



# INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH LEADERS

ISSUE BRIEF | August 2020

## Improving Access to High-Quality Preschool in Cincinnati

### WHY WE DID THIS STUDY

Advocates from a local community-academic partnership, Communities Acting for Kids Empowerment (CAKE), have called attention to barriers preventing preschool providers from accessing local and state funds that may, in turn, reduce access to preschool for children in Cincinnati. More than 150 Cincinnati preschool providers could lose access to state funding unless they reach new Ohio-specific early child care quality standards by July 2020. This resulting funding loss could jeopardize access to preschool for thousands of Cincinnati children.

The new quality standards, also known as Step Up To Quality (SUTQ), are measured using a five-star rating system that recognizes that extent to which programs meet or exceed state licensing standards for early care and education. In order to receive state funding, early childhood education providers must obtain at least one star on the SUTQ system by July 2020 and three stars by 2025.<sup>1</sup> While this policy has the potential to improve early childhood education quality, it could also effectively reduce families' access to preschool due to provider barriers to achieving SUTQ standards.<sup>2</sup> In addition to losing out on state funding, providers that fail to meet the new standards could also lose out on tuition assistance payments offered through Cincinnati Preschool Promise (CPP), which is a property tax-funded preschool assistance program for qualifying families and providers.<sup>3</sup> The recently approved program requires qualifying providers to have a three-star rating or higher.

The potential impact of this new rating system on Cincinnati's children is significant since the city already has one of the highest child poverty rates in the United States<sup>4</sup> and a shortage of high-quality providers in many neighborhoods.<sup>5</sup> As a result, there is an urgent need for non-SUTQ-rated providers in Cincinnati to begin the process of becoming SUTQ-rated.

The purpose of this study was to identify "priority" neighborhoods for targeted outreach efforts to non-SUTQ-rated providers to increase their quality ratings.

### WHAT WE FOUND

- Cincinnati has 162 preschool providers (with capacity to serve about 5,000 children) that need to take steps to meet new SUTQ standards.
- Six Cincinnati neighborhoods have both a lack of quality preschool seats and very low child opportunity: Villages at Roll Hill, East Westwood, Millvale, West Price Hill, Mt. Airy, and Winton Hills.
- Targeting preschool providers in these six neighborhoods designed as "priority" could have a major impact on improving families' access to preschool.

To identify areas with the greatest need for targeted efforts, we defined “priority” neighborhoods as areas which were 1) a preschool quality desert with more than 100 fewer quality child care seats than children likely to attend and 2) had very low child opportunity based on an index that combined education, health, and socioeconomic indicators. Using these criteria, six priority neighborhoods were identified (see Figures 1 and 2). We also examined the quality rating status of preschool providers in these neighborhoods and identified 20 non-SUTQ rated providers with the capacity to serve 650 children and an additional 59 one- or two-star SUTQ rated providers with the capacity to serve 750 number of children.

