



Early Childhood Infrastructure in Washington, DC

A new research series from the Low Income Investment Fund & Openfields

January 2025

Project overview

Research Team



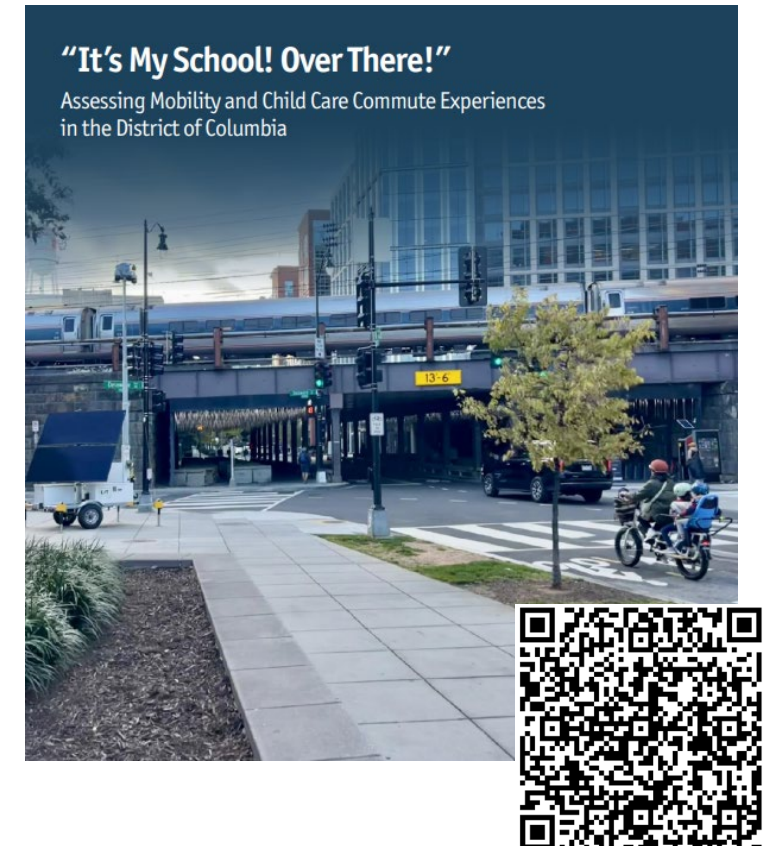
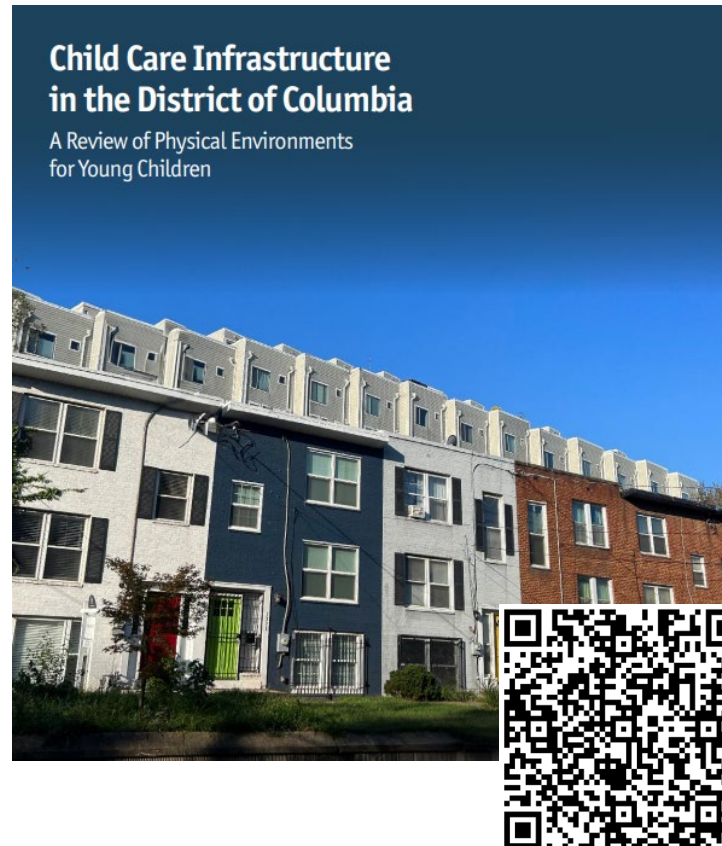
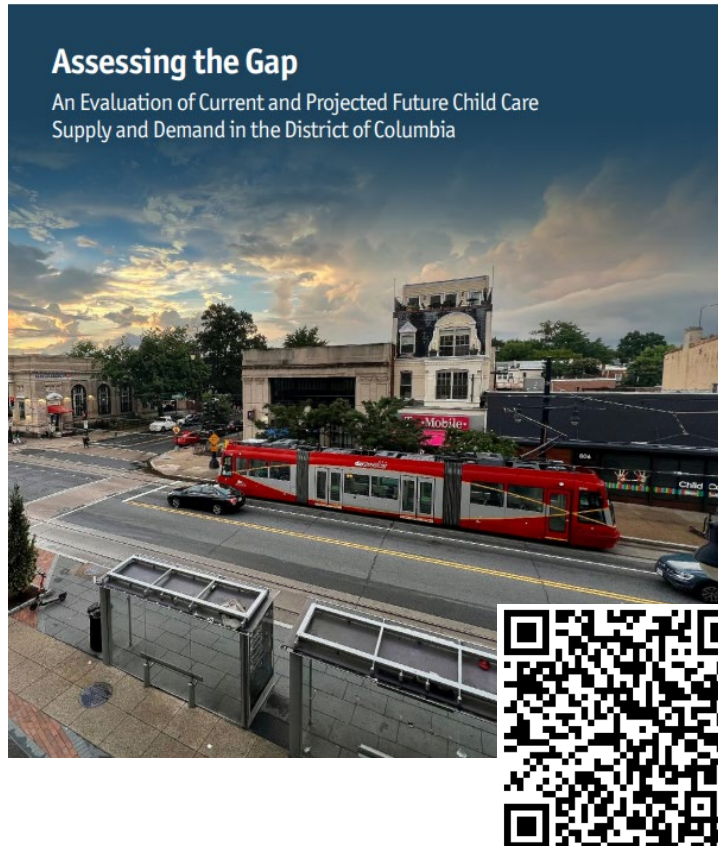
Key Supporters



