

# CHILD CARE ACCESS IN 2020:

How will pending state mandates affect availability in Franklin County, Ohio?



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## INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

Child care provision is a critical service for children and their families, and it can also bolster the workforce and larger economy. For child care to truly be beneficial, however, it must be affordable, accessible, and high quality. A current state requirement regarding child care programming may have enormous implications for many of Ohio’s most vulnerable families who rely on funding for child care. Specifically, by 2020, any Ohio child care provider that accepts Publicly Funded Child Care (PFCC) subsidies must both apply to and receive entry into Ohio’s quality rating and improvement system – Step Up To Quality (SUTQ) (the “2020 mandate”).

The purpose of this paper is two-fold. First, we aim to provide an in-depth examination of the availability of child care in Franklin County, Ohio, with a specific focus on PFCC-accepting programs, and explore how this landscape may change in July of 2020. Second, we aim to examine the locations of programs that are most at risk for losing child care sites, highlighting possible deserts through the use of mapping.



# 2020 SUTQ Mandate: What is at stake?

According to an analysis completed by Franklin County Jobs and Family Services (JFS), if the 2020 mandate went into effect today, over 21,000 young children would lose their care (Franklin County Jobs and Family Services, 2019). This is because unrated providers would lose the public subsidies that make it possible to provide child care services.

Franklin County JFS estimates that hundreds of providers in Franklin County are at risk of closure, while as many as 9,000+ families could lose their child care arrangement (Franklin County Jobs and Family Services, 2019). Many of these families would presumably have to find new care for their children or, alternatively, leave the workforce if they cannot. Ongoing work by Franklin County JFS suggests that the majority of PFCC payments go to providers in neighborhoods experiencing high rates of poverty relative to other surrounding areas, including Eastland/Far East, Linden/Milo Grogan, Northland/North Columbus, and West Columbus/Hilltop (Franklin County Jobs and Family Services, 2019). Table 1 shows that there are over 38,000 children under the age of five living in these neighborhoods where the poverty rates are sometimes as high as 65% (compared to the county-wide child poverty rate of 24%; U.S. Census Bureau, 2017a). In fact, in 12 of these 14 zip codes, at least one in four children under five years of age resides in a home below the poverty line.



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The goal of Step Up to Quality is to ensure every family has access to high-quality child care, and we wholeheartedly believe in that. However, when the majority of the children being served by unrated providers are children of color, living in some of the lowest asset neighborhoods in our community, that’s something I take personally. We’ve made great strides in Franklin County, but we certainly still have work to do – and those children and their families are counting on us.

– Joy Bivens, Director of Franklin County Jobs and Family Services  
(J. Bivens, personal communication, July 18, 2019)

**Table 1.** Number of children under five years of age and the percentage of those children living below the federal poverty line in the neighborhoods receiving the majority of PFCC funding

NEIGHBORHOODS	ZIP CODES	# OF CHILDREN UNDER AGE 5	% OF CHILDREN UNDER AGE 5 BELOW POVERTY LEVEL
Eastland/Far East	43068	3,752	16.28%
	43110	2,690	2.80%
	43213	2,520	33.10%
	43227	1,683	53.70%
Linden/Milo Grogan	43201	866	56.70%
	43211	2,212	64.90%
	43219	3,316	64.50%
	43224	3,799	41.20%
	43215	138	43.50%
Northland/ North Columbus	43229	4,838	37.80%
	43231	2,027	27.90%
West Columbus/ Hilltop	43204	2,711	40.90%
	43222	496	45.10%
	43223	1,605	49.20%
	43228	5,408	46.80%
<b>TOTAL:</b>		<b>38,061</b>	

**Notes.** Neighborhood and zip codes from Franklin County Jobs and Family Services (JFS, 2019). Data on children under five years of age and percentage living under the poverty line from the U.S. Census Bureau (American FactFinder).

As the data in Table 1 show, most of the neighborhoods where child care loss is likely to occur are also where a significant number of young children are living in poverty.

# Why is Ohio focused on quality?

## HIGH-QUALITY CHILD CARE MAKES A DIFFERENCE FOR CHILDREN

Research consistently shows that children who spend time in high-quality early child care settings enter kindergarten with better social, cognitive, and academic skills compared to children who did not (e.g., Meloy, Gardner, & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Phillips et al., 2017). Recent research on one of the most well-known high-quality child care programs – Perry Preschool – found that the participants experienced better health, employment, and relationship success even 50 years later compared to children who did not participate in that program (Heckman & Karapakula, 2019). Especially promising, the children of the original Perry Preschool participants also went on to have higher educational attainment and lower school suspension rates compared to the children of non-participants. Research also shows that children from economically disadvantaged homes are especially likely to benefit from high-quality preschool (e.g., Magnuson, Ruhm, & Waldfogel, 2007). This suggests that participation in high-quality child care can be a multi-generational strategy for improving health, economic, and educational outcomes for adults and children.

