

Access to Quality, Affordable Early Care and Education

Needs Assessment Survey Results:
Ellis County, KS

K-STATE
Research and Extension

About the Project

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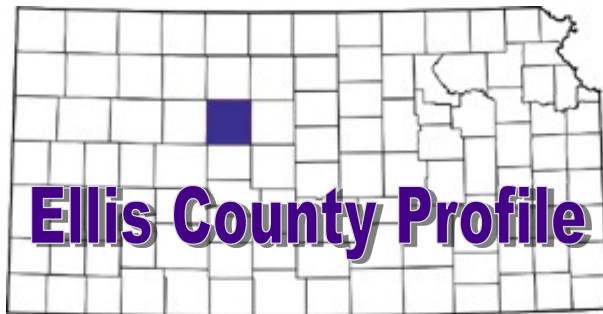
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Background

Securing early care and education in Kansas, irrespective of cost, can be difficult due to a general lack of options. Families often experience the added challenge of high costs and may find themselves unable to enroll children for financial reasons. Finding solutions to problems of early care and education access, affordability and quality is crucial for the long-term viability of all communities, especially rural ones, as child care arrangements have major implications for child development, family functioning, civic engagement, retention of residents and workforce participation. This ongoing project has assessed child care needs across Kansas and Nebraska, with the ultimate goal of moving communities toward sustainable, long-term strategies to meet the diverse needs of families.

Needs assessment included anonymous surveys with space to provide qualitative responses. Surveys were designed to capture a variety of perspectives and experiences around child care access, affordability, quality, barriers, and impact/importance within this community. Three distinct audiences were targeted for participation in survey needs assessment: adults seeking child care; adults who currently have child care; and members of the general public. The present document reports on survey results in Ellis County and surrounding areas.



People

Total population: 28, 934

Median age (years): 32.5

High School Graduates: 93.3%

Bachelors Degree or Higher: 36.3%

Economy and Labor Force

Number of Companies: 3,805

Civilian Employment (ages 16+): 12,517

Unemployment Rate: 4.0%

Residents Working within the County: 72.2%

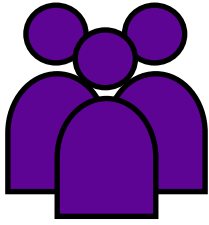
Median Household Income: \$52,883

Individuals Below Poverty Level: 16%

Cities

**Hays, Catharine, Ellis,
Schoenchen, Victoria**

Adults Seeking Child Care



Characteristics

n = 184

Race/ethnicity	96% White, 4% Hispanic or Latino
Age	33-37 yrs. (median, mode)
Gender	90% women
Education Level	45% Bachelor degree (mode)
Residence	80.0% Ellis County Six additional counties represented
Household income	\$150,000 + (mode)
Employment status	83.4% working as paid employee
Household Size	4 (median, mode)

Top Three Barriers

(Select all that apply from a list of 13 options)

- Cost/Affordability** (*n* = 76)
- Dependability of Care** (*n* = 68)
- Quality of Care** (*n* = 63)

Most Preferred Child Care Arrangements

(Select all that apply among 10 options)

- Child care center** (*n* = 101)
- Child care by me in our own home** (*n* = 55)
- Combination of care as needed** (*n* = 49)
- School-based program** (*n* = 74)

Top 5 Most Important Factors in Search for Care

Factor

1. The cost
2. The provider is someone you know and trust
3. The provider had a reputation for good care
4. The provider accepts infants
5. The provider has a warm and loving style

Note: Top five ranked from a list of 23 choices.

Q: What is the one thing you believe will most help your household meet family needs?

A: "Affordable, reliable & regulated/safe childcare."

A: "Childcare in the workplace."

Days Child Care is Needed for 0-5 yrs. (*n* = 201)

53% - Monday-Friday

22% - Snow days, Holidays & Summer Break

4% - Evenings (2nd Shift)

6% - Early Morning

13% - When Child is Sick

2% - Other

Challenge Rating to Top 3 Needs

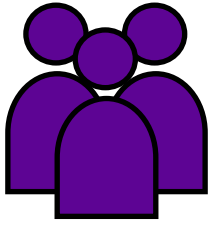
Need	Challenge Rating
Finding Infant Care (<i>n</i> = 105)	Extremely Challenging
Having Reliable Childcare (<i>n</i> = 84)	Extremely Challenging
Having Childcare During the Summer (<i>n</i> = 82)	Extremely Challenging

Is there anything regarding child care in Ellis County that you wished we had asked, or you would like to tell us?