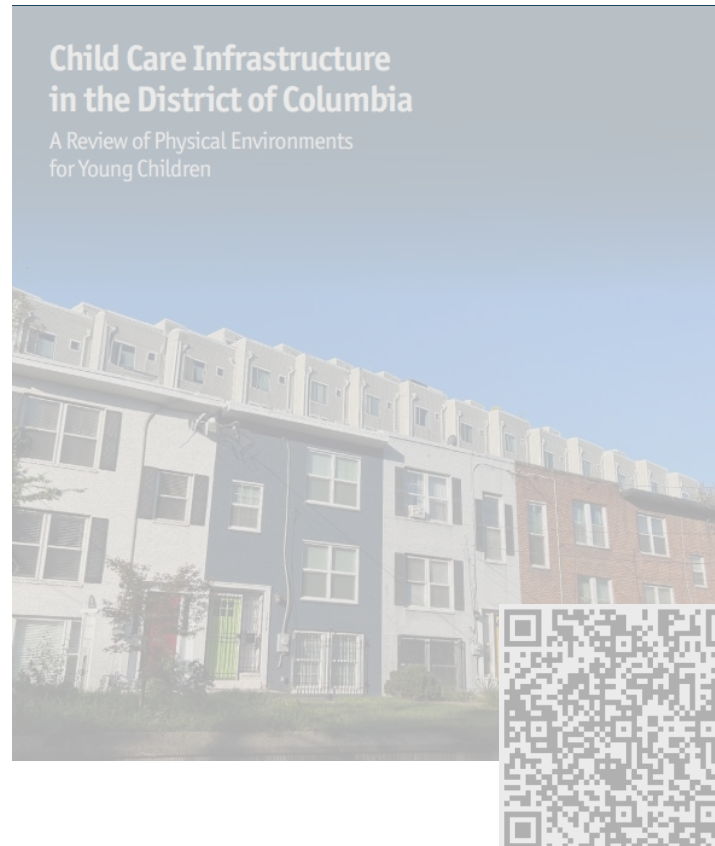
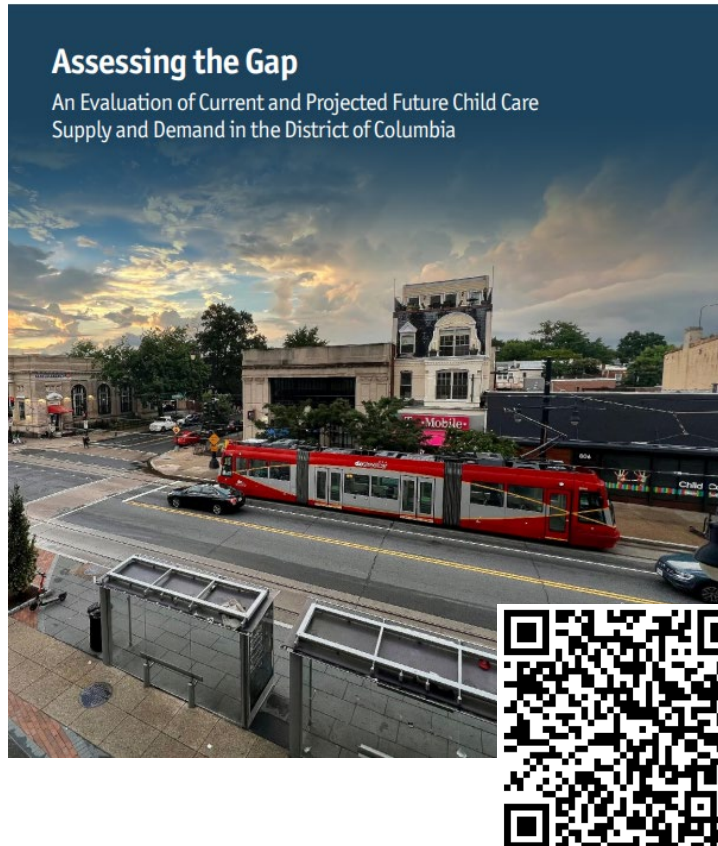
Advisory Committee

- Better Futures DC
- Capital Quality
- Carmen's Pride & Joy
- DC Department of Buildings
- DC Department of Small & Local Business
- DC Family Child Care Association
- DC Office of Planning
- Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic
- Educare of Washington DC
- Neighborhood Development Corporation
- Kadida Development Group
- Menkiti Group
- Multilingual Spanish Speakers Association
- The Director's Exchange
- United Planning Organization
- Under 3 DC
- Washington DC Economic Partnership

Project overview



Supply & Demand Analysis



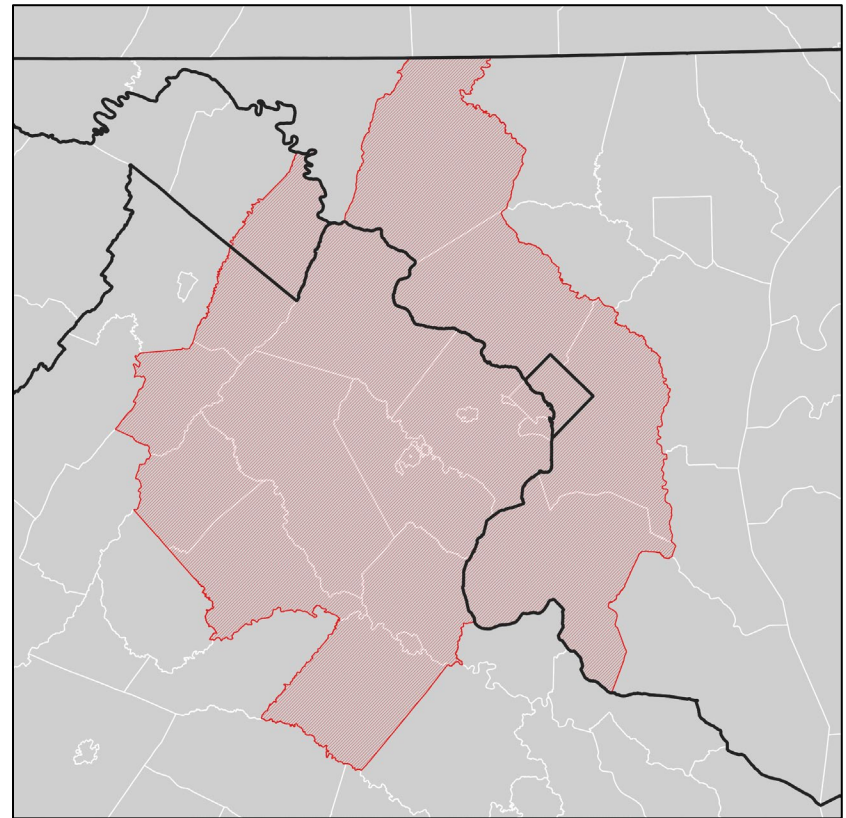
Assessing Demand Requires a Regional Perspective

DC Population in 2023

678k, ~46k children <6

DC Metro Population

6.3 million, ~438k children <6

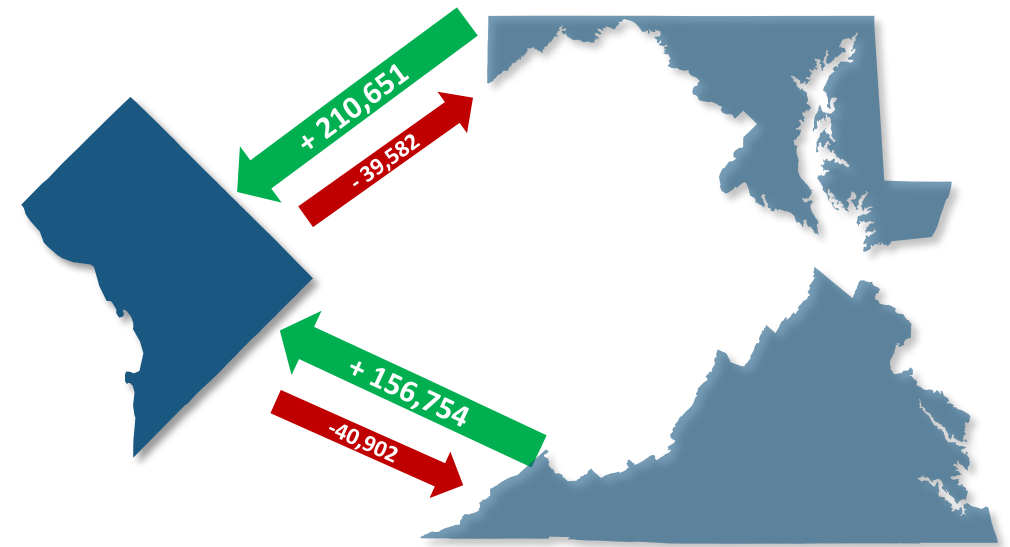


Demand comes from in and outside of DC

Accounting for commuters* into DC increases demand estimates by almost **10,000 children**, for a total estimated demand of just over **45,000 children**.