## HIGH-QUALITY CHILD CARE MAKES A DIFFERENCE FOR FAMILIES

Full-time center-based child care costs families in the range of \$5,000 to \$24,000 per year, depending on the location and age of a child. Child care is a critical work support for families in the workforce, and even more so for families experiencing economic hardship and for families headed by women. For instance, when Washington D.C. introduced two years of universal preschool for 3- and 4-year-old children, maternal labor force participation increased by roughly 10 percentage points in the years following the policy enactment (Malik, 2008). When families are able to send their children to reliable, high-quality child care, they can benefit from an associated increase in income, and in turn, the economy benefits from the increased revenue from taxes (Bishop-Josef, Beakey, Watson, & Garrett, 2019).

Recently, Child Care Aware (2018) ranked Ohio in the top 5 least affordable states for full-time center-based child care. In Ohio, one year of center-based infant care costs almost the same amount as a year of tuition at a four-year public college (i.e., \$9,466 vs. \$10,505). According to the same report, a Midwestern family with an infant and a preschooler in child care would pay more for child care than housing. As child care prices continue to rise, one mechanism by which state policies can support access to child care is by providing families with additional funds to off-set the cost (Childcare Aware, 2018).

## PUBLICLY FUNDED CHILD CARE OPTIONS IN OHIO

Caregivers have a number of options when seeking out care for their children, many of which are funded by the federal, state, or city government. Some options are available statewide – such as programs funded by the state early childhood education (ECE) grant or via federal flow-through dollars for preschoolers (ages three to five years) with disabilities. Yet others are city-specific; for instance, Columbus’ Early Start Columbus initiative provides funds to support preschool participation for eligible four-year-old children in the city of Columbus.

Funding for child care is complex and overlapping. Some programs are only funded for part of the day and year and must be layered with other funding sources to provide a full day’s care for a participating child. Many options also have specific income eligibility or work requirements. Of relevance to the present paper is the state-funded PFCC program. Ohio’s PFCC program provides child care subsidies directly to providers. For families to be eligible for PFCC funding, there is both a work and income requirement. A caregiver must be working, enrolled in the Ohio Works First Program, or in some cases, gaining additional education. Household income must be at 130% of the federal poverty level (FPL) or less, with eligibility on a sliding scale until 300% of the FPL. We focus on PFCC, in particular, given that the 2020 mandate is specifically directed towards child care programs serving children eligible for the PFCC subsidy.



# Research Aims



**AIM 1:** To provide an in-depth examination of the availability of child care in Franklin County, Ohio, focused on PFCC. Specifically, we examine the current number of providers within the county who currently accept PFCC yet are not within the SUTQ system. These particular providers are potentially at risk for not being able to accept PFCC-supported participants in 2020, should they not enter into the state SUTQ.



**AIM 2:** To examine the locations of the programs that are at risk of losing PFCC subsidies, and to bring attention to possible “deserts” and the implications this has for specific neighborhoods and communities.

## Method

Data used in this project come from two sources. First, we used the Ohio Department of Education and the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) child care directory (available online at <http://childcaresearch.ohio.gov>) to identify child care programs in Franklin County. These included federally funded, state funded, and private child care settings. From the lists and data included in the portal, we harvested all available data on locations, capacity, and Step Up To Quality participation.

Capacity (the number of available spaces for children) was determined by examining regular inspection reports which are also available on the ODJFS child care directory site. However, not all programs posted full reports; capacity was harvested from 879 programs with full reports through this online system.

The second data source was information obtained via direct phone calls made to the remaining 302 programs, wherein trained research staff asked child care program personnel about the number of children served. After two rounds of phone calls, we obtained data from 291 programs.

To gather information about how many children at each center receive PFCC, we requested data from the Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services. As of April 1, 2019, there were 724 PFCC-accepting programs serving roughly 21,000 children in Franklin County, Ohio. The information provided did not include data for programs with less than 10 children. Consequently, the data used in this report regarding PFCC-accepting sites represent all child care programs in Franklin County in which at least ten children are supported by PFCC.

