

2026

First Children's Finance

CHILD CARE NEEDS SUMMARY

West Central Minnesota

1-866-562-6801

infomn@firstchildrensfinance.org

firstchildrensfinance.org/minnesota



How First Children's Finance measures the gap between child care supply and demand

Each year, First Children's Finance completes an analysis of child care supply and demand in Minnesota. This analysis can be used to inform strategic supply building efforts and to track year-over-year progress on the availability of full-day, full-year care that supports working families.

To prepare the statewide and regional reports, FCF analyzes population-level data and child care licensing data to estimate both the full-day, full-year child care supply and demand. FCF focuses solely on full-day, full-year care to understand the supply of available care that supports parent and caregiver participation in the workforce and the number of children that are likely to need this kind of regulated child care.

The methodology outlined here is utilized to prepare the statewide Supply Demand Gap Analysis. When working with individual communities through our community consultation processes, FCF utilizes a more targeted methodology that also incorporates data on both the supply of part-day, part-year child care and on parent workforce participation.

How FCF Estimates Child Care Demand

Recognizing that not all children under age 5 need formal child care, FCF uses zip code data from the American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau on the number of children under age six with all available parents in the workforce who are likely to need child care. FCF reduces this number by 15% to estimate the number of children aged five and under with all available parents in the workforce.

How FCF Estimates Child Care Supply

To determine the supply of child care, FCF exports data on currently active child care licenses (including both child care centers and licensed family child care) as of June 1 of each year. While many families utilize part-time child care, or even multiple sources of part-time child care, working families generally need child care options that offer full-day, full-year care to support their participation in the labor force. FCF reviews available licensing data to identify and remove those programs that do not offer full-day, full-year care to better assess the gap in supply that meets the needs of working families.

© First Children's Finance 2026

While FCF does receive funding from the Minnesota Department of Children, Youth and Families, because FCF is an independent nonprofit organization and not a state agency, FCF does not have access to data that is not publicly available. In Minnesota, the capacity of certified child care centers is not publicly available, and thus certified child care centers are not included in the supply estimates. Capacity data for tribally licensed child care programs within the geography of Minnesota is also not public and is similarly not included in FCF's supply data. FCF also removes programs that are designated as offering only school year or summer-only programs. Finally, as this report is designed to estimate the gap in licensed child care, non-licensed or unlicensed programs, such as family, friend and neighbor care (FFN) and unlicensed pre-school or school-based programs are not considered in FCF's determination of child care supply.

To refine the estimate of child care supply, FCF makes a further adjustment to licensed capacity. It is not feasible for a child care program to always operate at 100% of licensed capacity. Unlike schools, where grade level is determined by children being of a certain age at the beginning of the school year, in licensed child care, whether a child is considered an infant, toddler, preschooler or school-aged is determined by their birthday. Thus, child care programs have children moving between age categories/classrooms throughout the year, creating temporarily open slots across the program. Because of this, as a best practice, FCF considers that 85% of licensed capacity is the functional equivalent of full enrollment. For purposes of these reports, licensed capacity of child care programs is likewise reduced from 100% to 85% to determine child care supply.



Background Information

DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND FAMILIES

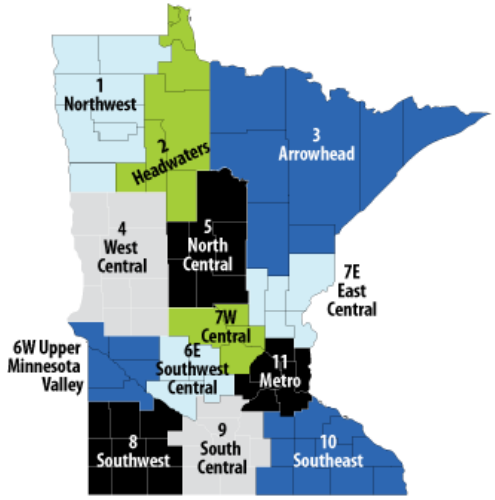
This report was prepared by First Children's Finance through generous funding from the Minnesota Department of Children, Youth, and Families.