"Having an authentic and up-to-date vaccination list for daycare providers is a must have in order to stay open and to care for children. The daycare provider must have this showing just like their license."

"Hays med needs a daycare center in Hays Kansas."

Adults Seeking Child Care Cont.

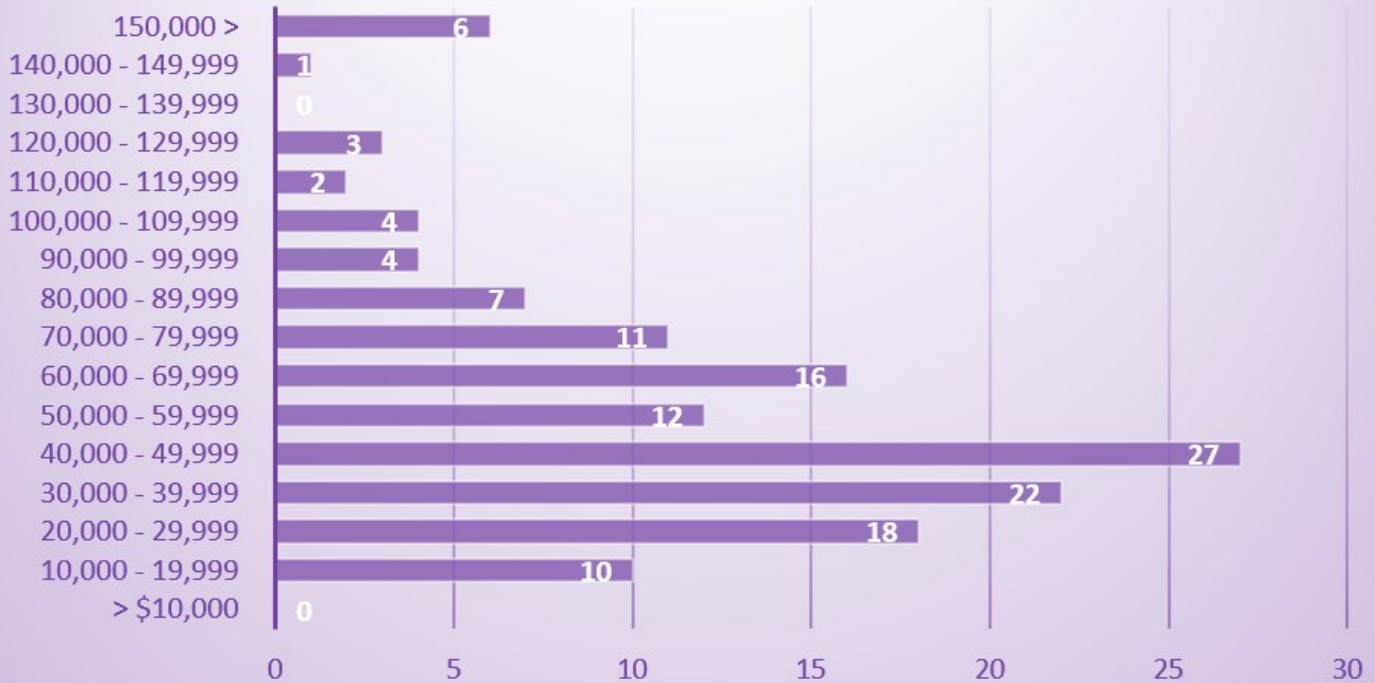


Characteristics

n = 184

Race/ethnicity	96% White, 4% Hispanic or Latino
Age	33-37 yrs. (median, mode)
Gender	90% women
Education Level	45% Bachelor degree (mode)
Residence	80.0% Ellis County Six additional counties represented
Household income	\$150,000 + (mode)
Employment status	83.4% working as paid employee
Household Size	4 (median, mode)

Income likely generated from joining/re-joining the workforce (*n* = 143)



If you had affordable child care would you enter or return to the work force?