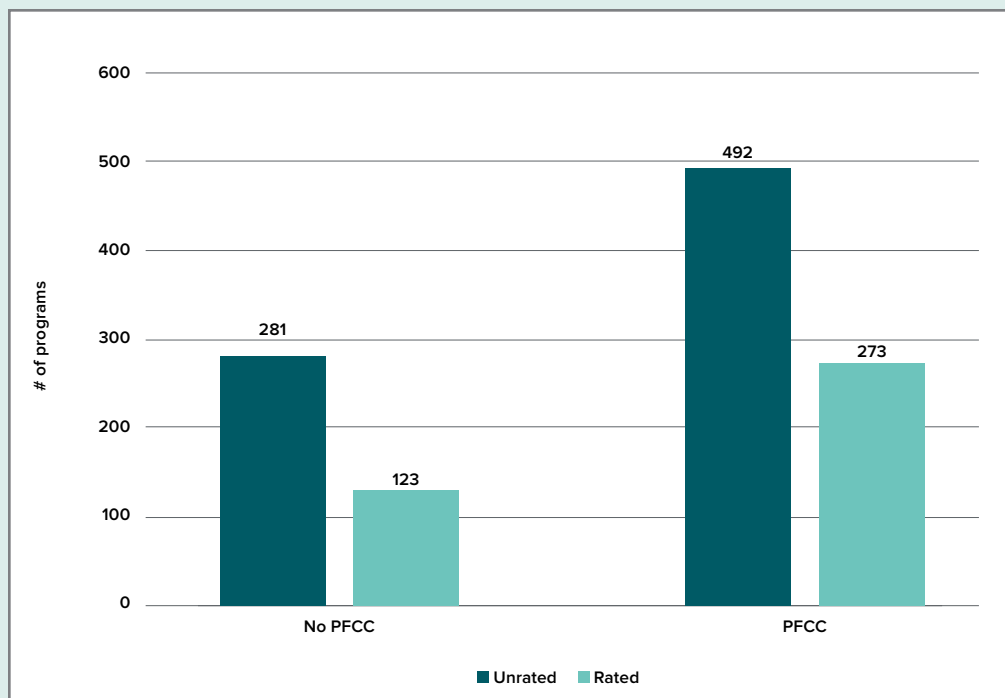
To create maps of the child care settings, the provided addresses were geo-coded using Texas A&M University’s GeoService ([Geoservices.tamu.edu](http://Geoservices.tamu.edu)). Maps were created using ArcGIS. An Excel file containing the names of the child care programs with their SUTQ rating, PFCC-accepting status, and location was uploaded to ArcGIS. The selected basemap was that of Franklin County, Ohio. We were able to map each of the 1,181 Franklin County child care programs.

## Results

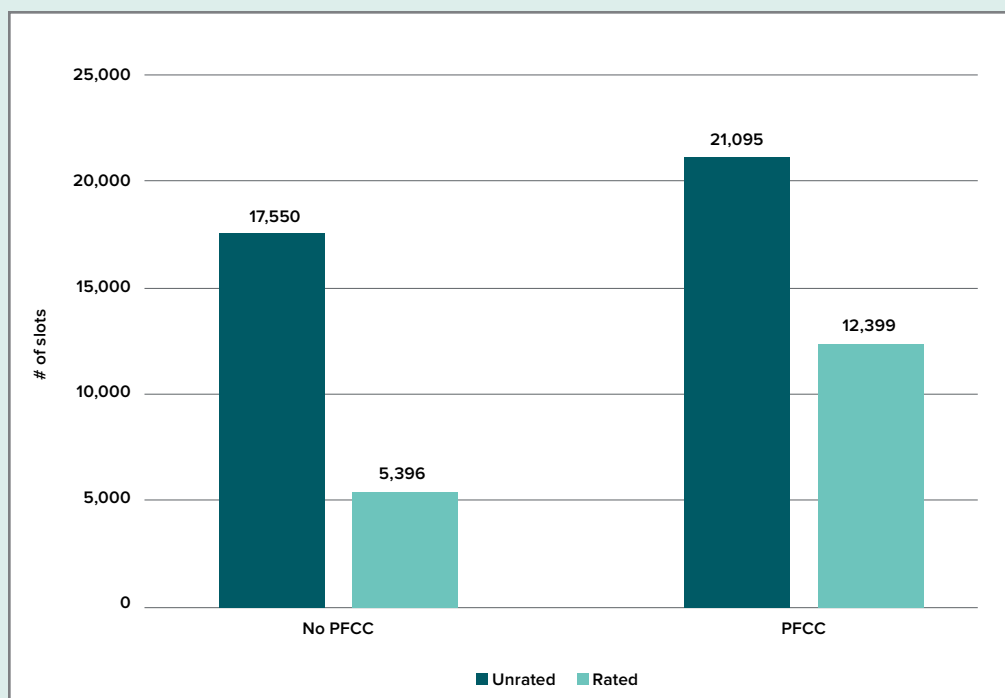
Based on data from the ODJFS website coupled with phone contacts with program administrators, there are 1,171 child care programs in Franklin County, Ohio. Estimating capacity based on data from 1,067 programs (114 programs had no data available), we estimate that there are 56,440 child care slots available in these programs. Based on the ODE website tool, of these 1,067 programs, 765 programs accept PFCC dollars and provide a total 33,494 child care slots.

