Aitkin	10	6	60.0%
Anoka	160	69	43.1%
Becker	67	32	47.8%
Beltrami	273	78	28.6%
Benton	32	16	50.0%
Big Stone	4	0	0.0%
Blue Earth	84	43	51.2%
Brown	27	9	33.3%
Carlton	32	11	34.4%
Carver	42	19	45.2%
Cass	30	9	30.0%
Chippewa	18	10	55.6%

Chisago	31	15	48.4%
Clay	73	45	61.6%
Clearwater	10	4	40.0%
Cook	1	1	100.0%
Crow Wing	71	33	46.5%
Dakota	155	90	58.1%
Des Moines Valley HHS	25	7	28.0%
Douglas	19	7	36.8%
Faribault-Martin	41	10	24.4%
Fillmore	5	1	20.0%
Freeborn	46	14	30.4%
Goodhue	23	10	43.5%
Hennepin	985	471	47.8%
Houston	14	8	57.1%
Hubbard	29	15	51.7%
Isanti	27	10	37.0%
Itasca	65	33	50.8%
Kanabec	7	5	71.4%
Kandiyohi	70	29	41.4%
Koochiching	18	7	38.9%
Lac qui Parle	2	2	100.0%
Lake	6	4	66.7%
Lake of the Woods	3	2	66.7%
Le Sueur	17	4	23.5%
Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe	57	24	42.1%
Mahnomen	9	2	22.2%
Marshall	1	1	100.0%
McLeod	42	21	50.0%
Meeker	20	14	70.0%
Mille Lacs	66	29	43.9%
MN Prairie	47	19	40.4%
Morrison	34	18	52.9%
Mower	37	6	16.2%
Nicollet	14	5	35.7%
Nobles	13	1	7.7%
Norman	6	3	50.0%
Olmsted	68	30	44.1%
Otter Tail	69	30	43.5%

Pennington	11	2	18.2%
Pine	33	14	42.4%
Polk	32	11	34.4%
Ramsey	444	234	52.7%
Renville	13	7	53.8%
Rice	78	30	38.5%
Roseau	11	3	27.3%
Scott	45	26	57.8%
Sherburne	47	27	57.4%
Sibley	5	3	60.0%
Southwest HHS	70	36	51.4%
St. Louis	342	156	45.6%
Stearns	114	49	43.0%
Stevens	6	3	50.0%
Swift	21	11	52.4%
Todd	18	7	38.9%
Traverse	4	0	0.0%
Wabasha	10	3	30.0%
Wadena	26	8	30.8%
Washington	81	42	51.9%
Watonwan	15	6	40.0%
Western Prairie Human Services	23	9	39.1%
White Earth Band of Ojibwe	109	44	40.4%
Wilkin	12	3	25.0%
Winona	45	16	35.6%
Wright	54	22	40.7%
Yellow Medicine	9	4	44.4%

Note. ECE enrollment data include Early Childhood Screening and Early Learning Scholarships, which are programs that do not provide educational programming or child care services.

Table 18. *Participation in any ECE Program by Race, Ethnicity, Age and County during AY 2021*

	# in FC	# in ECE	% in ECE
Total	**4,224**	**1,856**	**43.9%**
Race			
African American / Black	541	257	47.5%
American Indian / Alaska Native	878	325	37.0%
Asian / Pacific Islander	58	26	44.8%

Two or more races	1054	543	51.5%
Unknown / declined	84	27	32.1%
White	1,609	678	42.1%
Ethnicity			
Hispanic / Latino (any race)	391	168	43.0%
Non Hispanic / Unknown	3,833	1,688	44.0%
Age			
0	1,206	325	26.9%
1	839	309	36.8%
2	810	363	44.8%
3	738	412	55.8%
4	631	447	70.8%
County			
Aitkin	11	5	45.5%
Anoka	158	68	43.0%
Becker	57	37	64.9%
Beltrami	208	69	33.2%
Benton	33	12	36.4%
Big Stone	4	1	25.0%
Blue Earth	61	25	41.0%
Brown	28	12	42.9%
Carlton	32	15	46.9%
Carver	33	15	45.5%
Cass	29	9	31.0%
Chippewa	22	7	31.8%
Chisago	29	16	55.2%
Clay	72	33	45.8%
Clearwater	11	7	63.6%
Cook	1	0	0.0%
Crow Wing	75	34	45.3%
Dakota	93	41	44.1%
Des Moines Valley HHS	17	3	17.6%
Douglas	28	10	35.7%
Faribault-Martin	46	18	39.1%
Fillmore	6	2	33.3%
Freeborn	57	17	29.8%
Goodhue	24	11	45.8%
Hennepin	834	444	53.2%

Houston	6	2	33.3%
Hubbard	31	21	67.7%
Isanti	22	10	45.5%
Itasca	38	18	47.4%
Kanabec	8	2	25.0%
Kandiyohi	77	37	48.1%
Koochiching	22	8	36.4%
Lac qui Parle	3	3	100.0%
Lake	6	3	50.0%
Lake of the Woods	4	2	50.0%
Le Sueur	15	9	60.0%
Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe	48	12	25.0%
Mahnomen	7	4	57.1%
Marshall	1	0	0.0%
McLeod	29	16	55.2%
Meeker	19	15	78.9%
Mille Lacs	70	36	51.4%
MN Prairie	48	14	29.2%
Morrison	22	15	68.2%
Mower	37	11	29.7%
Nicollet	18	10	55.6%
Nobles	14	2	14.3%
Norman	1	1	100.0%
Olmsted	64	23	35.9%
Otter Tail	54	18	33.3%
Pennington	13	6	46.2%
Pine	32	12	37.5%
Polk	26	12	46.2%
Ramsey	357	174	48.7%
Red Lake	4	1	25.0%
Red Lake Nation	108	27	25.0%
Renville	18	8	44.4%
Rice	51	16	31.4%
Roseau	10	5	50.0%
Scott	30	17	56.7%
Sherburne	30	17	56.7%
Sibley	6	3	50.0%
Southwest HHS	84	29	34.5%

St. Louis	332	144	43.4%
Stearns	135	48	35.6%
Stevens	10	3	30.0%
Swift	13	7	53.8%
Todd	19	6	31.6%
Traverse	6	0	0.0%
Wabasha	14	6	42.9%
Wadena	43	14	32.6%
Washington	66	28	42.4%
Watonwan	14	1	7.1%
Western Prairie Human Services	20	9	45.0%
White Earth Band of Ojibwe	100	35	35.0%
Wilkin	7	2	28.6%
Winona	44	12	27.3%
Wright	61	25	41.0%
Yellow Medicine	14	8	57.1%

Note. ECE enrollment data include Early Childhood Screening and Early Learning Scholarships, which are programs that do not provide educational programming or child care services.

For AY 2020 and 2021 tables by program, contact Amy Dorman at dorm0039@umn.edu.