



# Methods Appendix

## Davidson County Child Care Landscape Study



DAVIDSON COUNTY CHILD CARE LANDSCAPE STUDY RESULTS | METHODOLOGY

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## About the Davidson County Child Care Landscape Study

The United Way of Greater Nashville engaged the Prenatal-to-3 Policy Impact Center at Vanderbilt University (Policy Impact Center) to conduct the Davidson County Child Care Landscape Study to examine child care supply, population metrics that inform demand, and the estimated cost of providing high-quality child care in Davidson County. The Davidson County Child Care Landscape Study consists of three phases.

- **Phase 1** focused on using state- and national-level publicly available data to understand the population and demographic characteristics of Davidson County that inform local child care demand and current supply. Though these data provided a foundational overview of the local child care landscape, they also revealed limitations in what could be understood without targeted data collection to provide more detailed, local data. A summary of key findings was released in March 2024.<sup>a</sup>
- **Phase 2** consists of an in-depth child care supply analysis based on an original child care provider survey. The Policy Impact Center developed and fielded the 2025 Davidson County Child Care Provider Experience Survey (Child Care Provider Survey) between June and August 2025 to all licensed child care programs in the greater Davidson County area. We discuss findings from this phase in Briefs 1, 2, and 3 of this five-part series.
- **Phase 3** uses a cost estimation model (CEM) informed by Tennessee- and Davidson County-specific data and input from local child care experts and community partners to estimate the cost of providing high-quality child care in Davidson County. We discuss findings from this phase in Briefs 4 and 5 of this five-part series.

This Methods Appendix provides details on the data sources, measures, and analytic approach for Phase 2 and Phase 3 of the Davidson County Child Care Landscape Study. Results from Phase 2 and Phase 3 of the study are presented in a five-part brief series.

Results from the Davidson County Child Care Landscape Study will inform child care expansion planning, resource allocation decisions, and policy and funding advocacy.

## Key Terms

### Local Definitions and Policy Context

Several key terms used throughout this study reflect state- and local-specific definitions and policy structures that shape how child care is provided and overseen in greater Davidson County:

- **Greater Davidson County:** The study region that includes 34 Zip Code Tabulation Areas (ZCTAs) that are entirely or partially within the border of Davidson County,

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<sup>a</sup> The Davidson County Child Care Landscape Study Phase 1 Executive Summary can be found here: [RaisingReadersNashville\\_ChildCare\\_Study\\_Phase1Summary\\_0324.pdf](#)

TN (see Table 1). This region includes approximately 57,000 children under age 5 and a total population of approximately 900,000.<sup>1,2</sup>

- **Tennessee Department of Human Services (TDHS):** One of two state agencies that oversees licensing requirements for child care programs to ensure consistent standards for child safety and program quality. TDHS licenses and oversees 60% of child care providers in greater Davidson County. TDHS-licensed providers participate in the statewide Quality Rating and Improvement System.<sup>3</sup>
- **Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE):** One of two state agencies that oversees licensing requirements for child care programs to ensure consistent standards for child safety and program quality. TDOE oversees 40% of child care providers in greater Davidson County. TDOE-licensed providers do not participate in the statewide Quality Rating and Improvement System.<sup>4</sup>
- **Child Care Certificate Program:** The program that provides financial assistance in the form of subsidized child care to help make care more affordable for families with low or moderate incomes, in which parents are working or enrolled in education or training programs.<sup>5,6</sup>

## Child Age Groups

For the Davidson County Child Care Landscape Study, we divided age groups into the following categories:

- **Infants:** birth through 12 months of age
- **Toddlers:** 13 months through 30 months of age,
- **Preschoolers:** at least 31 months of age and who have not entered kindergarten.

These age group classifications are consistent with TDHS' licensure rules for child care agencies.<sup>7</sup>

## Child Care Supply

For the Davidson County Child Care Landscape Study, we refer to the following key measures of child care capacity to reflect different aspects of supply:

- **Licensed Capacity:** The maximum number of child care slots a child care program is legally allowed to serve at any one given time, per state licensing regulations.<sup>8</sup>
- **Full-Day Equivalent Slots:** A generated standardized measure used to represent child care capacity across all programs with different enrollment patterns. One full-day equivalent slot represents either one child enrolled full-time or two children enrolled part-time.
- **Occupied Slots:** The number of full-day equivalent child care slots currently filled through enrollment. Occupied slots include enrollment of children served on a full-time basis and those served part-time, converted to full-day-equivalent slots.
- **Open Slots:** The number of full-day equivalent child care slots currently available for enrollment. Open slots include capacity for full-time and part-time enrollment, converted to full-day-equivalent slots.

- **Full-Day Actual Capacity:** The sum of all occupied slots and open slots within a child care program. This number represents the total number of full-day equivalent child care slots a child care program could accommodate today, given its current staffing levels, resources, program design, and other practical limitations. As such, this number is typically lower than a program's licensed capacity.

### Child Care Workforce

We refer to three different early childhood educator roles throughout the Davidson County Child Care Landscape Study.

- **Lead Educator:** The primary instructional leader and care provider for a classroom or group of children. A classroom can have two lead educators (i.e., co-leads).
- **Assistant Educator:** The educator or staff member who supports the lead educator in teaching and caring for young children.
- **Rotating Assistant Educator:** The flexible educator who moves between classrooms, providing support wherever needed throughout the day. This role is also frequently referred to as a floater.

### Other Key Terms

For references, the following key terms are used for the Davidson County Child Care Landscape Study:

- **Cost Estimation Model:** A child care cost estimation framework that generates an estimate of the total cost needed to sustain a high-quality child care program with a stable workforce. The framework accounts for all of the expenses involved in delivering high-quality child care, including labor costs that reflect a living wage and fair benefits, facility expenses, and learning materials.
- **ALICE Household Survival Budget:** ALICE is an acronym for Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed, and represents households with income above the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), but below the basic cost of living. The ALICE Household Survival Budget reflects the minimum wage needed to cover the cost of household necessities (housing, child care, food, transportation, health care, and technology), plus taxes, and is adjusted for all US counties.