*Accounting for commuter demand includes adjusting data to account for remote work, parent preference, and out-commuters who live in DC but do not work there

In- & Out-Commuters to DC from VA and MD
(+287k net)



Source: 2021 LEHD LODES Data (latest data available at time of reporting)

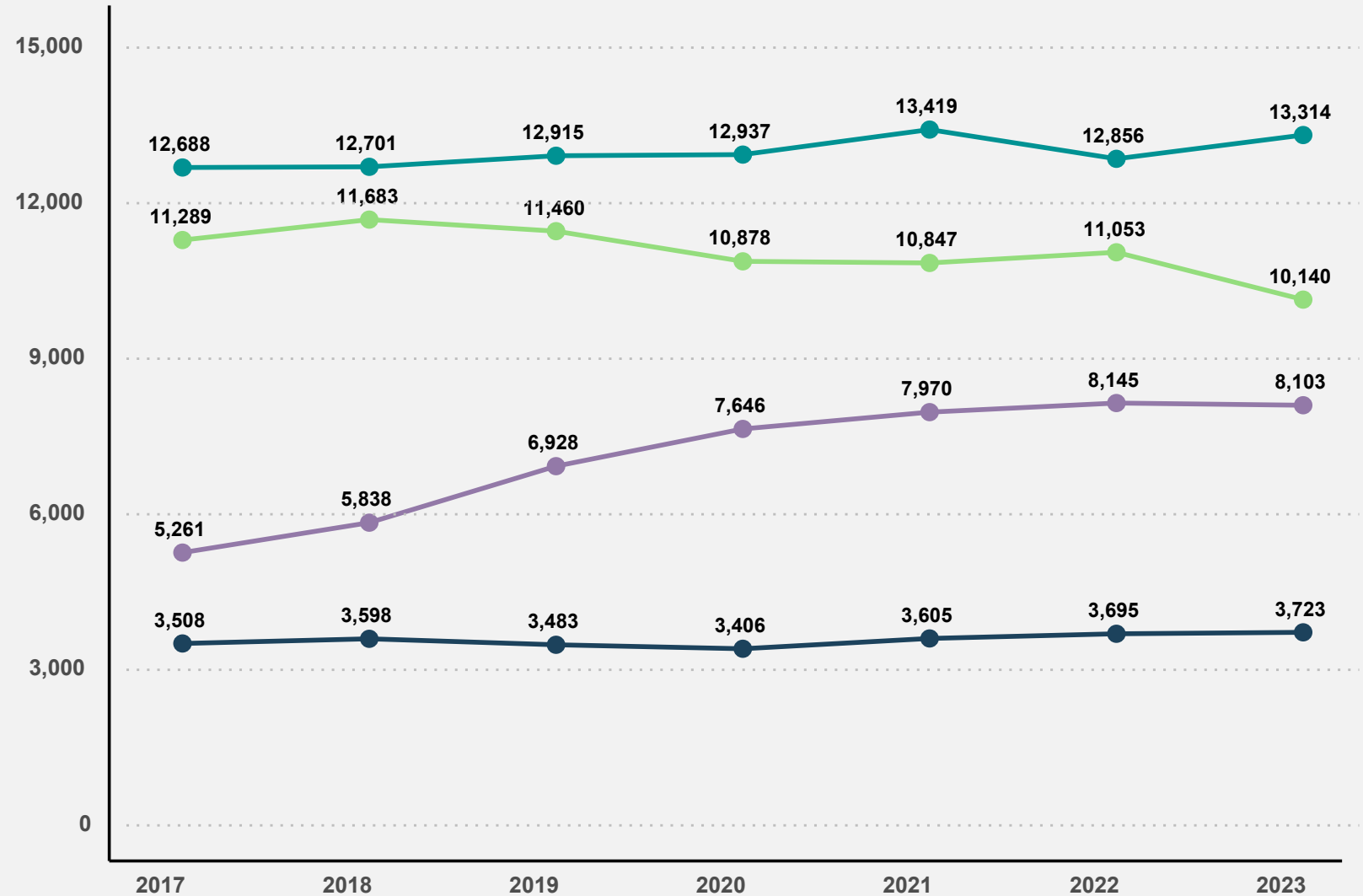
Child care supply is up 7.7% since 2017.

As a result of investments in public pre-K and incentives in infrastructure grants, private providers are shifting to serve younger children.

Age Group

- Pre-k in schools (36-71 months)
- Pre-k in facilities (36-71 months)
- Toddlers (12-35 months)
- Infants (0-11 months)

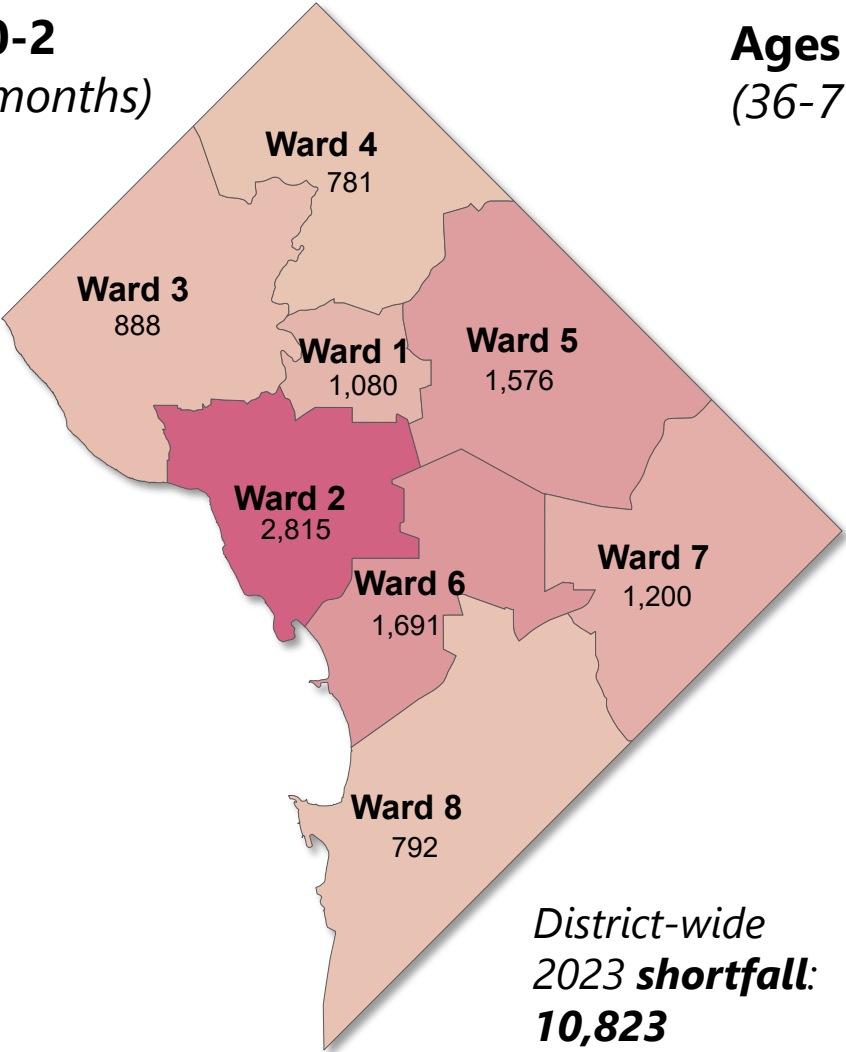
DC Child Care Supply by Age Group, 2017-2023



