DHS-5453-ENG 5-08

Families Affected by the Loss of Basic Sliding Fee Child Care Assistance in 2003:

- Child Protection
- School Attendance
- Wage Status

Minnesota Department of **Human Services**

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LBS-0001 (1-08)

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Background

Child Care Assistance Program

The purpose of the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) is to provide financial subsidies to help low-income families pay for child care in the private market so that parents may pursue employment or education leading to employment. The program also helps to ensure that children from low-income families are well cared for and prepared to enter school ready to learn. States set many of the eligibility requirements for the program within parameters identified in federal regulations. Program funding at the state level is a combination of federal and state dollars, and local investments.

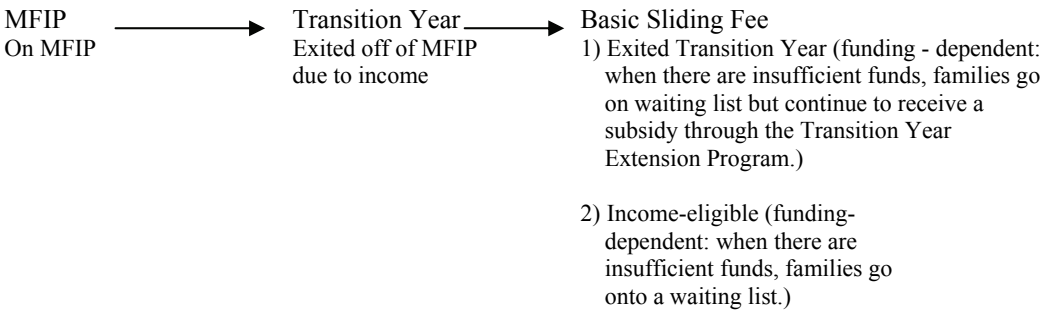
How it Works

The Child Care Assistance Program includes a number of subprograms. Families who currently participate in, or recently participated in, the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) are served through the MFIP and Transition Year child care programs. The Basic Sliding Fee (BSF) program helps families who are not currently connected to, or recently connected to, MFIP pay child care costs**.** To be eligible for BSF child care**,** income eligibility at program entry must be less than or equal to 175 percent of federal poverty guidelines (FPG). Families may remain in the program until their earnings reach 250 percent of FPG. See Appendix A for estimated hourly wage chart indexed to 2003 (FPGs). All families with incomes above 75 percent of the federal poverty level have a copayment as their share of child care costs. Copayments increase as family income increases. Families may select any regulated child care provider. The amount of the child care subsidy is determined by the care required to support the parents' work and/or school schedules, and the rate paid to the provider. The rate paid is the provider's private market rate, or the applicable CCAP maximum, whichever is less.

Minnesota's BSF program has limited or capped funding, in contrast to MFIP and Transition Year child care which serves all those who are eligible**.** Often there are more eligible families for the BSF Child Care Assistance program than can be served with existing funds. This drives the creation of waiting lists in many counties. Families served by MFIP Transition Year child care are higher priorities on the waiting list for BSF child care than most other families. During calendar year 2003, Minnesota served 11,313 families with 20,325 children in the BSF program. (Garceau, 2006)

Figure 1.

Eligibility for Accessing Child Care Assistance in Minnesota



Balancing National and Local Budgets

Economic downturns in the late 1990s and early 2000s prompted many states to reduce their expenditures for public programs in general, and child care assistance programs in particular. By June 2004, 32 states – including Minnesota – had either cut their child care assistance programs or intended to do so by 2004. (Parrott, 2003) Nationally, reductions to child care program funding were manifested in program policies that reduced the amount of money agencies paid out on behalf of children, in addition to lowering income eligibility ceilings. These policy changes were intended to save program dollars by reducing the number of families and children served at some income levels, while maximizing the number of families that could be served at other income levels with the dollars that remained.