## Geography

The sampled area reflects the same area examined in Phase 1 of the Davidson County Child Care Landscape Study.<sup>9</sup> The sampled area comprises 34 Zip Code Tabulation Areas (ZCTAs) that contain land within Davidson County. ZCTAs are areal geographic units that are roughly equivalent to postal ZIP code regions.<sup>10</sup> Because ZCTAs do not precisely align with the Davidson County line, some of the sampled area extends slightly beyond the county line. Thus, we refer to the study area as the “greater Davidson County” region throughout the brief series. See Table 1 for a complete list of the 34 ZCTAs that comprise the sampled area.

**Table 1: List of ZCTAs Comprising the Sampled Area**

ZCTA	
37013	37208
37027	37209
37072	37210
37076	37211
37080	37212
37086	37213
37115	37214
37122	37215
37135	37216
37138	37217
37189	37218
37201	37219
37203	37220
37204	37221
37205	37228
37206	37232
37207	37238

## Data Sources

The Davidson County Child Care Landscape Study relied primarily on the following data sources.

### Tennessee Child Care Licensing Data

TDHS collects detailed information on all licensed child care providers within the state, including those overseen by either TDHS or TDOE.<sup>11</sup> We used TDHS' child care Web Provider List, pulled on February 28, 2025, for two purposes: 1) we used the full list of programs and their characteristics to develop the population of child care programs eligible to participate in the study; and 2) we used the publicly available program characteristics from the Web Provider List throughout the analysis.

### The 2025 Davidson County Child Care Provider Experience Survey

The Policy Impact Center conducted the Child Care Provider Survey online between June and August 2025. We distributed the survey to 275 center- and home-based child care program directors located across greater Davidson County. The Child Care Provider Survey asked about:

- Child care enrollment and open slots
- Staffing, workforce characteristics, and educator wages
- Child care program director experiences and challenges

The Child Care Provider Survey was offered in both English and Spanish.

Survey participants received a \$50 Amazon gift card as a thank you for their time.

### American Community Survey Population Characteristics

The US Census Bureau annually conducts the American Community Survey (ACS) to estimate demographic, social, and economic characteristics of the US population. We used 5-year estimates of population counts, employment, poverty, and race/ethnicity from the 2023 ACS for this study.<sup>12</sup>

We aggregated county-level estimates to understand the population of the greater Davidson County region and used ZCTA-level population characteristics to improve our predictions of the size of the child care workforce and the overall child care supply in child care centers.

### Child Care Workgroup

The Child Care Workgroup is a group of local child care community partners and experts that the Policy Impact Center convened to tailor the cost estimation model to the local realities of greater Davidson County.

### Prenatal to 5 Fiscal Strategies 50-State Child Care Cost Model

Prenatal-to-5 Fiscal Services (P5FS) maintains a generalized, nationwide cost estimation model for center-based and home-based child care. We used the P5FS tool's expenses list as a baseline

and adopted its approach to healthcare costs and operating reserves for the greater Davidson County child care cost estimation models for center-based and home-based child care.

### **Administration for Children and Families Provider Cost of Quality Calculator**

The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) maintains a general tool for calculating the cost of running a child care business. This tool includes state-specific values for a variety of expense categories. Similar to the P5FS tool, our cost model adopts ACF default values for Tennessee for expense categories where concrete Davidson County estimates were unavailable.

### **Child Care Program Analytic Samples**

We began by identifying the eligible population of child care programs in greater Davidson County in Tennessee Child Care Licensing Data using the Web Provider List. Beginning with the list of all programs in the eligible ZCTAs, we removed all programs that provided drop-in only care (n=4), programs closed for the summer (n=19), programs outside of the study's geographic focus area (n=1), and center-based programs with a licensed capacity of less than 12 (n=1). After-school-only programs are not included in this study. We also excluded the four Metro Nashville Public School (MNPS) Early Learning Centers.

In total, 275 child care programs remained in the survey-eligible population, including 246 center-based programs and 29 home-based programs.

From the 275 programs that were in the survey population, 157 child care program directors engaged with the survey, of which 130 (n=116 center-based programs and n=14 home-based programs) consented to participate and provided sufficient information to be included in our analyses, resulting in a 47 percent response rate.

### **Center-Based Child Care Analytic Sample**

Child care centers are licensed early care and education programs that operate in nonresidential settings and serve at least 13 children.<sup>13</sup> Of the 275 programs in the survey-eligible population, 246 are center-based child care programs. In total, 116 (47%) center-based programs participated in the survey and provided sufficient information to be included in our analyses; we refer to these survey respondents as the center-based analytic sample.

### **Representativeness**

Using Tennessee child care licensing data and ACS population data, we compared key program and community characteristics between programs included in the analytic sample (n=116) and the full population of eligible center-based programs (N=246). Across most measurable characteristics, the survey sample is representative of the population, including key program factors such as serving infants, certificate acceptance, and whether the program is overseen by TDHS or TDOE (see Table 2).

The center-based analytic sample overrepresents centers licensed to serve between 101 and 150 children. The center-based analytic sample also overrepresents centers in the highest-income ZCTAs, where the median annual household income in the ZCTA is more than \$152,000, or

twice the county median household income. Additional considerations for interpreting findings based on sample representativeness are discussed in the limitations section.