As of 2023, growth is not keeping up with demand

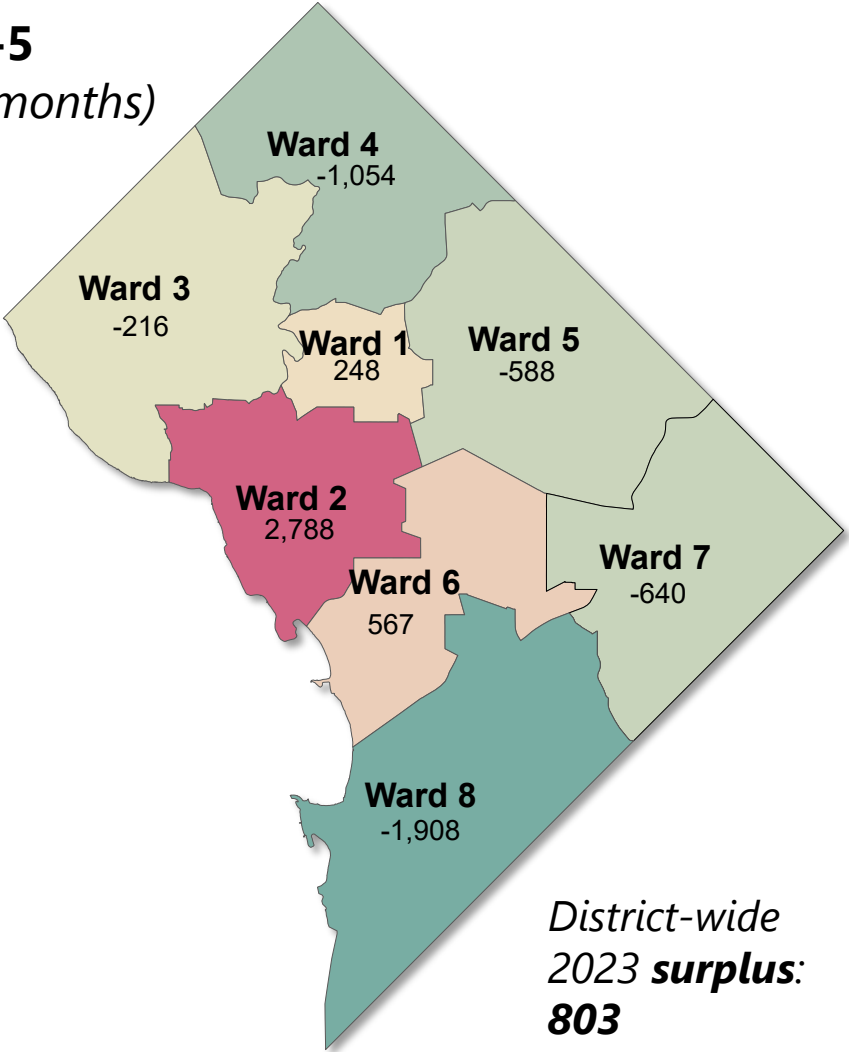
Ages 0-2
(0-35 months)

Shortfall (red)
or surplus (green)



District-wide
2023 **shortfall:**
10,823

Ages 3-5
(36-71 months)



District-wide
2023 **surplus:**
803

Estimates of future shortfall through 2035

Given facility closures and projected increases in demand, ongoing investment is needed, especially for infants and toddlers.