# 2020 Mandate: Implications for Providers and Families

Of Franklin County's 765 programs currently accepting PFCC dollars (see Figure 1), 273 (36%) are participating in Ohio's SUTQ rating system, whereas the remaining 64% are currently not enrolled in SUTQ. Figure 2 includes the current number of slots offered by the programs that do and do not accept PFCC dollars by their rating status. Based on these comparisons, the available data suggest that there are approximately 21,000 slots that are vulnerable to changes in PFCC subsidies.



< **Figure 1.** This figure shows the number of programs that do/do not accept PFCC subsidies by the number of programs that are/are not in the SUTQ system. The unrated sites that accept PFCC funding (N = 492) must be in the SUTQ system by July 1, 2020 in order to continue accepting PFCC subsidies.



< **Figure 2.** This figure shows the number of available child care slots at programs that do/do not accept PFCC subsidies by the number of slots for rated/unrated programs. If unrated programs close or stop accepting PFCC funding after July 1, 2020, 21,000 child care slots could be affected.

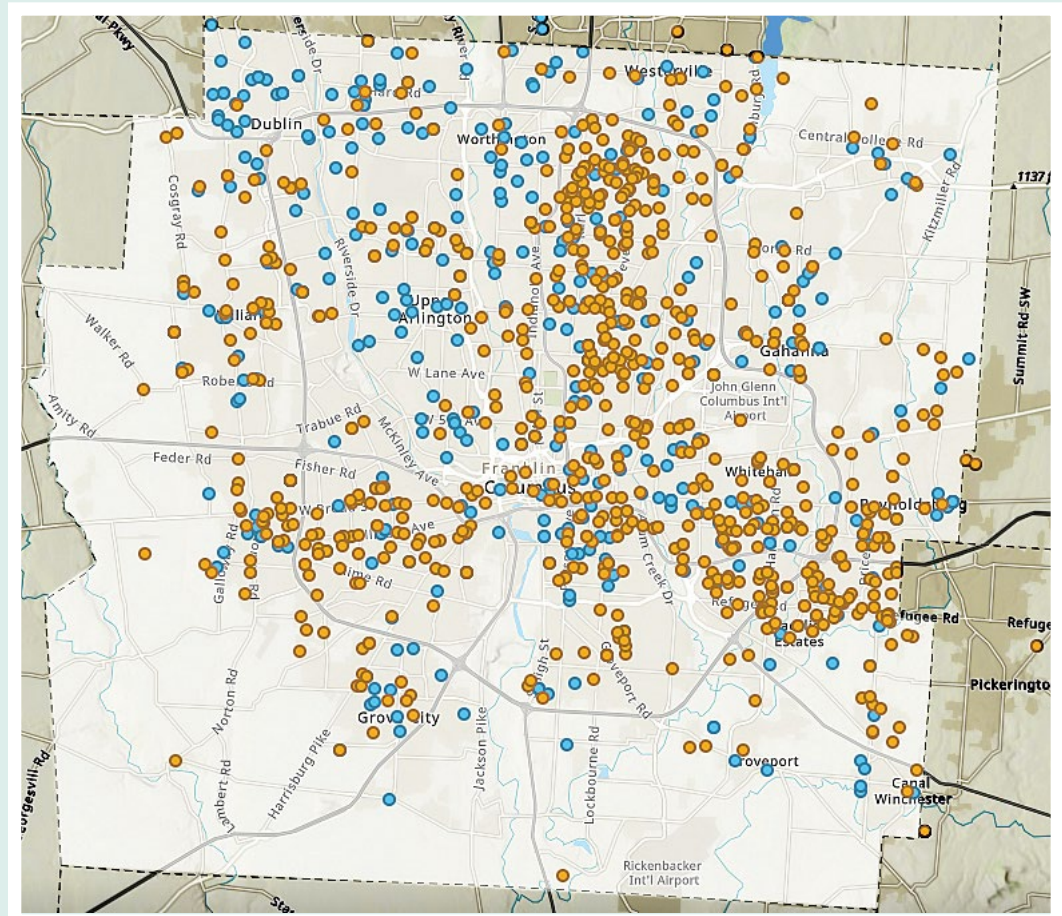
# Visualization of the Impact in Franklin County, Ohio