**Table 2: Center-Based Analytic Sample Representativeness**

Variable	Analytic Sample (n=116)	Population (N=246)
Licensed Capacity: 13–50 Children	10%	15%
Licensed Capacity: 51–100 Children	36%	42%
Licensed Capacity: 101–200 Children	41%*	31%
Licensed Capacity: 201+ Children	13%	12%
DHS-Licensed Center	85%	78%
DOE-Licensed Center	16%	22%
Accepts Certificates	68%	66%
Serves Infants and Toddlers	88%	87%
Open 8 or More Hours Per Day	81%	82%
Neighborhood Poverty < 9.0%	51%	44%
Neighborhood Poverty 9.0–18.1%	28%	34%
Neighborhood Poverty ≥ 18.1%	21%	23%
Median Household Income <\$76,000	28%	36%
Median Household Income \$76,000–<\$152,000	32%	33%
Median Household Income >\$152,000	40%*	30%

Source: Davidson County Child Care Provider Experience Survey. The Prenatal-to-3 Policy Impact Center, 2025. Note: \*indicates a difference between the analytic sample and the population at the  $p < .05$  level. Analytic sample  $n=116$ ; population  $N=246$  licensed center-based programs. Population  $N$ s in some categories listed may be slightly lower than what is listed because of missing data. Comparison based on available licensing data.

## Home-Based Child Care Analytic Sample

Home-based child care programs are licensed early care and education programs that typically operate in residential settings. In Tennessee, home-based child care is categorized into two groups based on approved maximum program size and subsequent staffing needs: 1) family home-based child care programs, which serve up to seven children, and 2) group home-based programs, which serve at least eight and up to 15 children and often employ at least one additional educator to meet regulatory and quality standards.<sup>14</sup> Despite differences in size, both types of home-based programs follow similar operational practices, offer comparable environments, and serve families in much the same way, so all home-based child care programs are analyzed collectively in Brief 3, *Limited Providers, Limited Slots: An Analysis of Home-Based Child Care in Greater Davidson County, TN*.

Of the 275 survey-eligible population of licensed child care programs, 29 are home-based child care programs. Of these 29 home-based programs, 23 are group-based, and six are family-based. In total, 14 surveyed home-based programs (10 group home-based programs and 4 family home-based programs; 48%) participated and provided sufficient information to be included in our

analyses; we refer to these survey respondents as the home-based analytic sample. The number of home-based providers in greater Davidson County overall and in our sample is too small to assess the representativeness of the sample.

## **Analytic Approach**

The following section describes our approach to data analyses conducted for each component of Phase 2 of the Davidson County Child Care Landscape Study. For this phase, we use Child Care Provider Survey data to describe the greater Davidson County child care landscape, including information on child care supply and availability and characteristics of the child care workforce.

Broadly speaking, we use the survey data reported on the Child Care Provider Survey and, where possible, make population-level estimates for center-based programs using strategies to ensure the estimates are representative of the full population of child care, not just the survey respondent programs. Where population-level estimates are not possible, we present data from survey respondents. All home-based results are presented for the survey sample only, based on the small sample size.

Because the briefs in the Davidson County Child Care Landscape Study draw on different research objectives, analytic approaches are organized by analytic construct rather than by individual brief.

### **Calculating Weights for Center-Based Estimates**

For all center-based child care measures for which we create population-level estimates, we use a weighting strategy to create estimates that are representative of the full population of child care programs.

To account for oversampling of larger programs in the analytic sample, centers were grouped into licensed capacity size categories (listed in Table 2). Post-stratification weights were calculated for each size category as the ratio of the number of eligible centers in the population to the number represented in the analytic sample. These weights were applied to programs within each category so that the weighted distribution of centers by size aligns with the population of licensed providers.

Weights were applied differently depending on the type of measure analyzed. For measures reported as counts (e.g., child care slots or educator counts), weights were applied directly to provider-level values and summed to generate regional totals. For workforce characteristics originally collected at the educator level (e.g., wages, education level, and years of experience), measures were first aggregated to the center level before weights were applied, so that centers with larger staff did not disproportionately influence the population estimates.

For all supply and workforce constructs, distributions were examined for extreme values. Sensitivity analyses were conducted to assess the influence of outliers on population-level estimates. When a single provider disproportionately influenced results, estimates were recalculated excluding the outlier(s). Final reported estimates reflect these adjustments where appropriate.

The center-based analytic sample also overrepresents centers located in higher-income communities (median household income >\$152,000) compared to the full population of licensed centers. The analytic sample size did not allow us to use multiple criteria to calculate our weights. Therefore, to account for this representativeness issue, we conduct post hoc sub-analyses to examine possible differences in results across income groupings for key variables and present those where relevant. Centers were grouped according to the median family income (MFI) of the ZCTA in which each program is located. Income categories were defined using the 2024 median household income for the region (approximately \$76,000) and twice that amount (\$152,000) to distinguish centers located in lower-, middle-, and higher-income communities.

Differences across neighborhood income contexts were examined across workforce measures, including educator education level, educator years of experience, educator wages, center profitability, and center annual turnover.

### **Estimates of Greater Davidson County's Child Care Supply**

Estimates of child care supply in greater Davidson County were based on three survey constructs: occupied slots, open slots, and full-day actual capacity.

Directors reported the number of children currently enrolled (or slots occupied) full-time and part-time, as well as the number of open slots available for full-time and part-time enrollment. To provide a consistent measure of supply across programs with different enrollment patterns (i.e., full-time and part-time enrollment and open slots), all reported enrollment and open-slot survey data were converted to full-day equivalent estimates. Full-day equivalent estimates serve as the baseline for all supply analyses.

Additionally, the Tennessee Child Care Licensing Data provided program-level licensed capacity. Total licensed capacity was calculated by summing licensed capacity across all providers to estimate the maximum number of child care slots the region is legally authorized to serve.

### **Center-Based Program Analyses**

Full-day equivalent occupied slot and open slot data provided by directors on the Child Care Provider Survey (i.e., the survey sample) were used to generate estimates of child care supply across the entire greater Davidson County region for all center-based programs (i.e., population-level estimates). Full-day-equivalent slots were weighted using post-stratification weights based on program-size categories derived from licensed-capacity administrative data.

Full-day equivalent capacity was calculated as the sum of weighted full-day equivalent occupied and open slots.