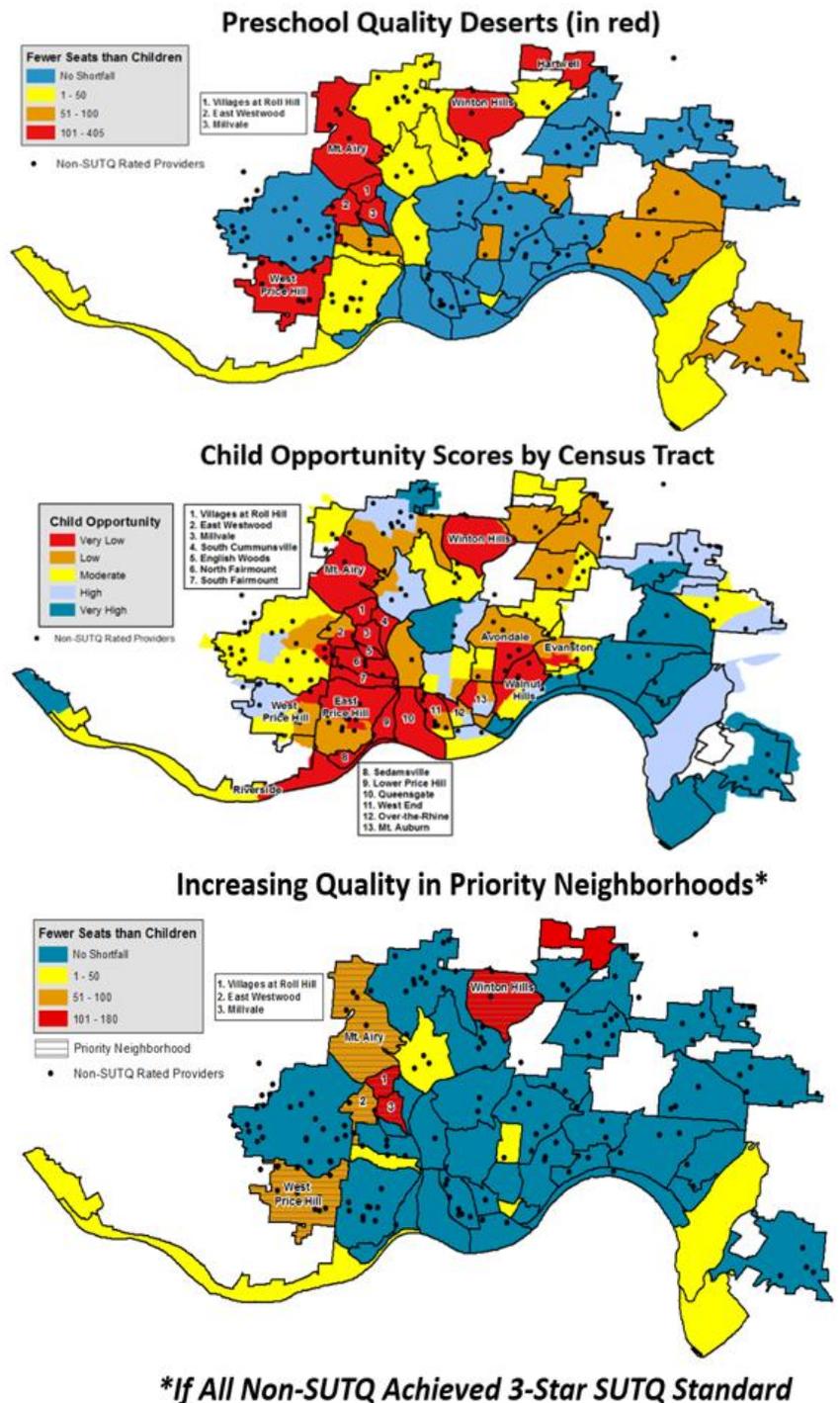
### WHAT THESE FINDINGS MEAN

Figure 3 shows the impact of targeting resources to the non-SUTQ-rated preschool providers in the six “priority” neighborhoods to help them reach the three-star quality threshold needed to be a CPP provider. The one- or two-star SUTQ rated preschool providers in these neighborhoods could also benefit from targeted outreach. Helping non-SUTQ, one-star, and two-star providers move to a three-star rating or higher would add more than 1,400 quality early childcare seats to these areas and eliminate their classification as preschool quality deserts. This research should raise awareness for State-level policy-makers about the potential adverse impacts of the new quality standards, while local policy-makers can use this research to address the lack of access to quality preschool in high-need areas in Cincinnati. [Add a sentence or two here that describes the implications for that State of Ohio or others responsible for providing these resources.]

