*The webinar was hosted by Dr. Jamie Wu, Holli Schlukebir, and Marissa Castellana on May 6, 2025.*

Wu: We work to support - recording in progress - and to support the childcare center in Michigan. We appreciate this opportunity to meet with you and share our recent works. So we will continue if you're ready. We can the screen share.

Schlukebir:Real quick, I just want to shout out our two MiLEAP contacts. I think I see them in the virtual room. Amanda and Lisa, they work with us on doing all the work that you'll see on our website trying to advance equitable childcare in the State of Michigan.

So let me share screen and let me repost the link again into the chat just so that - that's why I only sent it to hosts and participants. I'll send it to everybody. There we go. Okay. So wonderful. So we have updated our map. I don't know if anyone has looked at it lately, but we have now transitioned to zip code level analysis and county level analysis.

And before I go any further, I just want to clarify what a licensed childcare desert is. It is an area where the ratio of kids to license slots is greater than three, meaning that hypothetically, there would be competition among three kids for one licensed spot at a group home, a family home, or a center. And then there's also another way that a zip code can be counted as a childcare desert. And that is where they have no providers or licensed slots in that community.

And just as a broad caveat before we begin, um, these maps are our attempt to best approximate what is happening in communities, what actually is happening with childcare providers and families. Unfortunately, we have limited data, we get daily pulls from the or the Michigan Licensing Bureau. So, we get daily updates on who has a license and who doesn't, and we use that to assume how their license slots are approximated. And part of that means that we're only looking at licensed providers in these maps. So unlicensed, licensed exempt, and informal providers, which are very important to families across the state are excluded just because the data is unavailable. And then we also assume that all families that are counted within the American Community Survey, that is our population data source are seeking licensed childcare and are looking at it with only their zip code and county. And we recognize that that's not a reality. Some parents are able or more willing to travel farther, some are not. It all just depends. And then there's the final main assumption to kind of think about as we move forward is that we assume all licensed providers are operating at full capacity, which may not be true. Some providers may choose to operate less than, some have changing schedules, some have temporary closures. But we have a technical report linked above the map. As you can see right here, if you want to explore some more of the limitations and assumptions that guide this map in particular.

Wu: Yeah, and this is one of the several maps that we have been working on with the goal to help support Michigan's childcare centers. For this particular one, we want to identify the desert areas across Michigan and hopefully with supported legislature and policy designs to help strengthen. You might be unsurprised to see that most of the areas in Michigan is red and red meaning deserts, meaning that we don't have enough. And that desert definition is when there are three children competing for one slot and that area is defined as desert. Holli has just shared with you some of the limitations in terms of we had to assume all the children in the area are seeking childcare. And we only accounted, which overestimate the demand. But we also have only included the license providers because of data limitation, so that underestimate the supply. So we balance of things in the report that you can download in that, um, in the click right there.

Maybe, Holli, you can click so people have an idea about what we're putting there. It's really more of a definition of how we calculate these ratios and the definition, the data sources. You click on the link and it will take you to the different sources where we get the data from. And then some going down there is, for example, how do we define the regions and with a lot of quality data sources, and then looking at what do you mean by economic development organizations? What's the definition, the provider types, and then the several assumptions and limitations at the end. So, you know, these are more for people who needed that technical details and evidence to say, how did you come up with this?

But Holli is going to share with you how we kind of put all the data together to hopefully design something a little bit more user friendly so that you can, you know, play around the platform and see how that relevant to your work. Holli, thank you.

Schlukebir: Yeah. So one crucial aspect of the map is we know that as childcare advocates, there are some you're interested in different age groups, right? Not all age groups have the same accessibility. So the map defaults to looking at childcare desert ratios for zero to 13. And that assumes that all providers who are licensed for kids zero to 13 are all the slots are distributed equally. But one thing that is very interesting, we have the age groups zero to 13, which is overall infants and toddlers, preschoolers, and school age kids. When you go to different age groups, the childcare deserts really shift around. For example, you can see that a lot of the UP, those communities have a small population. So it's hard to approximate the level of demand and capacity there just because it's smaller. And then the lower half of the state, again, has that widespread insufficient limited childcare ratio. But then if you jump over to preschoolers, the state looks different. Once it loads a bit. There are quite a few people in office. It looks much different because there are more areas that have either adequate or limited licensed childcare, and adequate meaning that there's roughly the same number of kids to estimated license slots, and then limited where there is around two kids per estimated license slots.