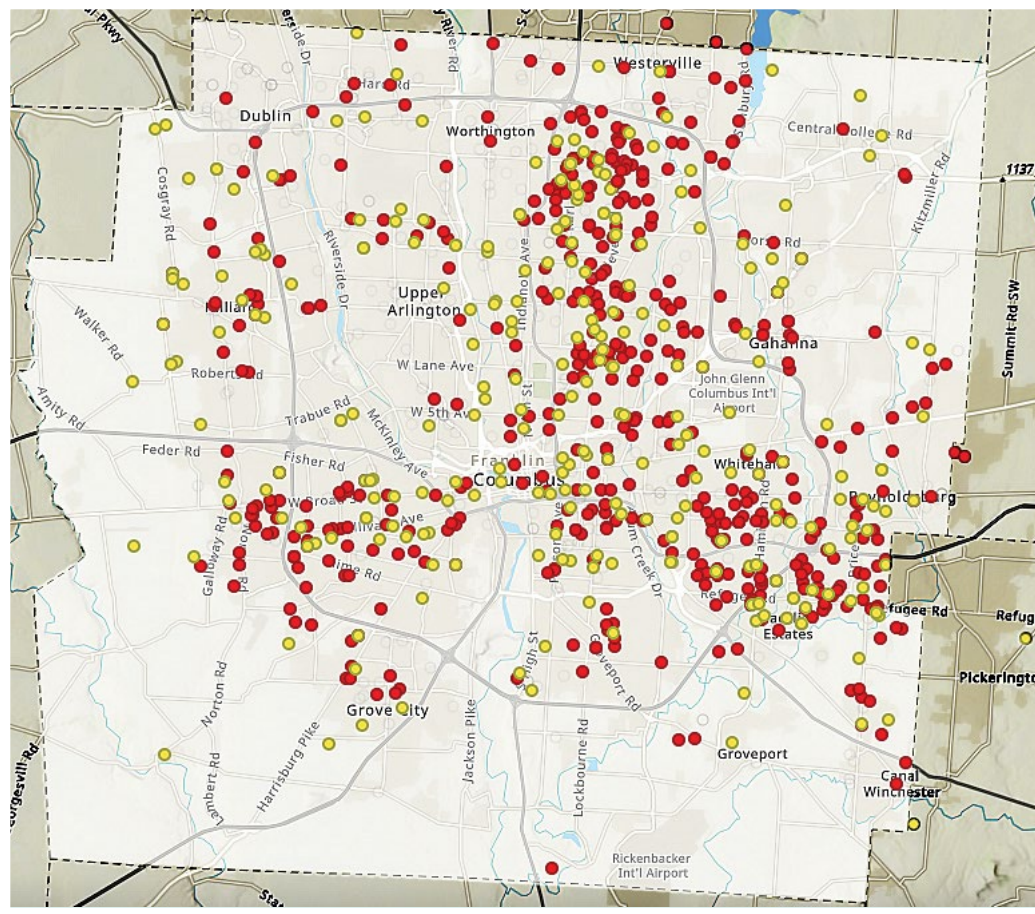
The maps that follow show the locations of Franklin County child care providers (both home-based and center-based) and differentiate among those receiving PFCC. Figure 4 further breaks down those differentiations, showing PFCC-accepting sites that are both rated and unrated in Ohio's SUTQ system. As these illustrations show, the loss of PFCC funds could jeopardize many centers and have an impact on the supply of PFCC-accepting child care slots in Franklin County. While the overall potential loss of more than 21,000 slots is stark county-wide, the loss of PFCC slots could be more pronounced in some communities, specifically the zip codes noted at the beginning of this paper (Table 1).

It's impossible to know from this study where families might choose to enroll their child should their existing center lose PFCC funds. Families may enroll their children based on where they live or where they work (or in between) so it's difficult to know precisely what the impact could be on their accessibility to a nearby center. Even if a family lives near another PFCC-accepting center, there's little guarantee that the center would have capacity for new children. This is especially true if the quality mandate affects PFCC-accepting providers all at the same time (next spring/summer).