This report covers the following geographic area:

MN Economic Development Region 4 sorted by county

West Central Minnesota Counties:

Becker	Grant	Stevens
Clay	Otter Tail	Traverse
Douglas	Pope	Wilkin



Data Sources:

2020-2024 U.S. Census American Community Survey, 5-year estimates
Minnesota Department of Human Services
Minnesota Department of Health
Minnesota Department of Education
U.S. Postal Service

Assumptions

1. If a zip code falls in more than one city and/or county, data was placed in the primary city and/or county as determined by the U.S. Postal Service.
2. All programs offering less than all day, every-day child care were excluded.
3. Due to lack of publicly available data, all certified and non-certified programs (generally school-based programs), and Tribal licensed child care programs were excluded.
4. Due to lack of publicly available Tribal licensing data, all tribally licensed child care programs are excluded

**Capacity is an internal calculation of First Children's Finance based upon historical data collection*

***Children under 5 is an adjusted calculation from 2020-2024 U.S. Census American Community Survey, 5-year estimates*

© First Children's Finance 2026

West Central Minnesota Child Care Needs Summary by County
June 2026

Totals:

Child Care Centers	CCC Capacity	Family Child Care	FCC Capacity	Total Capacity	Capacity*	Under '6' Working	Children Under 5**	Child Care Need
29	2,036	456	5,427	7,463	6,344	12,190	10,362	(4,018)

Zip Code	City	County	CCC #	CCC Capacity	FCC #	FCC Capacity	Total Capacity	Capacity*	Under '6' Working	Children Under 5**	Child Care Need
56511	Audubon	Becker	0	0	8	90	90	77	84	71	**5**
56521	Callaway	Becker	0	0	0	0	0	0	20	17	**-17**
56501	Detroit Lakes	Becker	3	115	34	415	530	451	714	607	**-156**
56544	Frazee	Becker	0	0	10	122	122	104	275	234	**-130**
56554	Lake Park	Becker	0	0	3	36	36	31	144	122	**-92**
56569	Ogema	Becker	0	0	0	0	0	0	62	53	**-53**
56570	Osage	Becker	0	0	0	0	0	0	31	26	**-26**
56575	Ponsford	Becker	0	0	0	0	0	0	17	14	**-14**
56578	Rochert	Becker	0	0	1	10	10	9	10	9	**0**
56589	Waubun	Becker	0	0	0	0	0	0	68	58	**-58**
56591	White Earth	Becker	0	0	0	0	0	0	48	41	**-41**
56514	Barnesville	Clay	1	64	14	166	230	196	365	310	**-115**
56525	Comstock	Clay	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	4	**-4**
56529	Dilworth	Clay	2	116	9	112	228	194	258	219	**-26**
56536	Felton	Clay	0	0	0	0	0	0	46	39	**-39**

56546	Georgetown	Clay	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	7	**-7**
56547	Glyndon	Clay	0	0	3	34	34	29	199	169	**-140**
56549	Hawley	Clay	0	0	18	201	201	171	318	270	**-99**
56552	Hitterdal	Clay	0	0	1	12	12	10	78	66	**-56**
56560	Moorhead	Clay	9	837	73	862	1699	1444	2845	2418	**-974**
56562	Moorhead	Clay	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**0**
56563	Moorhead	Clay	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**0**
56580	Sabin	Clay	0	0	2	22	22	19	88	75	**-56**
56585	Ulen	Clay	0	0	1	12	12	10	10	9	**2**
56308	Alexandria	Douglas	6	449	62	792	1241	1055	1349	1147	**-92**
56315	Brandon	Douglas	0	0	4	56	56	48	135	115	**-67**
56319	Carlos	Douglas	0	0	4	44	44	37	61	52	**-14**
56326	Evansville	Douglas	0	0	5	55	55	47	91	77	**-31**
56327	Farwell	Douglas	0	0	2	24	24	20	71	60	**-40**
56332	Garfield	Douglas	0	0	3	40	40	34	103	88	**-54**
56343	Kensington	Douglas	0	0	1	14	14	12	25	21	**-9**
56354	Miltona	Douglas	0	0	1	14	14	12	82	70	**-58**
56355	Nelson	Douglas	0	0	0	0	0	0	79	67	**-67**
56360	Osakis	Douglas	0	0	8	100	100	85	168	143	**-58**
56309	Ashby	Grant	0	0	3	36	36	31	107	91	**-60**
56311	Barrett	Grant	0	0	1	10	10	9	32	27	**-19**
56531	Elbow Lake	Grant	0	0	6	70	70	60	105	89	**-30**
56248	Herman	Grant	0	0	2	24	24	20	24	20	**0**
56339	Hoffman	Grant	0	0	3	34	34	29	57	48	**-20**
56274	Norcross	Grant	0	0	2	22	22	19	19	16	**3**
56590	Wendell	Grant	0	0	0	0	0	0	22	19	**-19**
56515	Battle Lake	Otter Tail	1	46	1	12	58	49	59	50	**-1**