Minnesota legislative and policy changes in 2003 resulted in termination of child care assistance to more than 500 families in 12 counties. The Department of Human Services (DHS) approved counties to terminate assistance to families in accordance with Minnesota statutes and rules. Counties were required to terminate child care assistance to families who were no longer eligible for assistance due to lowered income eligibility limits. Additional reductions to county child care assistance rolls were made in accordance with reductions in funding allocations and other required cost-saving policy changes. DHS advised counties to terminate BSF Child Care Assistance to families by using the "last on, first off" method. Families who had entered the program most recently were the first to be identified for termination of assistance.

Of the families whose child care assistance was originally terminated, more than 20 percent were reinstated in the program within a few months. The ability to reinstate families was a function of ongoing monitoring of county budgets. As counties determined that they could support the child care expenses, families were notified that they were again eligible for assistance. Not all families re-enrolled in the child care assistance program.

Reason for the Study

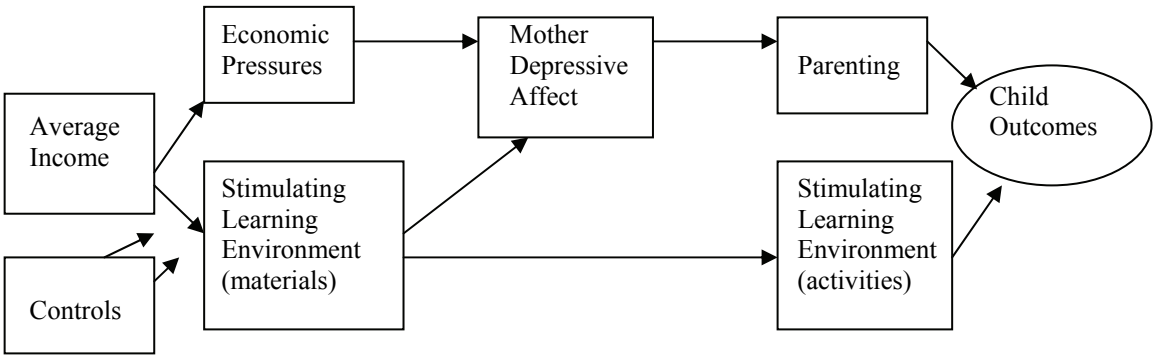
DHS wanted to understand the impact of the loss of BSF Child Care Assistance in order to inform future policy decisions. Concerns about the impact on children and families due to loss of the BSF program included: short-term harm that could result from children being left alone to care for themselves inappropriately; disruptions to parental employment due to the loss of stable child care if parents could no longer afford their current child care arrangement; and increased use of other public assistance programs (such as MFIP, Food Support or Medical Assistance) because of the economic stress of losing the financial support available through BSF assistance. Concerns about the longer-term impact of the loss of child care assistance included the potential for poor early childhood school readiness, and general education and child behavior outcomes that would lead to lagged academic performance in later years. As these outcomes would be measurable only with the passage of time, they are not investigated in the present study.

How Would the Loss of Basic Sliding Fee Influence Family and Child Outcomes?

Child Care Assistance, Investment and Stress Theories

The multiple aspects of family economics and stress that can affect child outcomes are complex and interrelated. Because child care assistance is just one economic support, this resource likely plays a role in combination with other resources. Two theories have dominated research on child outcomes as they relate to economics: family stress, and investment theories. Family stress theory emphasizes the ways in which economic stress will affect parent-child interaction. Investment theory focuses on the materials and resources that parents are able to purchase to meet the child's physical and developmental needs. In current research, family stress and investment theories are usually considered in combination. These two theories are examined.

Figure 2. Integrated Family Investment and Stress Model



Combination of human capital and family stress mediator's models. (Reproduced and used with permission, Brooks-Gunn, 2006)

The family economic system is characterized by direct and indirect effects in which child care assistance plays a role. As an economic support, CCAP contributes to the parents' ability to work and pay bills. One direct effect of BSF CCAP on the family economic system is the money that is saved by the receipt of BSF Child Care Assistance that is available for other family needs. If BSF CCAP is no longer available, families may have fewer economic resources to meet other needs. (This effect of BSF is most clearly represented by the "Economic Pressures" box in Figure 2.)