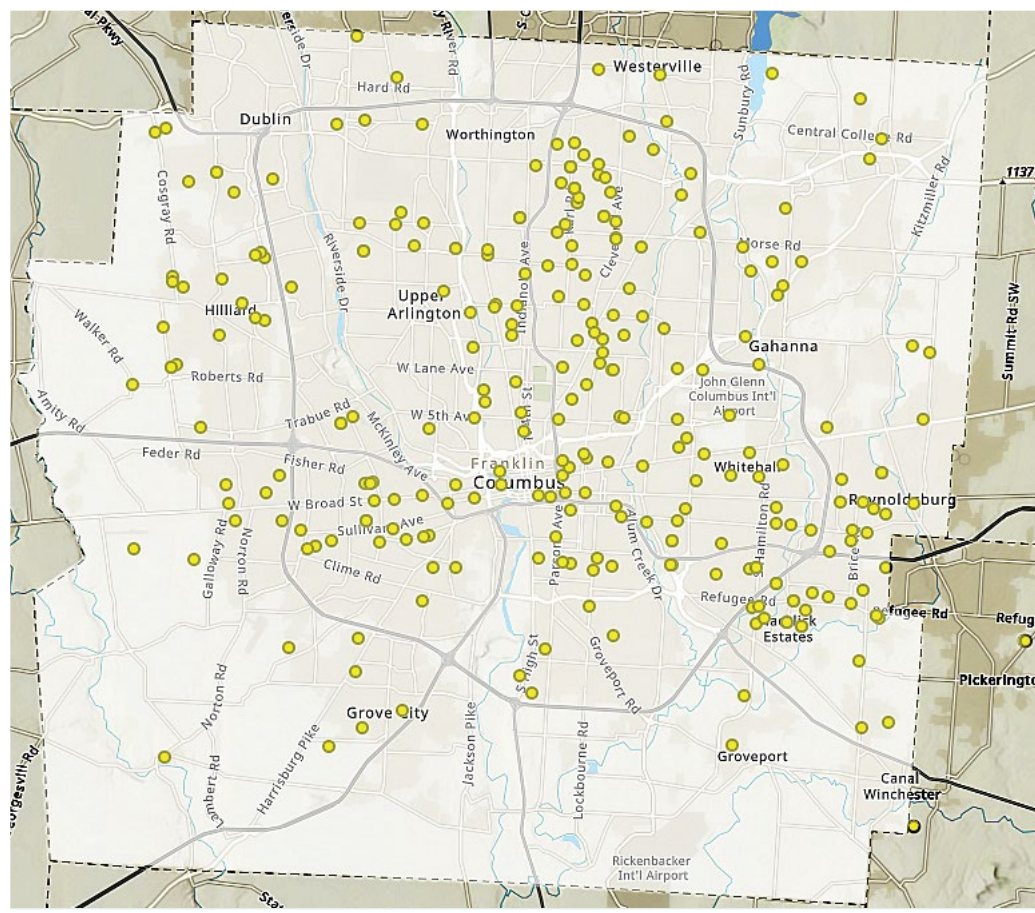
> **Figure 3.** This is a map of Franklin County, Ohio, with each dot representing a child care program. Blue dots represent programs that do not accept PFCC; orange dots represent those that do accept PFCC funding. Programs that do accept PFCC (orange) are required to be in the SUTQ program by July 1, 2020.







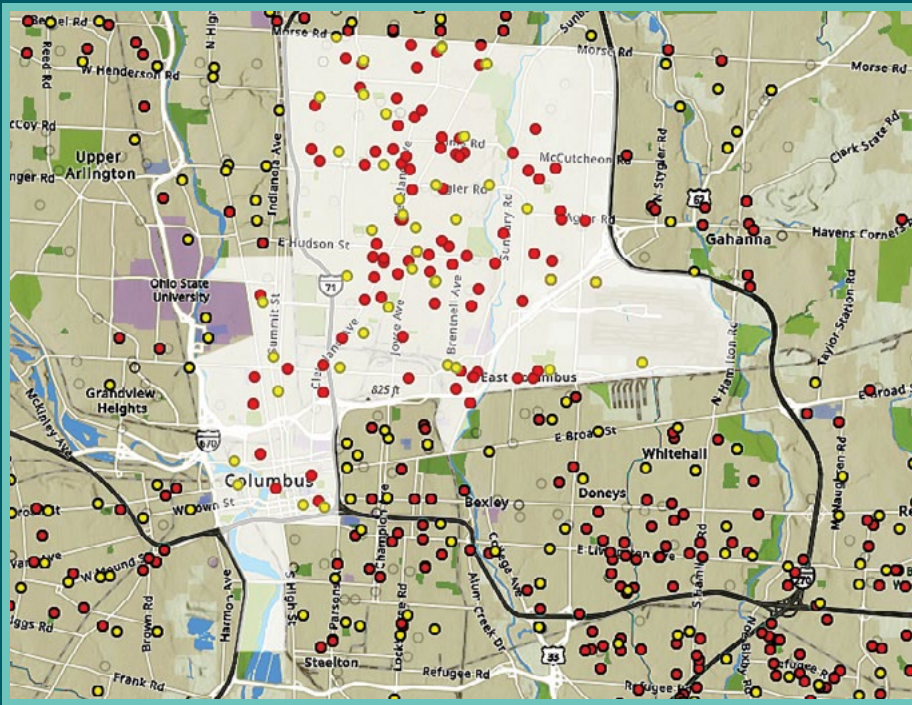
**< Figure 4.** The map shows only programs that accept PFCC funding. The yellow dots represent programs that accept PFCC and are in the SUTQ system. The red dots represent programs that accept PFCC but are not yet in the SUTQ system.