### ***Certificate Use***

Child care program directors reported whether their program accepts child care certificates and, if applicable, the number of children enrolled full-time supported by certificates.

Because certificate data were collected only for full-time enrollment, analyses of certificate use are limited to full-time slots.

Provider-level counts of certificate-supported full-time enrollment were aggregated across age groups (i.e., infants, toddlers, and preschoolers) and weighted using the same post-stratification weights to estimate the total number and share of full-day slots supported by certificates across the population of certificate-accepting center-based child care programs.

### **Home-Based Program Analyses**

Because of small population and sample sizes, estimates for home-based programs are limited to descriptive analyses of survey respondents. Full-day equivalent occupied and open slots were summed within the analytic sample to estimate full-day actual capacity among survey respondents. Population-level extrapolation was not conducted.

### **Estimates of ECE Workforce Size**

Estimates of early educator workforce size, specifically the number of educators currently employed by role (lead educator or assistant/rotating assistant), are derived from director-reported survey data.

### **Center-Based Program Analyses**

Provider-level educator counts were aggregated across educator roles (i.e., lead or assistant/rotating floater) and weighted with the same post-stratification weights to estimate the total number of educators by role for the population of center-based child care programs.

### **Home-Based Program Analyses**

Workforce size was not analyzed for home-based programs. Directors in home-based settings frequently serve both program owners and primary educators, which limits the application of the role-based workforce analyses used for center-based programs. The small population and sample size of home-based providers further limited analytic comparisons.

### **Estimates of ECE Workforce Characteristics**

Estimates of early educator workforce characteristics are derived from director-reported survey data describing the composition of the workforce at each responding program. Specifically, directors reported on:

- The number of educators within predefined categories of the highest educational attainment
- The number of educators within predefined categories of years of experience in early childhood education
- The number of educators holding a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential

- The number of educators within predefined hourly wage ranges, reported separately by role (lead educator and assistant/rotating assistant)
- The number of educators who were hired and left their program in the prior 12 months, used to calculate provider-level annual turnover rates

### **Center-Based Program Analyses**

Early childhood educator workforce characteristics were collected at the educator level. To prevent centers with larger staff from disproportionately influencing the estimates, educator counts were aggregated to the center level. Center-level calculations were converted to population-level estimates using the same post-stratification weights based on licensed capacity.

This approach was applied across workforce constructs, including:

- Educational attainment
- Years of experience
- CDA credential attainment
- Hourly wages
- Staff turnover

### ***Estimates of Early Childhood Educator Wages***

Hourly wage estimates are derived from director-reported counts of educators within predefined \$2-per-hour wage ranges (e.g., \$15.01-\$17.00 per hour), reported separately for lead educators and assistant/rotating assistant educators. To estimate the average hourly wage for each educator, the midpoint of each wage range was used (e.g., the range from \$13.01 to \$15.00 has a midpoint of \$14.00).

To reduce the influence of large centers in the survey sample and better approximate the distribution of providers in the region, midpoint wages were first used to calculate average wages within each center, both across all roles and separately by role (i.e., lead and assistant/rotating assistant). Each center-level estimate was weighted using post-stratification weights by licensed capacity category. These weights adjust to an analytic sample so that the distribution of centers by size aligns with the population of reachable licensed centers. Results are presented as a weighted average of center-level wages across reporting sites.

### **Home-Based Program Analyses**

Because of the structure of home-based care, directors and any additional educators they employ were combined for these analyses. Not all director-reported characteristic measures were included in the analyses for home-based programs, and only constructs that could be meaningfully interpreted were reported. Given the small population and sample size of home-based programs, findings are limited to descriptive analyses of survey respondents at the aggregate level. Population-level extrapolation was not conducted. Differences by location were also not examined.

## Survey Descriptives of Program Characteristics and Provider Experiences

The Child Care Provider Experience Survey included numerous questions to gather information about directors' experiences in greater Davidson County. To better understand directors' experiences, challenges, and support opportunities, we examined directors' responses descriptively. Some survey questions apply only to certain types of providers (e.g., home-based programs, programs that serve specific age groups, etc.); therefore, the sample size varies by survey item. Analyses of home-based and center-based programs are conducted separately and reported in their respective briefs. Descriptive statistics of director and program characteristics represent observed values from the survey sample and may not be representative of the full population.

## Cost Estimation Model

We constructed the greater Davidson County High-Quality Child Care CEM to estimate the cost of providing high-quality care to children in greater Davidson County's center-based and home-based child care programs. Each CEM is based on a model center or home, a hypothetical child care program with characteristics common to child care programs in greater Davidson County (as reported by Child Care Provider Survey respondents). This methodology describes the characteristics of the model programs, how we determine cost values for each cost category within the CEM, and how we compute the cost of care.

## Cost Estimation Model Assumptions for Center-Based Child Care

### Classroom Counts and Capacity

Using survey data to inform the center size and classroom distribution, the model center contains seven classrooms described in Table 3, including: one infant classroom, two toddler classrooms, and four preschool classrooms.

Group sizes for each classroom reflect Tennessee licensing requirements.<sup>b</sup> Because the preschool classification covers multiple age ranges with distinct group size regulations, the maximum group size for preschool assumes two classrooms with the maximum group size for 3-year-olds (18) and two classrooms with the maximum group size for 4- and 5-year-olds (20).

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<sup>b</sup> TENN. COMP. R. & REGS. 1240-04-01-.22(1)(c). Specifically, group sizes reflect the values in Chart 1.

**Table 3: Capacity of the Model Child Care Center**

Age Group	Classrooms	Maximum Group Size	Maximum Capacity	Occupied Slots
Infants	1	8	8	7
Toddler	2	12	24	21
Preschool	4	19	76	65
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>--</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>93</b>

Notes: Maximum group sizes are based on Tennessee State licensing requirements for child care centers. See TENN. COMP. R. & REGS. 1240-04-01-.22(1)(c).