(*n* = 151)

97.3% - YES

1.3% - NO

1.3% - Maybe

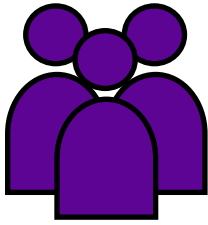
In your opinion, what are the greatest strengths of your community?

"The ability to pull together to take care of my child when I'm at work."

"Caring people."

When asked if availability and access to childcare was negatively impacting the community, 93% answered yes.

Adults Who Currently Have Child Care



Characteristics

n = 293

Race/ethnicity	97% White, 3% Hispanic or Latino
Age	33-37 yrs. (median, mode)
Gender	85% women
Education level	52% Bachelor degree (mode)
Residence	92.8% Ellis County Five additional counties represented
Household income	\$70,000 to \$79,999 (mode)
Employment status	89.2% working as paid employee
Household Size	4 (median, mode)

Current Child Care Arrangements

Care in non-relative's home (*n* = 110)
 Child care center (*n* = 44)
 School-based program (*n* = 35)

Preferred Child Care Arrangements

Child care center (*n* = 105)
 Care in non relative's home (*n* = 105)
 School based program (*n* = 78)

Top 5 Most Important Factors in Search for Care

Factor

1. The provider is someone you know and trust
2. The cost
3. The provider had a reputation for good care
4. The provider accepts infants
5. The provider had a warm loving provider style

Note: Top five ranked from a list of 23 choices.

Days Child Care is Needed for 0-5yrs (*n* = 269)

65.9% - Monday-Friday

25.2% - Snow days, Holidays & Summer Break

3.0% - Evenings (2nd Shift)

1.5% - Early Morning

4% - When Child is Sick

4% - Other

Top Three Barriers When Searching for Care

(Select all that apply from a list of 13 options)

Quality of Care (*n* = 126)

Cost/Affordability of Care (*n* = 109)

Dependability of Care (*n* = 63)

"It would be nice if there were a childcare facility locally that had hours that matched what was needed for shift work (healthcare, manufacturing etc.) and would prioritize openings for children with parents who work in those industries. It is very hard to find childcare for start times before 7:30am and after 5:00pm. When my children were younger, it was fortunately much easier to find a provider in general. Many times it required piecing together extra family/friends to get kids to/from daycare and look after them during non-daycare hours that we are still working due to our jobs. Also weekend/holiday daycare is very much needed especially for single parents and those whose work schedules require them to work on weekends & holidays."