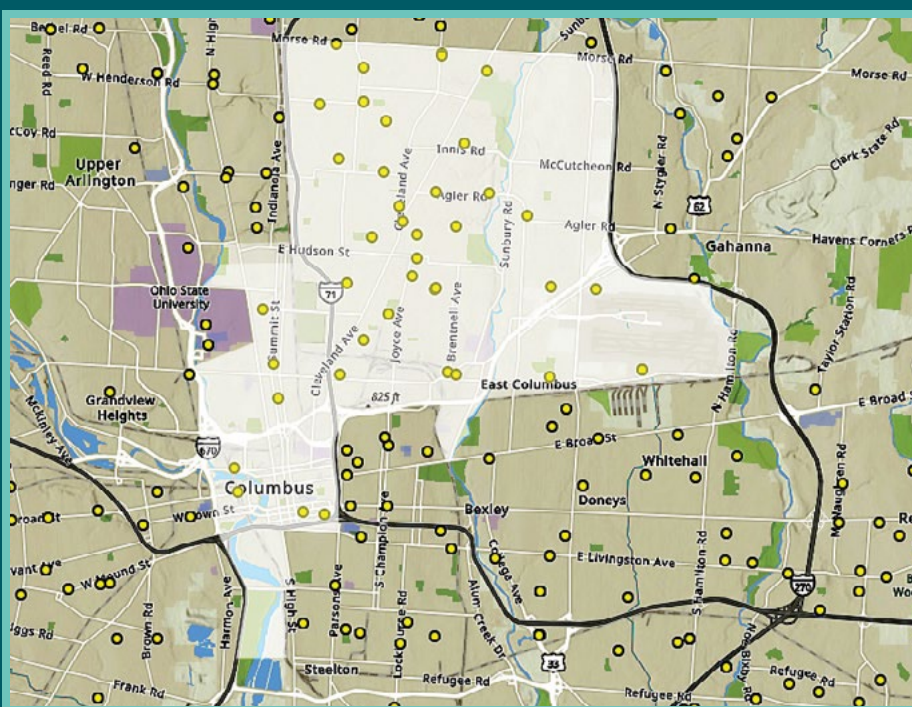
**< Figure 5.** This map depicts the landscape of PFCC-accepting child care programs in Franklin County, Ohio if the programs that are unrated disappear in 2020.

## IMPACT AT A NEIGHBORHOOD LEVEL

It is important to consider the magnitude of loss of child cares at a neighborhood level, as we illustrate for the Linden/Milo Grogan zip codes. We chose Linden/Milo Grogan, in particular, because there are over 100 PFCC-accepting programs in these zip codes as well as a high number of young children; in fact, there are over 10,000 children under the age of five in these zip codes (see Table 1). Of 130 PFCC-accepting programs, 52 (40%) are currently in the SUTQ system, whereas 60% are unrated and thus in danger of either closing or ceasing to be able to accept PFCC funding. To illustrate, Figure 6 shows the available PFCC-accepting programs (both rated sites in yellow and unrated sites in red) that are currently available in the Linden/Milo Grogan zip codes. Figure 7 shows the remaining PFCC-accepting programs if the unrated programs were to close in July of 2020.



< **Figure 6.** This map depicts the landscape of PFCC-accepting child care sites in the Linden/Milo Grogan zip codes. The yellow dots represent programs that accept PFCC and are in the SUTQ system. The red dots represent programs that accept PFCC but are not yet in the SUTQ system.



< **Figure 7.** This map depicts the landscape of PFCC-accepting child care programs in the Linden/Milo Grogan zip codes if the programs that are unrated disappear in 2020.