Finally, the model center is assumed to operate at less than full capacity, reflecting the natural turnover of students during a school year. In line with other CEM methodologies, we assumed that the enrolled capacity of the model center is 85 percent of the maximum capacity allowable under group-size regulations.

In total, the model center cares for 93 children: seven infants, 21 toddlers, and 65 preschoolers.

### Staff Roles

The model center, at the recommendation of the Child Care Workgroup, employs a variety of teaching and non-teaching staff, including:

- Sufficient classroom educators to reach the maximum group size with legal adult-to-child ratios.
- Rotating educators to maintain ratios across the center’s full hours of operation while classroom educators are not present.
- Teaching trainers providing pedagogical assistance. Per Child Care Workgroup recommendations, one trainer specializes in teaching infants and toddlers, while one specializes in teaching older children.
- A director, two assistant directors, and an administrative assistant.
- A full-time cook.
- Part-time providers of behavioral, family outreach, maintenance, and janitorial services.

### Full-time Staff Compensation

Staff compensation at the model center maintains a hierarchy where pay increases meaningfully alongside job responsibilities to create the possibility of long-term career progression.

No staff member earns less than the ALICE Household Survival Budget (“ALICE Wage”) for a single adult in Davidson County, approximately \$23 in 2025 dollars.<sup>c</sup> Average hourly

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<sup>c</sup> United for ALICE. (2025). *The State of ALICE in Tennessee*.

and annual pay for each full-time staff role appear in Table 4. Full-time staff work 2,080 hours per year. Teaching staff are compensated using a wage scale that provides increased wages with additional education and experience. Therefore, the wages in Table 4 represent the average wage, as calculated using the levels of education and experience of the ECE staff reported on the Child Care Provider Survey.

**Table 4: Wages of Full-Time Center Staff**

Role	Count	Hourly Wage	Annual Pay
Director	1	\$48.55	\$100,989
Assistant Director	2	\$36.48	\$75,874
Administrative Assistant	1	\$23.00	\$47,840
Classroom Educator*	14	\$32.64	\$67,901
Rotating Assistant Educator*	3	\$27.60	\$57,409
Teaching Trainer*	2	\$32.64	\$67,901
Cook	1	\$23.00	\$47,840

Notes: \* indicates that wages for this role use a wage scale weighted by current average levels of education and experience. Annual pay figures are rounded to the nearest dollar.

Compensation for non-educators is scaled relative to other roles and, ultimately, the ALICE Wage. Scaling roughly follows the salary hierarchy defined in the P5FS Model. Assistant directors earn 22 percent more than the midpoint of the starting wages of classroom educators. The classroom educator's starting wage is defined as 30 percent above the ALICE Wage earned by entry-level staff. The director's wage marks a 21 percent increase over that of an assistant director, plus an additional 10 percent bonus recommended by the Child Care Workgroup.<sup>d</sup>

Teaching staff compensation is based on wage scales that adjust pay according to the educator's education and experience. For a detailed discussion of these wage scales, see Appendix A. Rotating educators use a wage scale that begins at the ALICE wage for someone with a high-school diploma and no experience and increases that wage by up to 20 percent for higher levels of education and by 1.5 percent for each year of experience (see Table A-1). Wages for classroom educators and teaching trainers are 20 percent higher at each level of education and experience (see Table A-2).

For all educators, cost computations are performed using a weighted average wage based on the current distribution of education and experience among educators as reported in the Davidson County Child Care Provider Survey (see Tables A-3 and A-4 in Appendix A).

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<sup>d</sup> The intent of this bonus is to account for the additional business responsibilities faced by the portion of directors whose center is not part of a multi-center business.

## Full-Time Staff Benefits

Full-time staff receive access to a standard suite of benefits intended to place them broadly at parity with public school educators. A full list of benefits and their associated costs appears in Table 5.

The benefits package includes access to a 401(k) retirement plan with a 3 percent employer match, health insurance, dental and vision insurance, as well as 15 days of paid time off. The cost of health insurance is assumed to be average for the state of Tennessee and includes an employer-funded portion, captured in the reported cost, and a worker-funded premium. The model center covers the entire cost of dental and vision coverage, in line with current practice at several greater Davidson County providers.

Additionally, staff receive a discount of \$1,000 per month when purchasing child care at the center where they are employed, a common benefit in the field. After Child Care Workgroup consultation, we assumed that 10 percent of staff would make use of this discount at any given time.

**Table 5: Benefit Package for Full-time Staff**

Benefit	Annual Cost to Model Center
Health Insurance	\$6,100 per staff member <sup>e</sup>
Dental and Vision Insurance	\$456 per staff member
401(k) Match	3% of wages
Paid Time Off (15 Days)	\$0 <sup>f</sup>
Social Security and Medicare Contributions	7.65% of wages
State Worker's Compensation	1.2% of wages <sup>g</sup>
State Unemployment Insurance	1.5% of wages <sup>h</sup>
Discounted Child Care	\$1000 per staff member requiring child care (assumed to be 10% of all full-time staff)

Notes: Dental and Vision insurance costs and the amount of the employer 401(k) match were determined according to Child Care Workgroup input and experience.

<sup>e</sup> Kaiser Family Foundation. (n.d.). [Average Annual Single Premium per Enrolled Employee for Employer-Based Health Insurance](#). Costs are scaled to from January 2024 to January 2025 using the Consumer Price Index and rounded to the nearest \$100.

<sup>f</sup> Workgroup input indicated that workers who take paid time off would not, in practice, be replaced with a substitute staff member. Instead, other on-site staff, including potentially administrative staff, would step in to maintain appropriate ratios. In such a case, paid time off creates no estimable cost for the model center.

<sup>g</sup> ACF Calculator default value for Tennessee.

<sup>h</sup> ACF Calculator default value for Tennessee.