Wu: Yeah. And this is also particularly because we have GSRP expansion and we have Strong Beginnings for public preschool for three years, and we have head start programs with some blended in with GSRP. So the desert map looks a bit better with this age group in Michigan.

Schlukebir: Definitely. And then I'm just going to show you real quick, the last age group, which is school age kids, which is kind of a demographic people don't really think about, especially when it comes to summer or before or after school care. So again, it kind of goes back to the larger red insufficient childcare across the state.

One feature of the map, which is pretty cool, is you can hover over a specific zip code, and it just gives you the overall license the license desert ratio level. So kind of those labels we were talking about up above the actual license desert ratio. And if you're wondering how we get that, we take the population, which is also listed and we divide it by the estimated number of licensed slots. So just by luck, I randomly found a zip code where the population is close to 800, estimated number of slots is close to 100, so that's roughly eight kids per licensed slot.

And then it also shows the estimated number of licensed providers, the geographic type of the zip code, and then the Child Opportunity Index level. For those of you who haven't heard it before, here at MSU, we're big fans of the Child Opportunity Index. It is a zip code level analysis of just kind of 44 census level indicators talking about, um, different opportunities, resources available to kids and families that influence their growth. And to make it really easy and useful to people, they have it range from very low all the way up to very high. So, you can see as you kind of go around the state, you get there's a high, there's a low. It all varies, but the particular Child Opportunity Index that we're using is normed to the state of Michigan.

Let's see. Oh, and I forgot to mention, but please, please, please put any questions you have into the Q&A portion. And Marissa will be answering them as we go along. And then I can answer some once I flip back from sharing my screen.

Let's see, other aspects of the map that you might find useful. We just have an overall count of zip codes by licensed childcare desert levels. But please note, we remove the small populations, just because their capacity and demand is more difficult to estimate, that they're just kind of removed to look at areas with more than 50 kids. So as you can see for school age kids, the state of Michigan is around 69% of zip codes are deserts. The next table kind of breaks down where children are by their ZIP codes licensed childcare desert level. Similarly, the estimated number of slots by licensed childcare desert level, and then the number of providers you can see inside and then outside of a desert by their provider type. So what this shows us right here is that actually providers are about equally split between operating inside and outside of a desert community. So it's not just that childcare providers aren't located in what is considered a childcare desert, they are. It just they need more. And then the final metrics that we have before I go into some of the maps filtering features, is that it looks at the percentage of all the zip codes that are classified as a licensed childcare desert and breaks it down again by the Child Opportunity Index, and then by geographic type. So city, rural/town, suburb.

Okay. Now, I know some people are interested in the whole state. Myself, I tend to say, so what, how does this help me or affect me? And I grew up in West Michigan, so I always kind of orient things there. You can actually break down the map by each economic development organization, which is really the ten regions that kind of make up the state. And then it actually will break down the analysis specifically to that area that you're interested in. And say, well, West Michigan is great. Again, going back to my own personal history. I grew up in Oceana County. I want to know what does childcare look like in Oceana County. So you can again filter it to county level. And just because zip codes don't match up perfectly code ZIP codes don't match up perfectly with counties and regions, it shows counties and economic development organizations that intersect with ZIP codes. So it's the best approximate we can do knowing that it's not a perfect measurement, but. And we have a county level tool that we'll show you in a second. So it really kind of filters down to the community you're specifically interested in and say, well, again, that's great, but I want to know my town, right. So then you can go to a specific ZIP code, and you can select as many of these filters as you'd like.

And then we also have where say I go back to the county level, some of these zip codes of blend together and you want to differentiate them a bit. You can show zip code boundaries. You can show county level boundaries if that's something you're interested in. There comes the box around Oceana County and then say this is great, but it's kind of hard for me to figure out because we don't exactly live by perfect zip code or county boundaries, so you want to see roads. So you can actually see where the roads intersect with communities. Yeah. And then if you want to simplify it all down again, you can go back and say, don't show non local roads, don't show county boundaries, don't show zip code boundaries. And then you're back to where we started. And we couldn't include - this is a very small caveat. We couldn't include local roads because then the whole state you wouldn't be able to see any of the zip codes. There's so many roads. Okay.