Comparisons



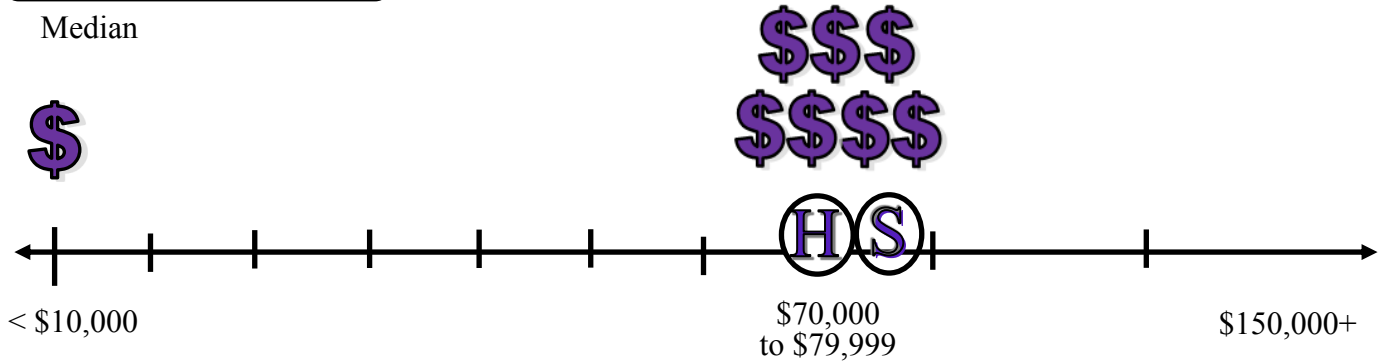
Seeking Care



Have Care

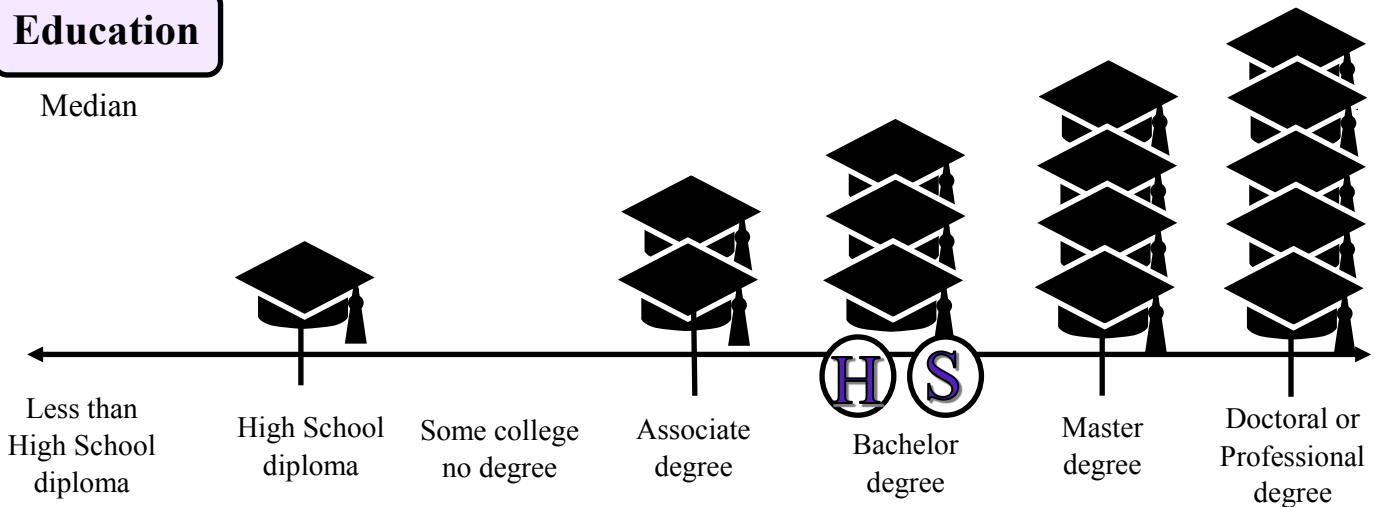
Household Income

Median



Education

Median

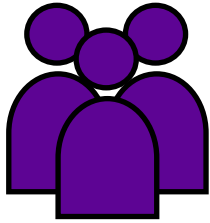


Respondents with Children in Specific Age Categories

Note. Some families have multiple children in a single age category. In this table, each respondent is counted only once per category.

Child Age	Seeking Care <i>n</i> = 270	Have Care <i>n</i> = 361
0 - 11 Months	61 (22.6%)	34 (9.2%)
12 - 18 Months	26 (9.6%)	39 (10.5%)
19 months - 4 years	73 (27.1%)	132 (35.6%)
5 - 8 years	61 (22.6%)	87 (23.5%)
9 - 12 years	29 (10.7%)	45 (12.2%)
13-18 years	20 (7.4%)	20 (5.4%)

General Public



Characteristics n = 268

Race/ethnicity	96.3% White, 0.38% Hispanic or Latino
Age	42.2% ages 22-42, mode 52+
Gender	83.3% women
Education Level	41.4% Bachelor degree (median, mode)
Residence	91.0% Ellis County Five additional counties represented
Household income	\$70,000 to \$79,999 (median)
Employment status	86.4% working as paid employee
Household Size	3 (median), 2 (mode)

Which of the issues below do you think are most important for families with young children in your community? (Three items with greatest consensus from a list of 13)

Issue	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Neither Important nor Unimportant	Somewhat Unimportant	Very Unimportant
Dependability of care (n = 218)	199 (91.5%)	17 (7.8%)	0	0	2 (0.9%)
Quality of care (n = 218)	202 (92.2%)	13 (6.0%)	1 (0.5%)	0	2 (0.9%)
Cost/affordability of care (n = 219)	194 (89.2%)	20 (9.2%)	2 (0.9%)	0	2 (0.9%)