## Part-time Staff

The model center employs several part-time service providers. Wages and the number of hours worked vary by the service, as reported in Table 6. Part-time staff do not receive benefits beyond mandatory payroll contributions.

**Table 6: Wages of Part-time Service Providers**

Service	Hours	Hourly Wage	Annual Pay
Behavioral Services	8 per week	\$32.00	\$13,312
Family Outreach*	16 per year	\$27.00	\$432
Janitorial	15 per week	\$23.00	\$17,940
Maintenance	10 per week	\$23.00	\$11,960

Notes: \* Upon consultation with the Child Care Workgroup, the need for family engagement services is calculated as 16 hours per 50 children whose parents receive full or partial payment assistance, estimated as 50% of children receiving care. Accordingly, the Model Center contains 47 children requiring payment assistance.

## Facility Costs and Other Fixed Expenses

Facility rent/mortgage payments and operating costs represent a large expense for the model center. Most facility-related expenses are proportional to facility size, which is itself proportional to the number of children served. The total size of the model center, including classroom and non-classroom space, is 6,045 square feet, or 65 square feet per enrolled child. Assumptions about facility size and related expenses are adopted from the ACF Calculator, with rent scaled to the cost of living in Davidson County and other values at Tennessee defaults (see Table 7).

**Table 7: Facility Expenses at the Model Center**

Expense Category	Expenses per Square Foot	Annual Expenses
Mortgage/Rent	\$24	\$145,080
Utilities (power, water, sewer, etc.)	\$3	\$18,135
Insurance	\$2	\$12,090
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$29</b>	<b>\$175,305</b>

Beyond facility-related costs, the model center incurs expenses that do not depend on the size of the center. These expenses appear in Table 8. The Child Care Workgroup provided estimates for the cost of internet/phone service and annual audits. For all other fixed expenses, we adopted the default assumptions of the ACF Calculator for Tennessee.

**Table 8: Other Fixed Expenses at the Model Center**

Expense Category	Annual Cost to Model Center
Audit	\$16,000
Internet/Phone Service	\$8,400
Professional Services	\$1,282
Accreditation	\$625
Licensing	\$573
Professional Memberships	\$75
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$26,955</b>

### Per Child Expenses

Many expenses are modeled on a per-child basis, such as food, educational expenses, and office supplies. These costs capture the day-to-day resources expended in providing high-quality care. Per-child costs and capacity-scaled totals appear in Table 9 below. All modeled costs represent Tennessee default values in the ACF Calculator.

**Table 9: Inventory of Capacity Scaled Expenses**

Expense Category	Expenses per Child	Total Center Annual Expenses
Food	\$2,177	\$202,461
Office Supplies	\$119	\$11,067
Educational Supplies/Crafts	\$119	\$11,067
Medical Supplies	\$67	\$6,231
Kitchen Supplies	\$57	\$5,301
Curriculum	\$37	\$3,441
Child Assessment	\$27	\$2,511
Developmental Screening Tool	\$14	\$1,302
Liability Insurance	\$126	\$11,718
Advertising	\$24	\$2,232
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$2,767</b>	<b>\$257,331</b>

### Cost Estimation Model Assumptions for Home-based Child Care

The cost structure of home-based child care programs is distinct from center-based programs. Home-based programs are typically much smaller and operate out of a private residence. Tennessee child care regulations divide home-based child care into two categories: 1) family home-based programs and 2) group home-based programs. Family home-based programs serve up to seven children, whereas group home-based programs serve at least eight and up to 15 children.<sup>15</sup> As a result, group home-based programs often require additional staff and space to meet licensing and quality standards. These differences

in scale create meaningful cost distinctions, necessitating the development of two separate cost estimation models for family and group home-based child care programs.

### Number of Educators and Capacity

Staffing patterns for model child care homes reflect evidence from the Child Care Provider Survey and consultation with the local Child Care Workgroup. The model family home has a single full-time educator, the owner, whereas the model group home has two full-time educators, including the owner and one assistant educator.

Group sizes for model family and group child care homes follow Tennessee licensing requirements.<sup>i</sup> Given the number of staff available and assuming that the home serves at least one infant and at least one toddler, each model home serves the maximum number of children permitted by state law. A summary of children served appears in Table 10.

**Table 10: Capacity of Model Child Care Homes**

Age Group	Family Home	Group Home
Infants	1	2
Toddlers	1	4
Preschool	3	6
School Age	2	3
<b>Total Group Size</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>15</b>

### Staff Compensation and Benefits

A summary of wages for each model child care home appears in Table 11. The owner pays themselves a wage equal to the model child care center assistant director wage, plus a 10 percent bonus to account for business responsibilities similar to a center director. The full-time assistant educator at the model group home is paid at parity with a center-based rotating educator (see Table A-1 in Appendix A for wage scale). Full-time staff are assumed to work 40 hours per week.

The model homes also employ part-time substitute educators to cover periods where a full-time educator is absent. Because the model homes are open for 60 hours per week, each home requires 20 substitute hours per week per staff member in addition to hours necessary to cover paid time off. Substitutes earn the ALICE Wage.

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<sup>i</sup> TENN. COMP. R. & REGS. 1240-04-01-.20(1)(c)(4), 1240-04-01-.21(1)(b).

**Table 11: Wages of Staff at Child Care Homes**

Staff Role	Home Type	Hours	Hourly Wage	Total Pay
Owner	All	2,080 per year	\$40.13	\$83,461
Assistant Educator	Group	2,080 per year	\$27.05	\$56,266
Part-time Substitute	Family	1,160 per year	\$23.00	\$26,680
	Group	2,320 per year		\$55,430

Full-time staff receive the same suite of benefits as full-time staff at the model center (see Table 5), except for the child care discount. Additionally, paid time off costs are not assumed to be zero. Instead, these costs are included in the number of substitute hours required in Table 11.