Um, I feel like I have been talking for forever, so I'm going to show you one last feature and then flip over to see if we can answer any questions. So say you want to save this particular snapshot of Oceana County school age children today. You can download it as a PDF. If it'll work. My Wi Fi is a bit slow in office. I know what's going to happen. Once I flip away from sharing my screen, it's going to show that I downloaded it 15 times. Um Well, let's see. You know what? I'll answer questions while it downloads, but let's see. Jamie, you're muted.

Wu: You have me on the screen share. I can see myself.

Schlukebir: There we go. Sorry. I always forget when I flip back to Zoom to not do this to - keep the screen share going.

Wu: I was trying to answer some questions. Some of them were regarding to the how often are the data being updated.

Schlukebir: Yes. So it is updated every day at 10:00 P.M. Or every day at 10:00 A.M. And then one thing that I saw the other question of, do we assume that the number of slots is equally distributed? We do. We assume that for their licensed capacity, if they're licensed for, say, zero to eight year olds, that their slots are equally distributed among the zero to eight year olds. Just because it's hard to get that we can't get that provider level data on what the actuality is as much as we wish we could.

Wu: Now, Jordan's question about GSRP, if they are licensed for the specific age group, we count them for that specific age group. If a provider is having a GSRP classroom but also have infant classroom and those and they use the same license ID license number, we have to assume that they slots are equally distributed, including, the - but some providers are only GSRP classrooms, they have separate license numbers. In that case, the license number indicated I'm serving 4-year-old and that would be the slots that we are counting. Sure.

Schlukebir: Yeah, that is, as Jamie mentioned, kind of a limitation of we're relying really heavily on license data, just because, again, the actual childcare landscape changes so frequently that say we could get an actual portrayal of what somebody's doing one day, there's no guarantee that it'll be what they look like the next day. So this is our best approximation. Yeah. No. Okay. Let me flip over to the other chart that we have to show you, which looks at county level licensed childcare desert ratios. So that's actually looking at - my computer is freezing again. There are so many people in office, which is wonderful, but - it actually lists all the counties by that number we are talking about, which is the number of kids divided by the number of license slots per age group. And then you can list them alphabetically, which is helpful if you're looking for a specific zip code or not ZIP code, sorry, county, or you can rank them by their licensed desert ratio. So you can see where the demand for childcare versus the supply is the greatest. And as you can kind of see, it's in the UP.

You can also, again, filter if you want to look at specific areas. And that small populations were excluded from analysis. That is just a holdover from the last map that I have to fix once we're done with this meeting. So ignore that for the time being. But then it actually shows per economic development organization, specific counties. So this one's pretty straightforward in comparison to the last map. Oh, and because the data is updated daily, each snapshot changes with the day. So Iron County may have a greater inequity between supply and demand for infant and toddlers, but that could change tomorrow if a new provider opens up. So it's important to remember that these snapshots are kind of time dependent.

Okay. I need a sip of water, so I will pass it to my colleague. Oh, how does the data compare to other states? Yeah, that's a good question.

Wu: I can answer that. In the US, about more than half of the lands are childcare deserts. In Michigan, if we will be more specific, we're doing better with the preschool population, but we are also part of this childcare crisis. We share the same childcare crisis across the nation. This is especially, this issue is more prevalent in low income communities and in rural communities where childcare deserts are more prevalent than others. And as you know, Michigan, most of the lands are in rural communities, so that plays an effect as well.

Schlukebir: And I'm going to drop a link into the chat. It's important to give credit where credit is due. The approach that we're using was developed by the Center for American Progress. They actually mapped the country, which is phenomenal. It's a little bit more outdated now just because this data is about 7-years-old. They switched over to a different kind of mapping software. So if you explore the kind of map that I shared, you may find a more updated one. But it doesn't have the same, like, broken down by zip code level analysis or census track, I believe, in their map.

Wu: Yes. And we are quite unique in the state in terms of having this timely data maintained and displayed in the interactive map for. So when we look at other states, sometimes it's hard to know what's the situation in those states because they don't have this infrastructure available. So we kind of fortunate to have been able to link the providers data with the other data available and then come up with this. We know and help identify the zip codes, the neighborhood pockets that really are struggling with finding childcare. Any other questions?