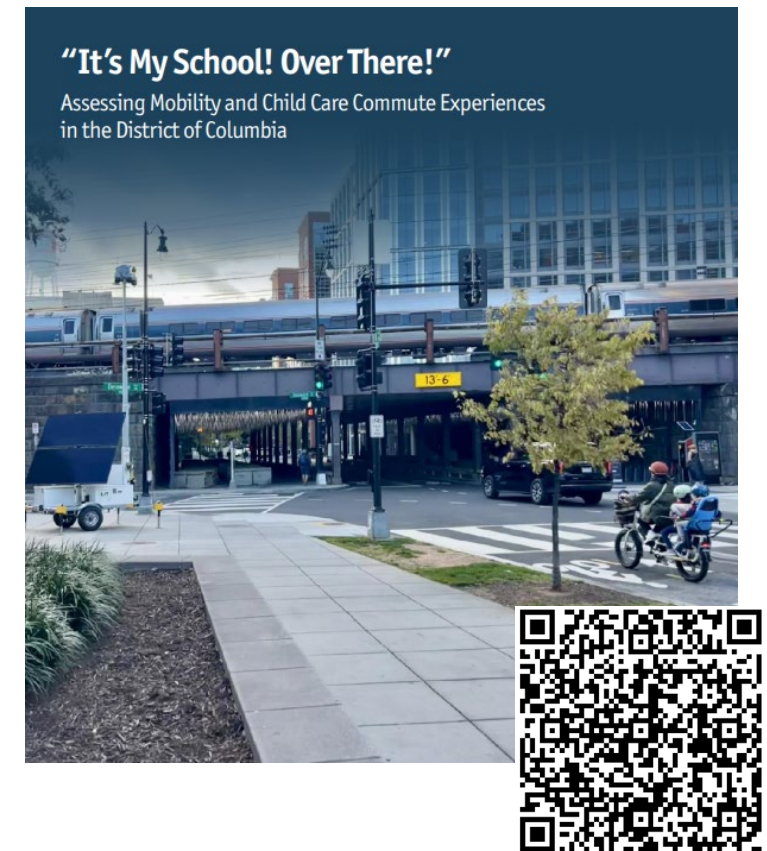
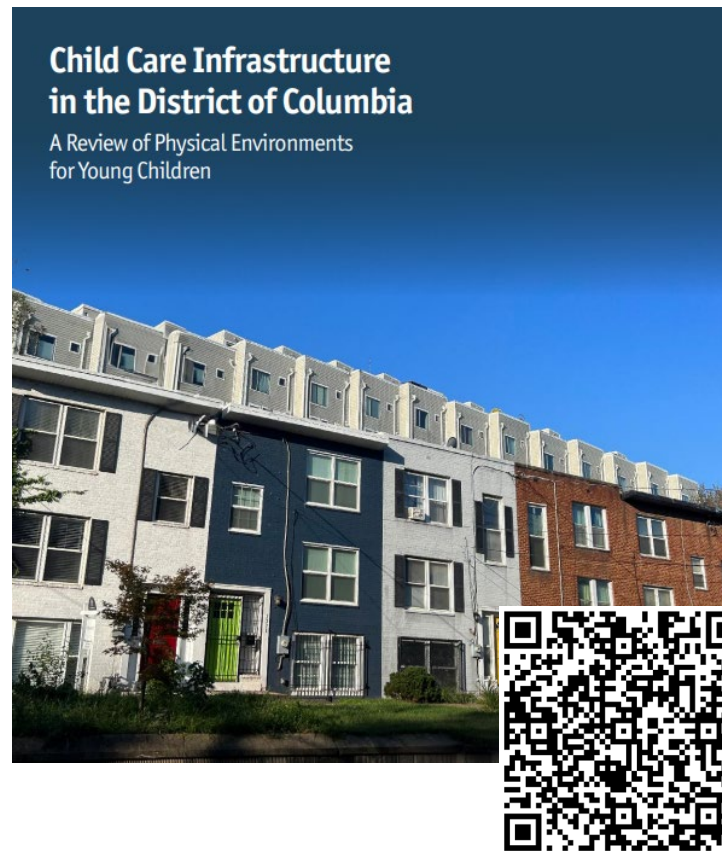
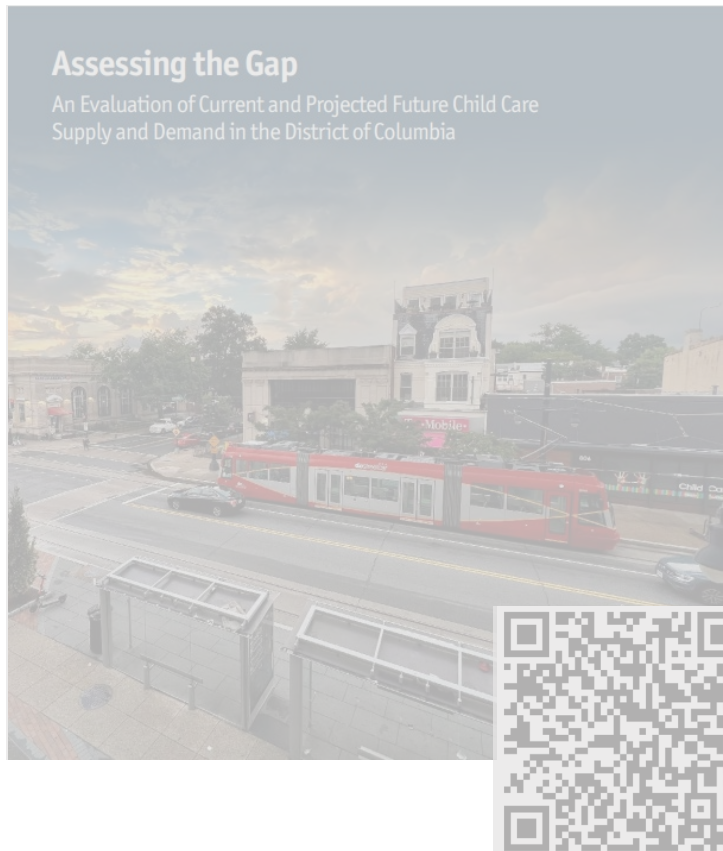
Infants & Toddlers

Projected Increase by 2035	Supply Scenario	Total Slots Needed	Slots per Year
4,637	Maintain the Gap	1,826 - 5,477	389 – 731
	Shrink the Gap by 50%	2,150 - 6,447	965 - 1,396

Preschool-Age Children

Projected Increase by 2035	Supply Scenario	Total Slots Needed	Slots per Year
4,312	Maintain the Gap	575 - 1,728	227 – 415
	Shrink the Gap by 50%	597 - 1,794	427 - 652