### Home Expenses

The portion of home-related expenses that may be deemed business expenses is given by the time-space percentage, which is equal to the percent of time that the home is used for work (the time percentage) multiplied by the percent of the home's total area that is regularly used for business purposes (the space percentage). Elements of these percentages appear in Table 12.

**Table 12: Assumptions for Time-Space Percentage Computations**

Age Group	Family Home	Group Home
Days Open per Year	260 days	260 days
Working Hours per Day	12 hours	12 hours
Time Percentage	35.6%	35.6%
Total Home Size	1,500 ft <sup>2</sup>	2,000 ft <sup>2</sup>
Space used for Business	500 ft <sup>2</sup>	750 ft <sup>2</sup>
Space Percentage	33.3%	37.5%
<b>Time-Space Percentage</b>	<b>11.8%</b>	<b>13.4%</b>

We assumed that both model homes are used for business 12 hours per day, including open hours as well as after-hours maintenance, 260 days per year, for a total of 3,120 working hours, or 35.6% of a non-leap year. Home sizes are based on typical Nashville home sizes, with the assumption that group homes will require additional space.

Full home expenses appear in Table 13. When computing the cost of care, we multiplied each full expense by the time-space percentage to determine the portion that constitutes a business expense. A mortgage cost of \$16 per square foot is based on the 2025 estimates of the median monthly mortgage payment in Middle Tennessee (approximately \$2,500) and average home size (approximately 1900 square feet) in Davidson County.<sup>16,17</sup> Similarly, the property tax cost of \$1.60 per square foot is based on a home of average value (\$440,000) and size (see above) and assumes that the home is within Davidson County's Urban Services District.<sup>18,19</sup> All other expenses are set at the default values for Tennessee home-based care in the ACF calculator.

**Table 13: Total Home Expenses Before Application of Time-Space Percentage**

Expense Category	Annual Cost to Model Home
Mortgage	\$16 per square foot
Property Tax	\$1.60 per square foot
Utilities	\$4,063
Insurance	\$3,875
Maintenance	\$653
Supplies	\$303

### Other Fixed Expenses

We also included all other expense categories from the ACF calculator at their Tennessee default levels (see Table 14). These expenses are the same for both the model family home and model group home. The time-space percentage is not applied to these expenses.

**Table 14: Fixed Annual Expenses for Family and Group Child Care Homes**

Expense Category	Annual Cost to Model Center
Food	\$9,764
Internet	\$1,728
Professional services	\$783
Toys and Crafts	\$584
Liability Insurance	\$567
Depreciation	\$392
Vehicle costs	\$327
Repairs	\$314
Training	\$297
Office Supplies	\$237
Advertising	\$172
Interest	\$154
Memberships	\$130
Licensing	\$126
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$15,575</b>

## Cost Estimation Model Computation Strategy

### Cost of High-Quality Care

To compute the cost of providing high-quality care at both center-based and home-based child care programs, we first summed all expenses to obtain a subtotal cost of caring for all children at the model provider. Next, we added an operating reserve equal to 5% of total

expenses to enable providers to cope with unanticipated expenses. Finally, we distributed the total across the children enrolled at the center to obtain the cost(s) of care.

Almost all expenses are distributed equally across all children enrolled at the model child care center, family home-based program, or group home-based program, the sole exception being that we distributed the wages and benefits of classroom educators at the model center exclusively to that age group. Thus, only the model child care center has a cost of care that is differentiable across infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, whereas the model home-based child care programs do not differentiate the cost of care by age.

## Limitations of the Study

The Davidson County Child Care Landscape Study uses rigorous research methods to provide new data on the local child care system; however, several limitations should be considered when reviewing the results.

First, the center-based analytic sample is not fully representative of the full population of eligible providers, with larger centers and providers located in areas with a higher median income overrepresented. The sample is balanced on other key characteristics, including certificate acceptance and neighborhood poverty level. Ideally, to account for over- or underrepresentation in the sample, estimates would be weighted using a joint adjustment across all unbalanced characteristics. However, the relatively small analytic sample limited our ability to construct stable multi-dimensional weights. Consequently, we prioritized weighting by licensed capacity. We also calculated center-level averages for key workforce characteristics to ensure that estimates reflect the typical center rather than being disproportionately influenced by centers in higher-income areas or those employing more educators.

Second, study results rely on self-reported data from the Child Care Provider Survey. Respondents were allowed to skip questions, which resulted in small differences in sample size across survey items because of item-level missingness.

Third, to create the CEM, we used cost input values that are as close to local and as up-to-date as possible. For many of the models' inputs, precise cost estimates for Davidson County are not available, so we relied on statewide Tennessee estimates. Relatedly, some cost estimates also do not scale with the size of the child care program or the age of the child in care. CEM model inputs are current as of November 1, 2025.

Lastly, the majority of center-based programs in greater Davidson County do not serve school-age children (i.e., through before- and after-school programming and/or over school holidays). Cost estimates for all age groups would vary somewhat for programs that serve school-age children. Our model cannot account for all the different structures and sizes of programs; however, it represents common features of programs in Davidson County to create as accurate a cost model as possible. Other cost models face similar limitations.

## Appendix A: Educator Wage Scales

This CEM relied on two wage scales for educators. Both wage scales differentiated wages based on an educator's highest level of education (up to a bachelor's degree) and years of experience (up to 14 years).

The first wage scale (Table A-1) applies to rotating assistant educators in child care centers and educators other than the owner at child care homes. The minimum wage for this wage scale is the ALICE Wage for a single adult in Davidson County. Each level of education increases pay by 6.67 percent, such that an educator with a bachelor's degree always earns 20 percent more than an educator with a high school diploma and the same experience. Each year of experience increases pay by 1.5 percent compared to the previous year.