Castellana: It looks like there's one in Q/A.

Wu: Yeah, I have a question about, do you know how many states have interacted childcare maps? I did I think one other state or two. When we were writing on another article, and we don't see this is just a newer approach that people are doing. I've seen this work apply in other sectors, but not in childcare. I forgot the name of is it Louisiana or somewhere. I forgot the name of the state. I can look it up, but I know Holli shared the most prevalent data is from the national study and that was a bit outdated. We adopt the idea and we zoom in in Michigan. We were placing the community factors in there to help identify the geographic, the rural, urban, or the resources level to really help the state dig into the issue of how different communities are confronted with the childcare desert issue and we not quite see other people doing it in other states.

Schlukebir: And then there are other states have snapshots available. But for example, I know Massachusetts and California have them, but they're published in journals and stuff and they're static snapshots, so they're not getting that dynamic interactive feature. And then there's usually a lag between publishing and when the data was actually created. So that's one of the cool things about what MiLEAP is partnering with us to do is that it's actually real time data.

Wu: Marissa, do you want to help lead the next session?

Castellana: Yes. Sounds great. If there's no other questions, I have several questions for you all just to reflect on the map and how you can apply this to your work. Of course, if you come up with any other questions that you'd like to ask me, Jamie, or Holli, definitely don't hesitate to put it in the chat or in the Q&A.

My first question for you all is by looking at the map, what disparities do you see in access to childcare either in the state or in the area you live or work in?

Wu: Well, I want to make sure as participants, we're using webinar, can they still speak up and unmute themselves?

Schlukebir: Yes. Yep. I think I have clicked through all of the attendees and made sure that they can talk, but make sure to shout in the chat if you can't and I'll make sure to grant you that. It was a fluke in how I set up the meeting.

Castellana: Yeah. The UP has a lot of need. Definitely. There was a lot of gray with the small populations and that deep color displaying insufficient childcare access. Great. Anything else that anyone noticed and wants to share?

Wu: It's interesting that UP has been brought up. We did another study just looking at GSRP and we were actually able to identify zip codes - and mostly they are in UP - that don't have equitable childcare access even with GSRP. I just shared the link in the chat.

Castellana: Yes. Thank you, Jamie. Jessica, to answer your question. Both is fine. I was thinking mostly in regard to the map capturing access of licensed slots to childcare, but families' knowledge is also definitely very important in providing families with information about childcare access.

Great. I'll ask my other question is what challenges do you believe providers might face when they're located in childcare deserts?

Schlukebir: I think it's important too to think about that it's not just parents, it's also grandparents, aunts and uncles, anyone who may be supporting a child's growth. But then it also ties into the economy as well, the community. Are the adults caring for a child able to interact and engage and pursue the employment or the education that they want? Are they able to give their child the educational and social opportunities they desire? Okay.

Overwhelming wait lists, yes, buildings that can be used, not enough workers and parent transportation. I know the transportation is a big one, especially in communities where there's not that public transit. You really basically need a car for most of the state to go anywhere farther than a mile or two.

Castellana: Definitely in childcare deserts where the nearest provider might be ten plus miles away from a family who might need transportation in order to get there. Great point. Yeah. Lots of great answers in the chat.

Wu: Yeah. I have heard that licensing has been making changes in response to the time that it takes for the fingerprint process to help shorten the time that providers can get people on board to work. It is very extremely difficult to get qualified workers.

Castellana: Diversity in childcare needs, such as specialist needs for children with special needs, definitely.

Schlukebir: Yeah. Well, that's part of the difficulty, too, of getting workers, is there is credentialing needed. There is degrees and licenses and going through that process because people often underestimate how much work and, like, specialized knowledge goes into taking care of children.

The idea that every area in rural communities have parents looking for care in them. Yeah. It can be there can be rural communities where there's a high demand and there's providers who are able to fit it. There are other rural communities where there's no one or there's a provider that's not where parents don't want the services or there's parents that do and there are no providers. It's a part of the geographic scope of Michigan. It really makes it difficult to provide services, especially if you're living outside of the city or a suburb.

Wu: Well, yeah, totally working wages.