# Conclusion

This report was conducted to examine how many programs and child care slots could disappear in Franklin County after the July 1, 2020 mandate requiring programs that accept PFCC to enter the SUTQ system. The analyses presented here are helpful in considering the potential effects of this mandate should current PFCC-accepting programs not enter into SUTQ. As the analyses specific to Franklin County, Ohio illustrate:

- Of 33,494 child care slots available at PFCC-accepting programs, 21,095 (63%) could be lost to families who rely on PFCC subsidies.
- Of the 765 PFCC-accepting sites, 492 (64%) could stop accepting PFCC subsidies or close altogether.
- PFCC-accepting sites tend to cluster, but in some places, they are few and far between.

# Implications and Recommendations

If child care programs that accept PFCC subsidies remain unrated as of July 2020, one of two things could happen: the programs could stop accepting PFCC funds and remain open by accepting private pay or the programs could close completely. When subsidized child care is lost, the implications are felt by children, families, child care professionals, future kindergarten teachers, and the larger economy. For each stakeholder, the effects are multifaceted.

- Children may have to leave the child care setting that they have been attending since infancy. This is a disruption in stability (which is essential for children) and could result in the loss of close relationships with caring adults and peers.
- Caregivers may be faced with finding another PFCC-accepting site that aligns with their needs (e.g., hours of operation) and is near their home or work. As the maps suggest, this could be much harder in some places than others. Alternatively, parents may have to choose between employment or providing child care for their children.
- The local economy may be impacted by lost tax revenue and staff shortages if families have to leave the workforce. Women, for instance, make up 77% of health care and social assistance workers as well as 63% of the educational service workforce in Franklin County, Ohio (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017b). The knowledge and education required to fill those positions may mean that those positions remain unfilled.
- Child care professionals could be impacted in a variety of ways; some may close their programs and be out of work themselves. On the flip side, child care professionals who accept PFCC and are in the SUTQ system may not have the capacity to take on more students if their neighboring programs close.
- Kindergarten teachers could face a larger percentage of children entering kindergarten with little to no preschool experience. As the research in the introduction suggested, preschool can provide an even larger boost for children from economically disadvantaged homes compared to their more advantaged peers (e.g., Magnuson et al., 2007). Since the PFCC-accepting sites most in danger of closing tend to be in the most disadvantaged areas of Franklin County, children served in those locations may be especially at risk for entering kindergarten without the basic academic and socioemotional skills necessary to thrive in kindergarten and beyond.

# Recommendations

## UNDERSTAND BARRIERS

It's important to gain an understanding of barriers to accessing the Step Up To Quality system to know which of these at-risk slots are likely to disappear from Franklin County programs and whether this is inevitable. This analysis is limited in that it cannot shed light on whether unrated providers plan to enter the system and/or what barriers they face in doing so between now until next July.

## GATHER MORE DATA ABOUT BARRIERS

Statewide, policy makers may want to glean more information related to barriers that providers face – especially in counties that lack the intensive effort put forth by Franklin County. Rural communities may be especially at risk, given the sheer distance between some existing providers. It may also be helpful to gather information related to barriers not only for the most immediate mandate, but for the 2025 deadline as well. By 2025, providers accepting PFCC must be 3-star rated or higher.

## PROVIDE SUPPORT

State policy makers might also consider providing additional supports to help centers get into the quality rating and improvement system, SUTQ. County departments along with resource and referral agencies are uniquely positioned to do this work and may know best what strategies are most effective.



## CENTRALIZE DATA

Housing this data in a central place could also be useful as would frequent updates tracking when providers enter the system and move up the star-rating system. Maps that show specific neighborhoods – even the House and Senate districts – would help highlight the issue locally for state and local policy makers. Most of them are aware of the impending mandate and a possible loss of child care slots – providing more specific data as to what’s happening in their own backyard would be helpful. This is an area where researchers can offer support and expertise so that government entities and officials have real-time updates about child care availability for their constituents.

## ENGAGE BUSINESS COMMUNITY

At the same time, the business community should stay engaged in this issue given that high-quality child care is a vital workforce support. The loss of child care slots in Franklin County (and statewide) could push thousands of families out of the workforce.

## CONNECT WITH RESOURCES

Providers – whether center- or home-based – should connect with their local resource and referral agencies, county agencies, and others who can help them overcome barriers to entry into SUTQ. To the extent that they are able, they should connect with existing coalitions and ensure their voices are heard at decision-making tables when it comes to timelines, compliance and regulation, and the real-world realities of policy implementation.



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