### MORE ABOUT THIS STUDY

This research was initiated by Communities Acting for Kids Empowerment (CAKE), a community-academic partnership made up of 11 members, including two professional researchers and nine community early childhood health advocates. CAKE is structured as a hybrid community advisory board and co-researcher model, where members are given equal decision-making power and involved in all phases of the research.<sup>6</sup>

In this study, Cincinnati neighborhoods were defined as priority neighborhoods if they met two criteria: (1) qualification as a preschool quality desert; and (2) qualification as a very low child opportunity area. Preschool quality deserts were defined as neighborhoods with more than 100 fewer quality seats than children likely to attend.<sup>7</sup> The number of quality seats was determined by adding up the total capacity of all quality preschool providers (>3 stars SUTQ) for each



neighborhood.<sup>8</sup> The children likely to attend was determined by taking 75% of the number of 3- and 4-year-olds in each neighborhood.<sup>9</sup> Areas with very low child opportunity were identified using the Child Opportunity Index (COI 2.0), which was developed by the diversitydatakids.org project and the Kirwan Institute (Brandeis University).<sup>10</sup> The COI 2.0 is a measure of relative opportunity at the census tract level, and includes 11 education, 10 health and environment, and eight social/economic measures. We defined “very low child opportunity” as census tracts in the bottom quintile for the COI 2.0, relative to all census tracts in Cincinnati. If a very low opportunity census tract was located inside a neighborhood boundary, the neighborhood was defined as very low opportunity.

## SOURCES

- <sup>1</sup> Ohio Department of Education, Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services. “Step Up to Quality (SUTQ).” Retrieved on [August 15, 2020]: <http://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Early-Learning/Step-Up-To-Quality-SUTQ>.
- <sup>2</sup> Topmiller, M. and Best, L. (2018). “Lessons from Family Child Providers in Cincinnati.” Communities Acting for Kids Empowerment (unpublished manuscript).
- <sup>3</sup> Cincinnati Preschool Promise (CPP). Retrieved on [July 1, 2020]: <http://www.cincy-promise.org>.
- <sup>4</sup> United States Census Bureau. (2013–2017). American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates, Table B17024: Age of Income to Poverty Level in the Past 12 Months. Retrieved on [March 15, 2019]: <https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/searchresults.xhtml?refresh=t>
- <sup>5</sup> Karoly, LA, Auger, A, Kase, CA, McDaniel, RC, Rademacher, EW. Options for Investing in Access to High-Quality Preschool in Cincinnati. RAND Corporation. Retrieved on [December 11, 2018]: [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR1615.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1615.html).
- <sup>6</sup> Karoly, et. al, (2016).
- <sup>7</sup> Topmiller, M, Jacquez, FJ, Morris, JL. et al. (2020). Translating Community Input to Research Questions: Communities Acting for Kids Empowerment (CAKE). Interdisciplinary Community Engaged Research: Early Childhood Health and Children at Risk, Ed., Jacquez, FJ and Svedin, L.
- <sup>8</sup> 4C for Children. Retrieved on [June 11, 2019]: <https://www.4cforchildren.org/>
- <sup>9</sup> US Census Bureau. (2013-2017). American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates, Table DP05: ACS Demographic and Housing Estimates. Retrieved on [March 15, 2019]: [<https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/searchresults.xhtml?refresh=t>].
- <sup>10</sup> DataDiversityKids.org, Kirwan Institute, Brandeis University. The Child Opportunity Index 2.0. Retrieved on [August 12, 2019]:<http://www.diversitydatakids.org/data/childopportunitymap>.

## STUDY CONTACT INFORMATION:

Farrah Jacquez ([jacquefh@ucmail.uc.edu](mailto:jacquefh@ucmail.uc.edu)), Jamie-Lee Morris ([jleezabeth@gmail.com](mailto:jleezabeth@gmail.com)), and Michael Topmiller ([MTopmiller@healthlandscape.org](mailto:MTopmiller@healthlandscape.org)). This research was conducted as part of their distinguished fellowship in the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Interdisciplinary Research Leaders program from 2016 to 2019.