Child Care Infrastructure & Mobility





Indoor spaces



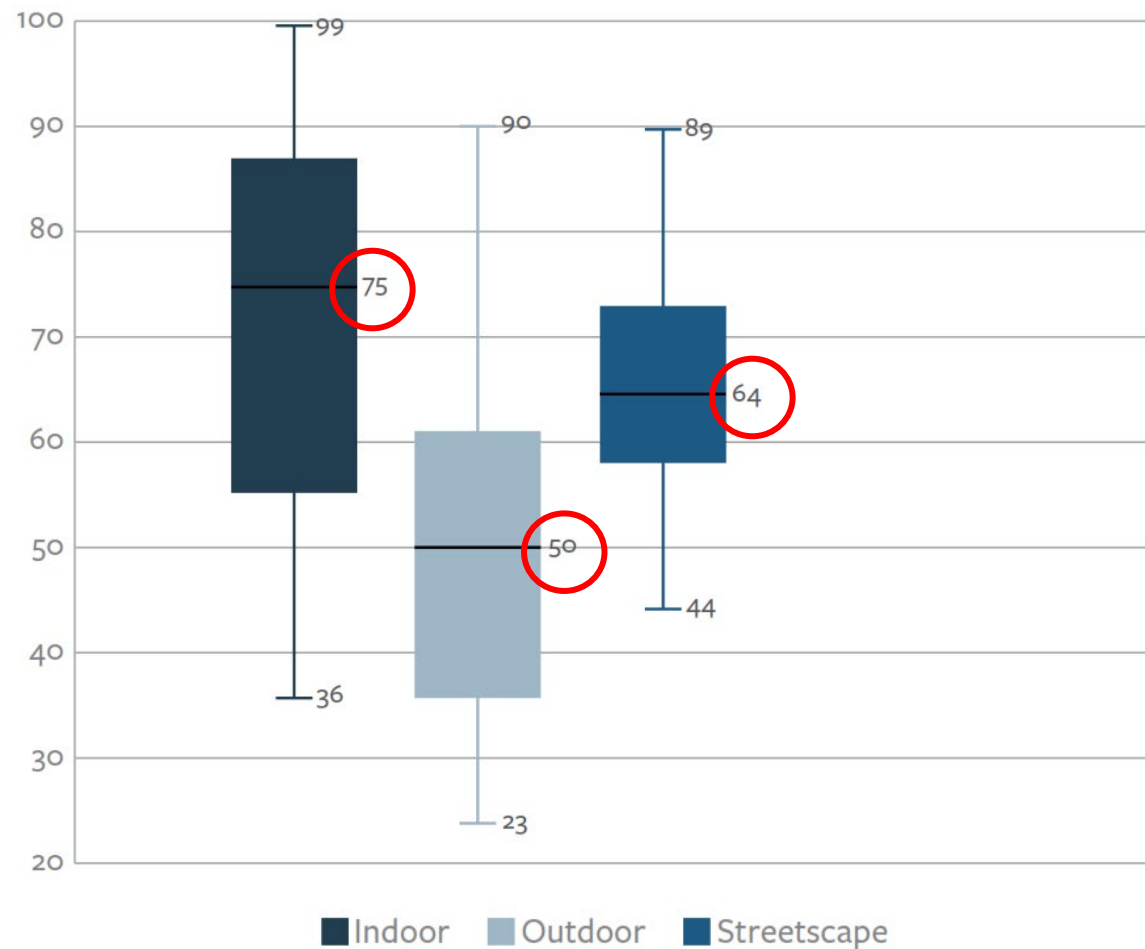
Outdoor play areas



Streets surrounding facilities

Conditions of existing facilities

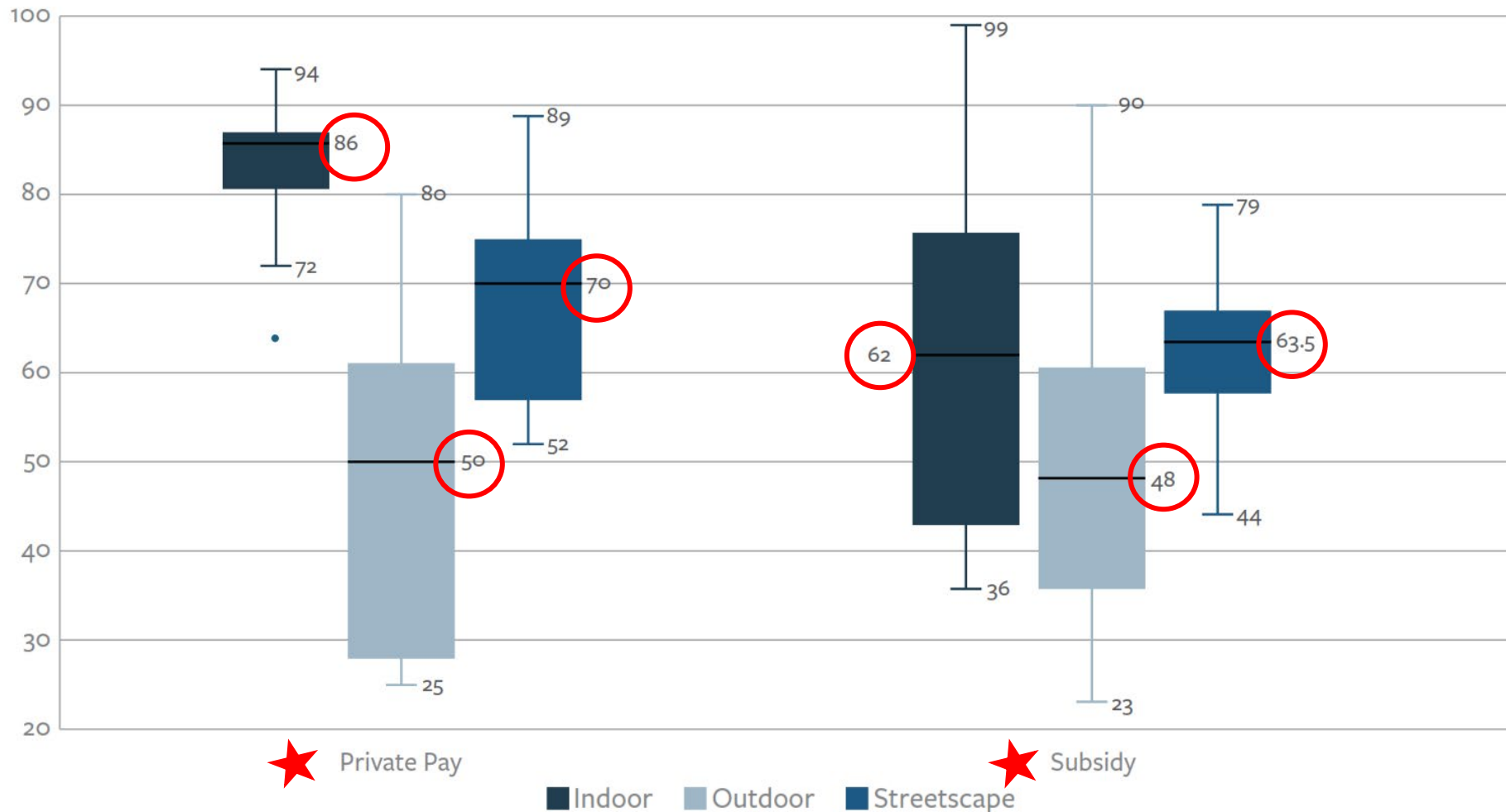
Site Visit Review Score Range, All Facilities



Outdoor spaces had the lowest quality

Conditions of existing facilities

Site Visit Review Score Range, Facilities by Primary Operating Funds

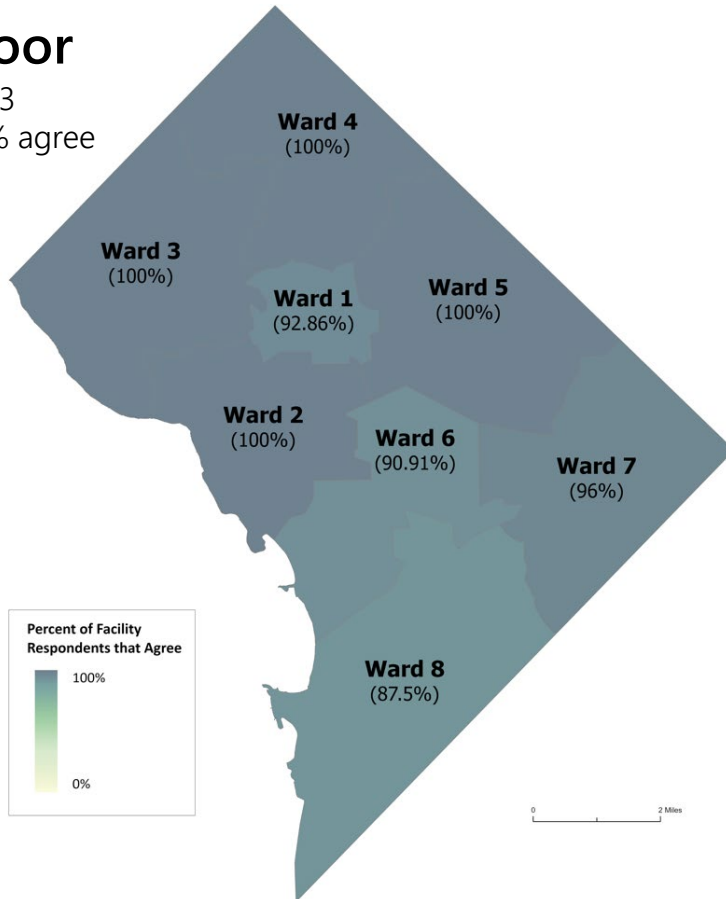


Low-quality outdoor space was the rule in private-pay and subsidized facilities

“The [indoor/outdoor] space in my facility supports learning.”