Perceptions of Community Needs and Potential Solutions

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
In general, families in our community have access to an adequate supply of child care services. (n = 219)	120 (55.2%)	62 (28.5%)	10 (4.6%)	19 (8.7%)	8 (3.7%)
Access to quality, affordable child care is an economic development issue. (n = 217)	11 (5.0%)	14 (6.4%)	27 (12.4%)	66 (30.4%)	99 (45.5%)
Federal and/or state government should make child care services more affordable than they are at present. (n = 220)	15 (6.8%)	17 (7.7%)	40 (18.0%)	57 (25.7%)	91 (41.0%)
County government has a role to play in access to quality, affordable child care. (n = 219)	13 (6.0%)	20 (9.2%)	43 (19.8%)	75 (34.5%)	68 (31.2%)
Churches have a role to play in access to quality, affordable child care. (n = 220)	24 (10.8%)	34 (15.3%)	98 (44.1%)	45 (20.3%)	19 (8.6%)

Is there anything regarding child care in Ellis County that you wished we had asked, or you would like to tell us?

"Infant care is almost impossible to find."

"When my daughter was born it was quite difficult to find daycare for infants. I contacted probably 40 different people just to see if they had openings! It was very frustrating how few options are available for infants."

"We need more childcare availability in our county. It must be" affordable, reliable, dependable, clean, provide learning experiences, have trained, caring as well as suitable number of staff, available to parent work schedules, serve nutritious meals and easy access for parents."

"We employ 24 hour staff and finding daycare is impossible for them."

"A moms day out program would be great. Hays has no options like this."

Summary of Findings

Understanding Ellis County's need for access to quality, affordable early care and education requires attention across multiple domains. As with many communities in Kansas, demand for care far exceeds supply.

Infant Care

Those seeking care demonstrate need across the age spectrum, but especially for young infant (0-11 months), and toddler to preschool age (19 months to four years). Those with care further represented the lack of infant care options, as only 9 percent of the respondents indicated having young infant care (0-11 months). While this could be due in part to the age of children in families with care, the voices of respondents in the qualitative data indicating the need for infant care provides important value, allowing for verification of this finding.

Workforce Participation

In Ellis County, the median household incomes for both those seeking care and those with care were in the \$70,000-\$79,000 range. Those seeking care reported a mode (the most represented answer) of \$150,000 or higher, yet those with care reported a mode of \$70,000-\$79,000. However, the mean (average) for both groups was \$70,000-\$79,000, indicating that while the single most response for those seeking care was \$150,000, the rest of the responses brought the average to the same household income as those with care. These figures, combined with an average education level of a four-year college degree, tell the story of a workforce of educated women (85% of respondents) unable to join the labor force due to the lack of early care and education available to them. Further, a staggering 97 percent of respondents indicated that they would return or join the workforce, with the average expected wages resulting from this providing an additional \$40,000-\$49,000 in household income.

Public Perceptions of Need for Early Care and Education

The public in Ellis County seems to understand the need for early care and education in their communities. Respondents indicated that they perceive of child care as an economic development issue, and that there was a need for care. Further, the highest number of respondents strongly agreed that federal and state government should be involved in making care more affordable, with those somewhat agreeing that county government has a role. The public was noncommittal on the role that churches should play.

Conclusion

Early care and education needs in Ellis County seem to be well known among respondents. In comparison to most of the needs assessments we have conducted, the public seems to both understand the community's need, and believes that federal, state, and local governments should provide support to make child care more affordable. We would recommend that Ellis County stakeholders use these results in three key ways. First, we recommend providing elected officials with documentation of this need, and especially the potential contributions that would result from the latent talent pool of women joining the workforce in support of economic prosperity for both their families and communities. Second, we recommend that communities in Ellis County use this report as data on which to base grant and low-or-no cost loans to build child care capacity. Third, because of the shortages in the workforce and the experiences of many businesses during the pandemic resulting from the lack of early care and education (e.g., reduced productivity, increased absenteeism, workers leaving the workforce), working with the private sector to support child care capacity appears to be a mutually beneficial approach to alleviating many of the issues identified in these data.

Ellis County respondents appear to know that the time is right for action on this issue and these results provide evidence of the community's recognition of the multiple stakeholders necessary to move toward community action and change.