Castellana: Definitely. Lack of infant toddler spots and new developers need perk lots to offset the higher cost of infant toddler care.

Schlukebir: I just want to be cognizant that we have about 8 minutes left. Yes. Thank you. Can you please jump in if you haven't.

Wu: I appreciate all this feedback in the chat. We also are doing a survey in a few weeks to collect what you see is the most needed and possibly make recommendations for the next round for support if MiLEAP is able to launch a the next round of Caring for MI Future kind-of initiatives, which provided infrastructure updates, funding for infrastructure updates, provided a scholarship to help with getting more qualified staff, start up grant for businesses looking forward to start off a business in childcare, stuff like that. We are planning to - and scholarship applications. Currently, there are childcare they used to call childcare subsidies, now it's the scholarships. And we still identify areas where providers don't even want to take the scholarships. So we are - we did another map that showed that the child scholarship deserts that scholarship is supposed to help offset the high cost and how supplement the providers' costs, but in many realities, they don't. So we're compiling the data hoping to um, make a recommendation for the next step, and maybe there are not resources available for everyone, but at least hopefully with our work, we can have concentrated efforts in certain areas to help start up, to allocate the resources to the most needed areas.

Schlukebir: And then there is a very, very accurate or fair question that was posed of, are there plans to update the data to reduce the number of data limitations. And the difficulty comes in, again, we have the license data, right, of what the state, like, the stamp of you can serve this many children within this environment, right? But then knowing the day to day realities is quite difficult, especially a lot of the data that we're getting for this map and for the other ones that we have is coming from Great Start to Quality. And unless providers actually enter in the information about their business, their system, it's hard for us to figure it out. So really, there is - we are really we're reliant on what providers are willing to tell us, and not everyone has the time or capacity to do so. There really aren't very many methods to reduce the number of data limitations except if you know providers, please encourage them to participate in Great Start to Quality to update their data, make sure it's accurate and reflective of what they're doing. And then also encouraging families and providers to take part in opportunities to give the state feedback, to give them information about the actual day to day looks like within their center, their group home, their family home, making sure that information flow is going. Just because, yeah. Jamie raised her hand.

Wu: I wouldn't say that the data is not accurate because all the estimates are based on reasonable parameters and we have to have a baseline to start. This data is consistent with the other national data trends. And license number, they come in to say, this is the age group we want to serve. We use the slots that they committed to serve to calculate these estimates. We cannot gauge every parent's interest in finding a childcare but the definition says that if there's like one or two slots per children waiting, then that's like adequate, that's a good enough parameters. There's also like families other undocumented provided childcare, provisions by families, neighbors and stuff. So this is something that is a baseline and it still provide critical information to know where we start.

Also, some research have suggested that center based, the providers that have license that participated in a Great Start to Quality, family type providers or anyone that has a license actually has more rules and regulations and provide a higher quality care possibly than the ones that are provided by friends or neighbors. So this is a good estimate of where we are able to have a baseline of how bad the situation is across regions.

Schlukebir: And then there's another question about, is there a way to tell the number of slots actually that someone is licensed for versus how many children they actually take on at a time. And then the best way to gauge this accurately for the state of Michigan is asking providers, doing surveys. And I know MiLEAP in the past has conducted several surveys and has intentions to do so moving forward. So if you're a provider, keep an eye out for a survey, make sure that you're encouraging people in your network to fill out the survey as well and actually give us that raw harsh feedback. What is it like within your center, group home, family home, whatever, so we can know what's going on and actually portray your needs. Thank you.

Castellana: And then the last question I have for you all with the 2 minutes we have left is just what recommendations you have for us as the map developers on how this map could better serve your needs? Are there other metrics you would like to see included in the future? You can always reach out to us after this as well if you have more feedback as you start to use the map.

Schlukebir: Yes. I will put our unit's list of people and email addresses. Please, if you have any feedback comments, reach out, email Dr. Wu, Marissa, or myself, and we will respond. And we hope you send us an email and tell us what we can do, how things are changing and doing better.

Okay. That is important. If the centers are licensed by age group, yeah, thank you. Yeah, we'll definitely look into that. And I don't want to be a time thief, but thank you, everyone, for participating, for listening to us talk at you for so long. If you have any feedback, questions, comments, concerns, please let us know.