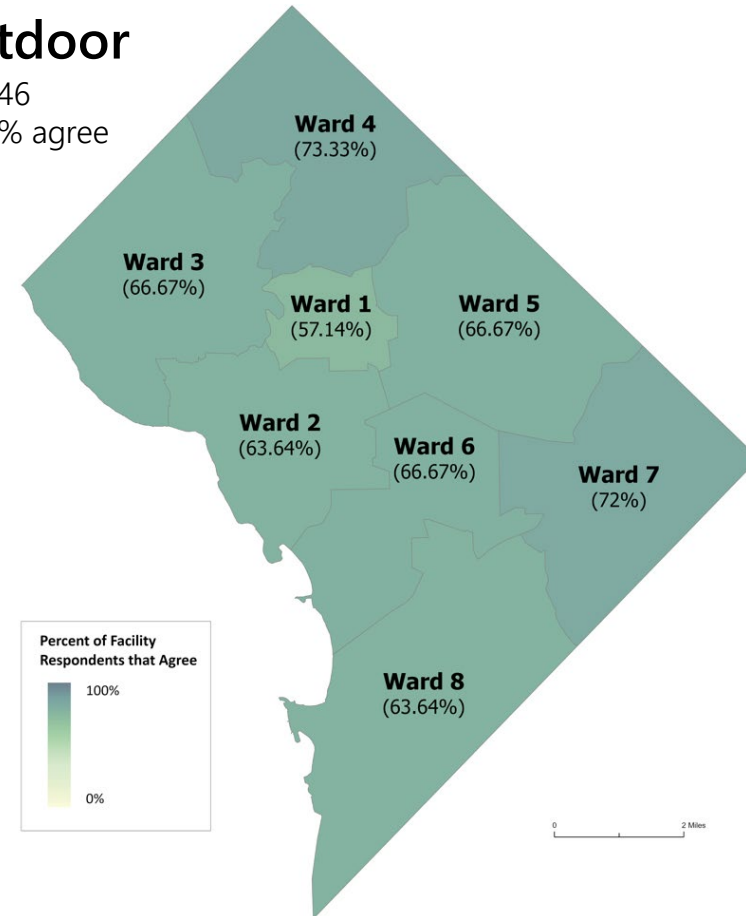
Indoor

N=153
95.4% agree



Outdoor

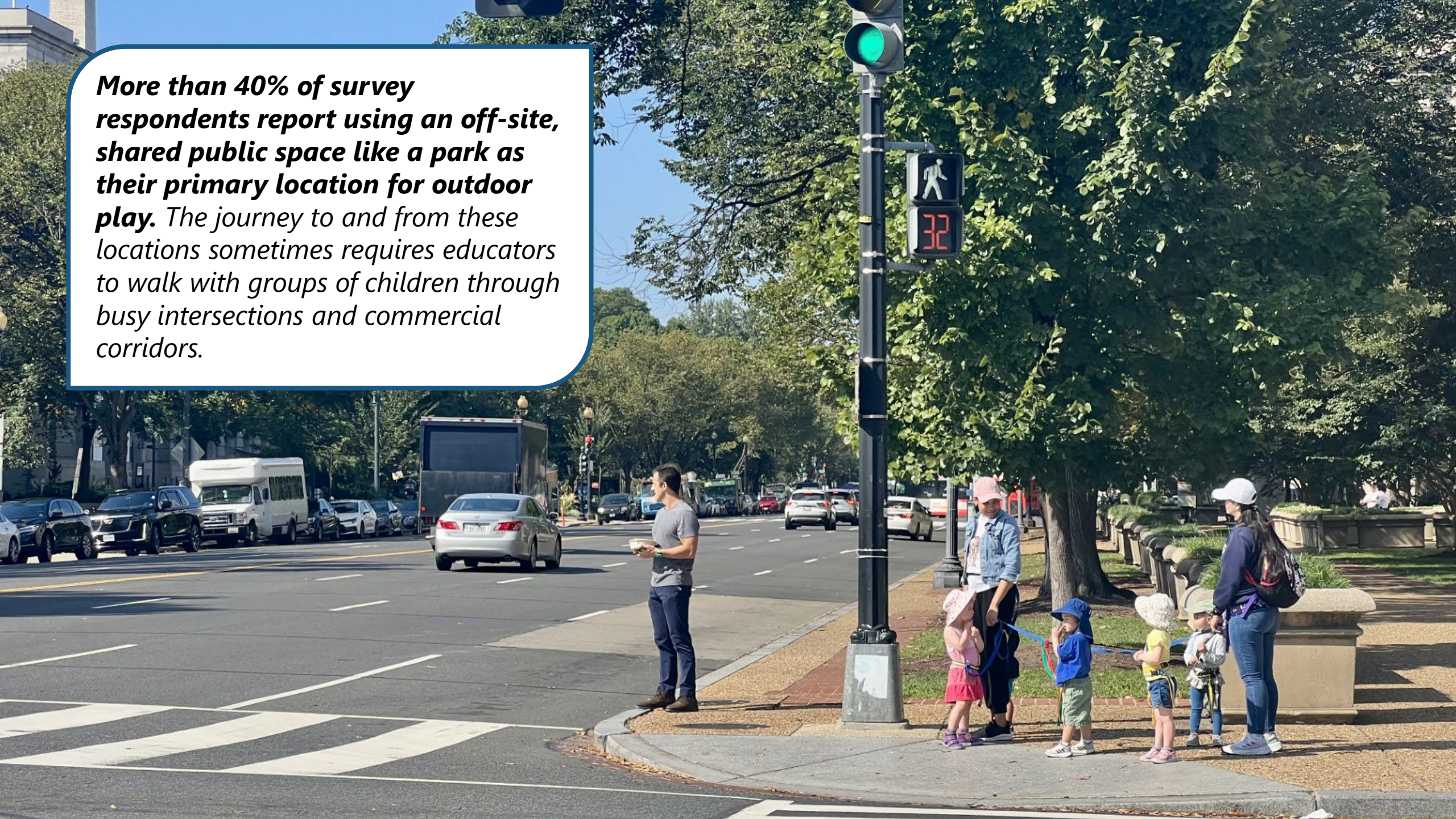
N=146
65.8% agree



Directors see outdoor spaces as big areas for growth and improvement, but financial resources remain a barrier. Several directors indicated they would **rather have no equipment at all than to try to piece together resources to maintain and upgrade it on a regular basis.**



More than 40% of survey respondents report using an off-site, shared public space like a park as their primary location for outdoor play. The journey to and from these locations sometimes requires educators to walk with groups of children through busy intersections and commercial corridors.



*"The public park is geared more toward children 4-5 and up. **It does not support group [play] for children 3 and under [and] has little to provide for them.**"*



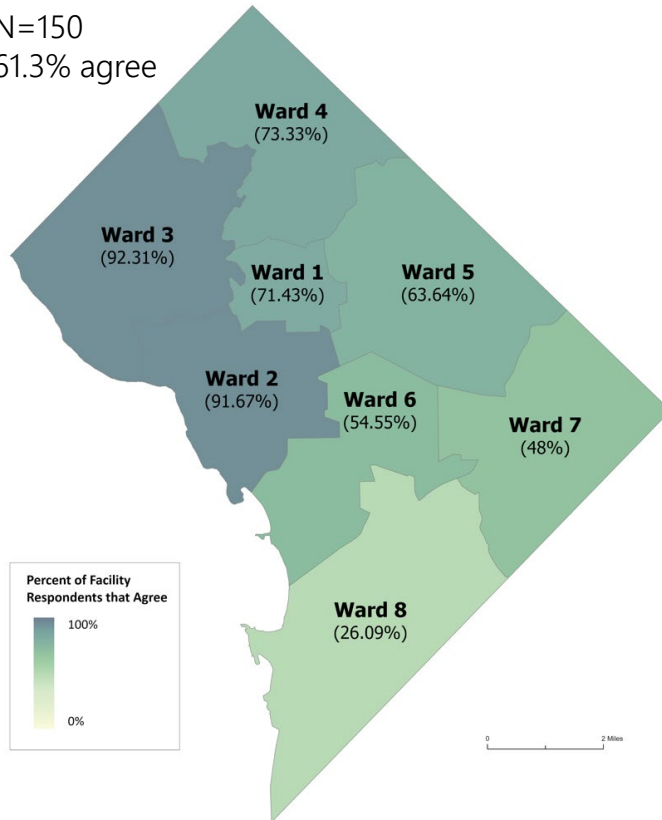
Challenges with shared outdoor space is a microcosm of larger issues related to the public realm that surrounds facilities. **Road design, sidewalks, street plants, and public art all impact quality but child care leaders have almost no authority to influence these spaces.**



Perspectives on streetscape conditions

"The neighborhood my program is in feels safe for young children."

