



Minnesota children in child care

The Minnesota Department of Human Services receives frequent requests for data related to children in child care. We aim to respond in a standard way to provide consistent data over time. However, there are multiple ways to describe and measure the number and percent of children in child care in Minnesota. Depending on how you intend to use the data, one methodology may be more appropriate than another. This brief will help stakeholders understand the complexity of child care data and select an appropriate methodology.

What do we mean by children?

- Children of all ages may experience some form of care, but we generally report on children age 12 and younger as needing child care.
- Early childhood system reforms typically focus on young children birth to kindergarten entry. Census data (Table 1) provides population estimates for children by age groups: birth-2 and 3-5.

Table 1. Number of children in Minnesota

Age group	2014 census estimate
Birth-2 years	208,464
3-5 years	210,620
6-9 years	291,061
10-12 years	214,626
Total Age 0-12	924,771

Source: Population Division, U.S. Census Bureau. Estimated Population for 2014, as updated July 2015. Pulled from [KidsCount Data Center](#).

What do we mean by *in child care*?

- Child care is generally understood to be care provided by someone other than a parent or guardian. Patterns of child care use differ by age group, with children between the ages of 3 and 5 using the most child care.
- As a general rule, more children need child care during the summer months than the school year. While children age 5 to 12 are most affected by the summer verses school year distinction, younger children may also be impacted as whole families change their routines and some child care programs may only offer care during certain months.
- Prior to kindergarten entry, many care arrangements promote children's development and learning toward school readiness. Child care options are defined in the section *What are types of child care in Minnesota* below.
- The definition of child care for school-aged children (5-12 years old) is more complicated due to determining if after-school activities (sports, teams, clubs) should be included as a type of child care.
- To accurately describe the number of children in child care, a definition of hours per week needs to be determined. The number of children in child care receiving 30 or more hours weekly would greatly vary in comparison to those in child care receiving five or more hours weekly.

Table 2. Number of children in child care in Minnesota

Age group (in years)	Percent of children in some form of child care	Number of children in some form of child care
Birth-2	69	143,840
3-5	82	172,708
6-9	60	174,637
10-12	50	107,313
Total Birth-12	65	601,101

Source: Percentages come from the 2009 Child Care Use Study, multiplied by US Census Population Estimates for 2014 to generate the number of children in some form of care. Note that percentages are rounded.

What are types of child care in Minnesota?

Center-based care

Child care centers and private preschools

Child care centers are licensed through the Minnesota Department of Human Services and provide care and education for children in age-based groups, either for full or part day up to five days weekly. These programs are often located in free-standing buildings, businesses, community centers or places of worship.

Preschools operated by public or private schools may be license-exempt if they meet specific criteria, including operating for no more than four hours per day. Other entities, including churches or individuals who operate a private preschool program, even if less than four hours per day, must be licensed unless they meet some other licensing exclusion outlined in state statute. A complete and up-to-date list of licensed child care centers can be found at www.licensinglookup.dhs.state.mn.us/. There is no official list or count of license-exempt preschools.

Public or charter school pre-kindergarten programs

Public or charter school options including pre-kindergarten and School Readiness programs are overseen by the Minnesota Department of Education. They are generally not required to be licensed due to their designation as school district programming. These programs provide early childhood education opportunities, building school readiness skills. Program types vary by district and location, including blending funds to allow for extended services. Learn more about these programs on the Minnesota Department of Education's website at hw20.education.state.mn.us/MdeOrgView/.

School-age child care centers

School-age child care centers care for children in kindergarten through sixth grade in schools, community centers, the Y, YWCA, or a park and recreation program, although they may also care for younger children. These programs may be licensed or license-exempt depending on the facility. Nearly all programs that serve only school-age children are license-exempt. There is no official list or count of license-exempt school-age care programs in Minnesota.

Early Head Start and Head Start

Early Head Start (prenatal to age 3) and Head Start (ages 3 to 5 years old) promotes the school readiness of young children from eligible families with low incomes. These programs have comprehensive services that support the mental, social and emotional development of children in addition to providing health, nutrition and social services. For more information about Minnesota Head Start programs visit www.mnheadstart.org/.

Drop-in programs

Drop-in programs are short-term care for a few hours at a time, usually offered in shopping malls or community centers. These programs must be licensed by the Minnesota Department of Human Services. A complete and up-to-date list of licensed child care centers can be found at www.licensinglookup.dhs.state.mn.us/.

Licensed family child care

These programs care for children of mixed ages in the home of a provider who is not usually a family member, friend or neighbor. They are licensed by the state or a tribe. A complete and up-to-date list of licensed family child care providers can be found at www.licensinglookup.dhs.state.mn.us/.

Family, Friend and Neighbor

A more informal form of child care, Family, Friend and Neighbor caregivers provide care in either the child's or someone else's home. Family, Friend and Neighbor caregivers are non-licensed providers of care. Caregivers include grandparents, aunts, older siblings, cousins, neighbors, babysitters or nannies. It can also include playgroups and care exchanges. There is no official list or count of Family, Friends and Neighbors caregivers.

Supervised activities

Local community programs and centers, public libraries, public schools, parks and recreational centers, and worship communities provide supervised activities or lessons in community locations. During the summer, supervised activities includes recreation programs and day and overnight camps. Most of these programs are exempt from licensing. There is no official list or count of license-exempt programs in Minnesota.