**Table A-1: Wage Scale for Center-Based Rotating Assistant Educators and Home-Based Educators**

Years of Experience	Education Level			
	High School	CDA	Associate Degree	Bachelor's Degree
0	\$23.00	\$24.53	\$26.07	\$27.60
1	\$23.34	\$24.90	\$26.46	\$28.01
2	\$23.70	\$25.27	\$26.85	\$28.43
3	\$24.05	\$25.65	\$27.26	\$28.86
4	\$24.41	\$26.04	\$27.67	\$29.29
5	\$24.78	\$26.43	\$28.08	\$29.73
6	\$25.15	\$26.83	\$28.50	\$30.18
7	\$25.53	\$27.23	\$28.93	\$30.63
8	\$25.91	\$27.64	\$29.36	\$31.09
9	\$26.30	\$28.05	\$29.80	\$31.56
10	\$26.69	\$28.47	\$30.25	\$32.03
11	\$27.09	\$28.90	\$30.71	\$32.51
12	\$27.50	\$29.33	\$31.17	\$33.00
13	\$27.91	\$29.77	\$31.63	\$33.49
14+	\$28.33	\$30.22	\$32.11	\$34.00

The second wage scale (Table A-2) applies to classroom educators and teaching trainers at child care centers. Other CEMs refer to this type of educator as a “lead educator.” Wages are a flat 20 percent increase on those in the prior wage scale. The midpoint between the highest and lowest starting wage (based on education) is exactly 30 percent higher than the ALICE Wage.

**Table A-2: Wage Scale for Center-based Classroom Educators and Teaching Trainers**

Years of Experience	Education Level			
	High School	CDA	Associate Degree	Bachelor's Degree
0	\$27.60	\$29.13	\$30.67	\$32.20
1	\$28.01	\$29.57	\$31.13	\$32.68
2	\$28.43	\$30.01	\$31.59	\$33.17
3	\$28.86	\$30.46	\$32.07	\$33.67
4	\$29.29	\$30.92	\$32.55	\$34.18
5	\$29.73	\$31.38	\$33.04	\$34.69
6	\$30.18	\$31.86	\$33.53	\$35.21
7	\$30.63	\$32.33	\$34.04	\$35.74
8	\$31.09	\$32.82	\$34.55	\$36.27
9	\$31.56	\$33.31	\$35.06	\$36.82
10	\$32.03	\$33.81	\$35.59	\$37.37
11	\$32.51	\$34.32	\$36.12	\$37.93
12	\$33.00	\$34.83	\$36.67	\$38.50
13	\$33.49	\$35.35	\$37.22	\$39.08
14+	\$34.00	\$35.89	\$37.77	\$39.66

To determine the average wage earned under each wage scale, we relied on the distribution of education and experience among current child care educators in Davidson County. Data regarding these distributions comes from the Davidson County Child Care Provider Experience Survey (see Tables A-3 and A-4).

**Table A-3: Distribution of Educator Education Based on Survey Data**

Highest Education Credential	Percentage of Educators
High School Diploma	46%
Child Development Associate (CDA)	5%
Associate Degree	9%
Bachelor's Degree	39%

Notes: Data for this table reflect the highest level of education of teachers implied by the Davidson County Child Care Provider Experience Survey. The figure for CDAs reflects an assumption, grounded in prior work by the Prenatal-to-3 Policy Impact Center, that approximately one-half of teachers with a CDA also have additional education.

**Table A-4: Distribution of Educator Experience Based on Survey Data**

Years of Experience	Percentage of Educators	Assumed Percentage Per Year
0 years	9%	9%
1-2 years	24%	12%
3-5 years	21%	7%
6-8 years	12%	4%
9-11 years	12%	4%
12 years or more	21%	7%

Notes: Data for this table reflect responses from the Davidson County Child Care Provider Experience Survey. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding error.

## Who We Are

### **Prenatal-to-3 Policy Impact Center**

The Prenatal-to-3 Policy Impact Center translates the science of the developing child into state level policies that have the strongest evidence of improving outcomes for infants, toddlers, and their parents. Based in Vanderbilt University's Peabody College of Education and Human Development, the Center's team of researchers and nonpartisan policy experts work with policymakers, practitioners, and advocates to navigate the evidence on solutions for effective child development in the earliest years. Learn more at [www.pn3policy.org](http://www.pn3policy.org).

### **United Way of Greater Nashville**

At United Way, we unite the community and mobilize resources so that every child, individual and family thrives. Together, we are working to create a community where every child receives a quality education, no one lives in poverty or poor health, and the most basic needs of our families are met. Serving the community for more than 100 years, United Way of Greater Nashville is also recognized as the founding chapter of the Alexis de Tocqueville Society, a now global giving society that has invested more than \$10 billion in the work of United Ways worldwide. United Way of Greater Nashville is creating lasting change throughout Middle Tennessee. We are uniquely positioned to do this work by bringing individuals, businesses, nonprofits and government to the table to have the tough conversations, mobilize the resources and make the smart investments that will create lasting solutions for our region's most pressing issues. Our service area includes Cheatham, Davidson, Dickson, Hickman, Houston, Montgomery, Robertson, Stewart and Williamson counties. Learn more at [www.unitedwaygreaternashville.org](http://www.unitedwaygreaternashville.org).

### **Raising Readers Nashville**

Raising Readers Nashville is a collaborative working to support systems change in the area of early childhood education. We serve the early childhood community by working to improve literacy in four domains of focus: Ready to Read, Literacy Skill Development, Family and Caregiver Engagement and Educator Support. We do this in four ways, incubator, a leader of active initiatives, convenor or accelerator where we partner with community and as champion to amplify the work of others. Learn more at [www.raisingreadersnashville.org](http://www.raisingreadersnashville.org)

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## Authors

### Report Prepared by:

Cynthia Osborne, PhD; Sean Craig, MA JD; Kels Bowman, PhD; Sierra Rowe, MPAff; and Monica G. Navarro

### Acknowledgements:

Jennifer Huffman, MPAff; Kaeley Benson, PhD; and Sarah Brown

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