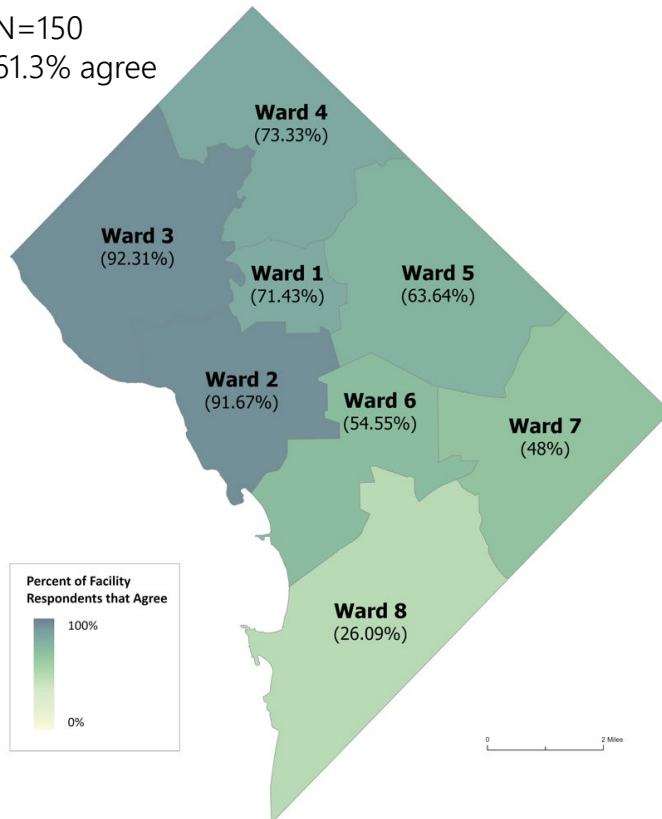
N=150
61.3% agree



Perspectives on streetscape conditions

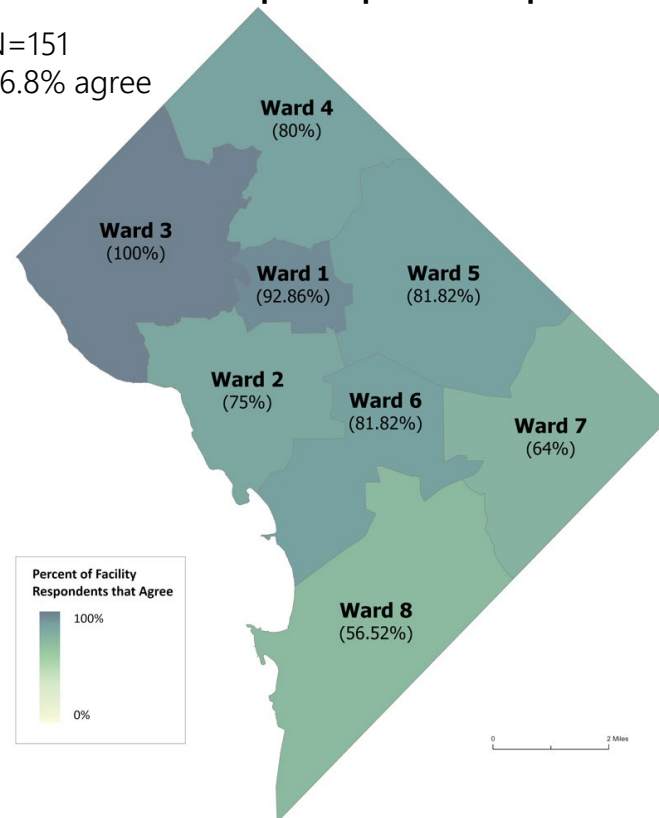
"The neighborhood my program is in feels safe for young children."

N=150
61.3% agree



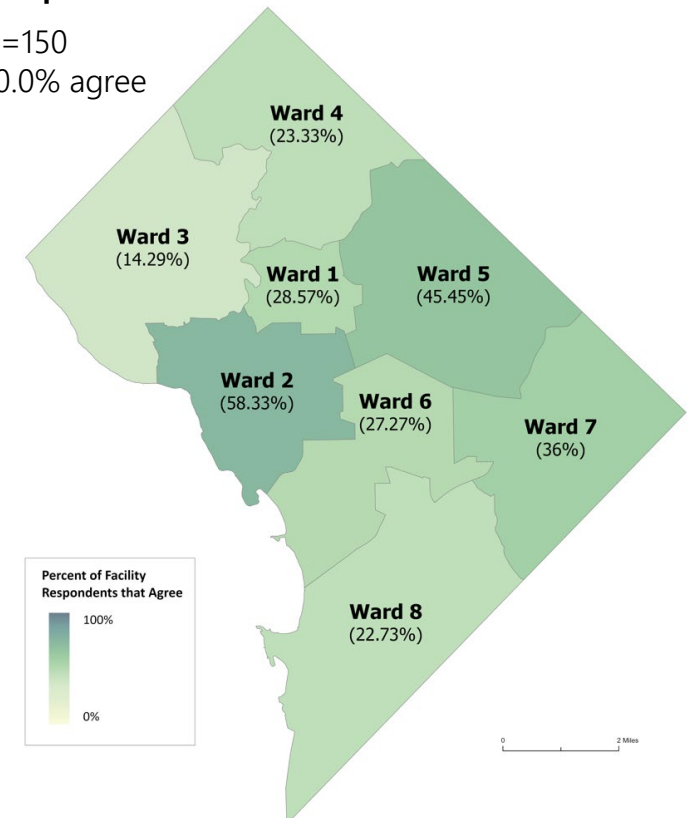
"Some families are able to bike with their children for pick up and drop off."

N=151
76.8% agree



"Cars driving near my facility rarely exceed the speed limit."

N=150
30.0% agree



*"I like the neighborhood we are located in, but **drivers are very dangerous, and they seem more annoyed by a large group of children than cautious or considerate.** One of the children in my program (and her caregiver) has been hit by a car while crossing a street to get to school."*



Study takeaways and implications



Commitment to child development facilities as an **essential planning mechanism**



Sufficient and reliable funding for physical facilities and infrastructure



Ability to **coordinate across agencies** with children and caregivers as a north star

Broader context for the work

We need both kinship care and a childcare sector

While this was a study focused on the formal care sector, other research we have conducted shows that families regularly piece together multiple types of care.

Regional problems require regional solutions

Because this work was funded by OSSE alone, it focused on DC, but the geography of childcare is linked to commuting patterns.

Healthy, vibrant communities require healthy, vibrant childcare options

A vibrant childcare sector is key to a healthy economy.