How many children are served in each kind of care?

There are two ways of answering this question.

1. **Primary child care arrangement.** This is the type of care that each child uses for the greatest number of hours each week. Each child can have only one primary child care arrangement. This way of measuring children in care is helpful when thinking about the total of all Minnesota children in care and where those children spend the most time.

Example: A three-year-old child attends a child care center for eight hours a day on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday, but spends eight hours on Wednesday and Friday with a grandparent. The child's primary arrangement is center-based care because the child spends more hours per week at the center than with the grandparent.

When to use this approach: This approach is best when you want to provide a pie chart that shows all children in Minnesota, with each section representing a different primary arrangement.

Caution: This approach does not adequately acknowledge the fact that many children receive multiple types of care and may underestimate the number of children receiving any one type of care.

Table 3. Percent of Minnesota children by primary arrangement type

Primary care arrangement	Percent of children in care with this type of primary arrangement	Number of children in care with this type of primary arrangement
Center-based child care	31	186,341
Licensed family child care	13	78,143
Family, Friend and Neighbor Supervised activities	43	258,473
	12	72,132

Source: Percentages come from the 2009 Child Care Use Study. Child counts are calculated using the total number of children in some form of care, as found in Table 2.

2. **All child care.** When we talk about all child care that is used, we acknowledge that a child may spend some hours in one kind of care and some hours in a different type of care.

Example: A three-year-old child attends a center for eight hours a day on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday, but spends eight hours on Wednesday and Friday with a grandparent. The child receives both kinds of care, so they would be counted both as attending center-based care and as attending Family, Friend and Neighbor care.

When to use this approach: This approach is best when you want to explain how many children are impacted by a particular care type.

Caution: This approach does not differentiate between a full-time care setting and a setting that a child attends just a few hours per week. This approach counts the same children multiple times, so the numbers of children served cannot be added together to reach a total.

Table 4. Estimated number of children in Minnesota in each type of care

Provider type	Summer	School year
Family, Friend and Neighbor	298,259	242,387
Center-based care	126,161	201,768
Licensed family child care	67,111	80,784

Source: The 2009 Child Care Use Study provides percentages of children in each type of care. These percentages were multiplied by 2014 census numbers to arrive at estimates.

What is the supply of child care in Minnesota?

We often describe the supply of child care in terms of the number of slots available for children, which can be defined in two ways.

1. **Licensed Capacity.** Licensed capacity is the maximum number of children that a licensed child care program is legally allowed to serve at one time. For licensed family child care providers, there are additional restrictions on the number of children in particular age groups that can be in care.

Example: A family child care provider has a licensed capacity of 14 children, with the following restrictions.

- No more than 10 children under school age.
 - Of these 10 children, a combined total of no more than four children shall be infants and toddlers.
 - Of these four children, no more than three children shall be infants.

This family child care provider chooses to serve only 3 infants and 3 school-age children. Therefore, although licensed for 14 children, the provider cares for only six children.

When to use this approach: This approach is best when you want the most up-to-date and complete information about licensed child care providers and the number of children they can serve. It is the most straight-forward approach to measuring supply.

Caution: This approach does not provide any information about non-licensed care types. It does not account for the fact that many programs intentionally choose not to operate at full capacity. Moreover, it does not account for the fact that many programs serve children in shifts, allowing them to serve more children in a week than their licensed capacity.

Table 5. Licensed capacity of licensed child care providers

Provider type	Average licensed capacity per provider	Total licensed capacity across all providers
Licensed child care centers	70.6	116,948
Licensed family child care	11.7	107,657
Total capacity		224,605

Source: DHS Licensing Lookup as of Jan. 14, 2016. Updated numbers are available at any time by downloading the CSV file of all licensed child care providers at licensinglookup.dhs.state.mn.us/.

2. **Desired Enrollment.** Each year, Minnesota child care providers are surveyed and asked to report on the number of children that they would like to have enrolled in their program. For many programs, the desired enrollment is lower than the licensed capacity. For others, it is higher because they are serving children in shifts. However, not every program in the state responds to this survey, so only the average desired enrollment can be reported.

Example: A child care center is licensed to serve 40 children. Class one provides full time care for 12 children. Class two and three provides part time care. Both the morning and the afternoon sessions in these classes serves 12 children each or 48 children daily. The program serves 60 children each day, but never more than 36 children at one time. This program reports a desired enrollment of 60, despite being licensed for just 40.

When to use this approach: This approach is best when you are looking for a more accurate count of the total number of children served in programs, regardless of full-time or part-time care. Note that centers generally report a higher desired enrollment than their licensed capacity while family child care providers generally report a lower desired enrollment than their licensed capacity.

Caution: This data comes from a survey of that is completed in the first four months of each year for licensed child care providers and only every few years for license-exempt providers.

Table 6. Desired capacity of child care providers

Provider type	Average desired enrollment per provider
Head Start/Early Head Start	54.4
Licensed child care center	82.9
Licensed family child care	10.2
School age care centers	101.5

Source: Minnesota’s NACCRRAware Database, as maintained by Child Care Aware of Minnesota. Data pulled on Dec. 2, 2015.



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