© First Children's Finance 2026

56518	Bluffton	Otter Tail	0	0	2	24	24	20	32	27	**-7**
56524	Clitherall	Otter Tail	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	8	**-8**
56324	Dalton	Otter Tail	0	0	4	46	46	39	57	48	**-9**
56527	Deer Creek	Otter Tail	0	0	2	24	24	20	56	48	**-27**
56528	Dent	Otter Tail	0	0	1	6	6	5	39	33	**-28**
56533	Elizabeth	Otter Tail	0	0	2	24	24	20	13	11	**9**
56534	Erhard	Otter Tail	0	0	1	12	12	10	65	55	**-45**
56537	Fergus Falls	Otter Tail	1	88	41	472	560	476	993	844	**-368**
56551	Henning	Otter Tail	0	0	6	68	68	58	101	86	**-28**
56567	New York Mills	Otter Tail	1	34	5	60	94	80	215	183	**-103**
56571	Ottertail	Otter Tail	0	0	8	86	86	73	61	52	**21**
56361	Parkers Prairie	Otter Tail	1	40	3	32	72	61	117	99	**-38**
56572	Pelican Rapids	Otter Tail	0	0	9	100	100	85	213	181	**-96**
56573	Perham	Otter Tail	1	65	26	308	373	317	478	406	**-89**
56576	Richville	Otter Tail	0	0	0	0	0	0	12	10	**-10**
56586	Underwood	Otter Tail	0	0	5	58	58	49	76	65	**-15**
56587	Vergas	Otter Tail	0	0	1	10	10	9	36	31	**-22**
56588	Vining	Otter Tail	0	0	0	0	0	0	11	9	**-9**
56323	Cyrus	Pope	0	0	0	0	0	0	35	30	**-30**
56334	Glenwood	Pope	0	0	9	102	102	87	246	209	**-122**
56349	Lowry	Pope	0	0	4	46	46	39	52	44	**-5**
56381	Starbuck	Pope	2	98	1	12	110	94	120	102	**-9**
56385	Villard	Pope	0	0	2	24	24	20	58	49	**-29**
56207	Alberta	Stevens	0	0	0	0	0	0	19	16	**-16**
56221	Chokio	Stevens	0	0	1	12	12	10	19	16	**-6**
56235	Donnelly	Stevens	0	0	0	0	0	0	19	16	**-16**
56244	Hancock	Stevens	0	0	2	24	24	20	75	64	**-43**

56267	Morris	Stevens	1	84	17	214	298	253	258	219	**34**
56219	Browns Valley	Traverse	0	0	1	12	12	10	37	31	**-21**
56236	Dumont	Traverse	0	0	0	0	0	0	47	40	**-40**
56583	Tintah	Traverse	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	**-2**
56296	Wheaton	Traverse	0	0	6	70	70	60	94	80	**-20**
56520	Breckenridge	Wilkin	0	0	11	130	130	111	110	94	**17**
56522	Campbell	Wilkin	0	0	0	0	0	0	17	14	**-14**
56543	Foxhome	Wilkin	0	0	0	0	0	0	11	9	**-9**
56553	Kent	Wilkin	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	7	**-7**
56565	Nashua	Wilkin	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	**-2**
56579	Rothsay	Wilkin	0	0	1	10	10	9	77	65	**-57**
56594	Wolverton	Wilkin	0	0	0	0	0	0	18	15	**-15**
	Totals		**29**	**2,036**	**456**	**5,427**	**7,463**	**6,344**	**12,190**	**10,362**	**(4,018)**



© First Children's Finance 2026