The amount of CCAP benefit paid on behalf of a child is a function of family income, family size, the number of children in care, and the cost of care. Therefore, the dollar amount of the economic support experienced by CCAP families will vary, but there is a relative nature to that amount of help. (Although a family of two with income that is relatively high will receive fewer actual CCAP dollars compared to a family of two with lower income, the relative effect of the receipt or loss of the program will be a result of all of the factors that contribute to each family's economic resources – including BSF.)

Child well-being as it relates to CCAP can be affected indirectly through the reduction of family stress because of the financial support provided by the program, support to parental employment, and the parents' ability to purchase quality child care that they might not otherwise be able to afford. Quality child care is comprised of several attributes, including reliability, stability, and an emphasis on

promoting short and long term positive academic outcomes. Quality child care can help parents to obtain and keep jobs if it allows them to be better, more reliable employees. These indirect effects are complex and interrelated (and difficult to untangle). The role that CCAP plays can be best inferred by a review of the literature relating to the multiple aspects of the impacts of family economics, employment, and income on families and children.

Costs of Child Care

Whether or not child care is available to working parents is partly a function of affordability. Federal guidelines recommend that families spend no more than 10 percent of their income on child care costs. However, a 2003 analysis of the affordability of child care arrangements based on family income in relation to state median income, and the current price of care in the Minnesota market, revealed that only .5 percent of centers and .8 percent of family child care would be affordable (within 10 percent of income) to families with incomes at 50 percent of the state median income. Families with incomes of less than $20,000 paid more than 32 percent of their earnings towards care. Only when incomes were more than $75,000 did the proportion of child care costs drop below the federally recommended 10 percent threshold. (Davis et al, 2004)

These findings are consistent with a 2004 statewide survey of child care use in Minnesota which found that families with the lowest incomes (those earning less than $20,000 annually), paid a much higher percentage of their income towards child care expenses, around 28 percent. The study also found that the average weekly cost for child care in Minnesota during 2004 was $111. (Chase et al, 2005)

Finally, data from the 1997 National Survey of America's Families showed that because child care costs are insensitive to the number of working parents in the family, single-parent families (having one wage earner) pay an average of 16 percent of their earnings towards child care costs, compared to dual-earner families who pay 7 percent. (Giannerelli et al, 2001) A family-level perspective on the costs of child care in relation to other household expenses for single parent families is offered in 2002 dollars by the Basic Needs Budget for Minnesota families. Built upon market analyses of regional basic living expenses of various family sizes, child care costs are consistently the second-highest expense for single-parent families, next to housing costs. (Ristau et al, 2003) (See Appendix B for examples of dual- and single-parent basic needs budgets from 2002 that include child care costs for families with two children.)

Self Care

Most parents choose to leave their children at home alone at some point, particularly when children reach older elementary and middle school ages. Self care is challenging to study and may be underreported as parents are not likely to freely admit that they leave their younger children alone. An additional complicating factor is that only Illinois and Maryland have state laws that clearly articulate when it is safe and legal to leave children home alone to care for themselves. In Minnesota, guidelines for appropriate self care vary by county; parents may be unsure about what is appropriate or even unaware that self-care can lead to contact with the child protection system. (See Appendix C for sample guideline language from three Minnesota metropolitan counties, National Child Care Information Center, Child Care Bureau, 2005.)

The occurrence and duration of self care varies by age; 11- and 12-year-olds are 10 times as likely as 5-7-year-olds to be left in some self care. (Kerrebrock, 1999) Another national estimate based on Census figures puts self care among children ages 5-14 at 6.9 million, or 20 percent in this age range. (Belsie, 2000) Minnesota parents reporting use of self care for children ages 10-12 is increasing: 41

percent during the school year, up from 26 percent in 2000; and 42 percent during the summer, up from 20 percent in 2000. (Chase et al, 2005)

Study Goals

The goals of this study were to examine the impact of the loss of Basic Sliding Fee Child Care Assistance on children and families, and to explore the utility of administrative data in examining these impacts.

Four types of data were analyzed for families who lost BSF CCAP. Data was compared during a 21-month pre-loss and 21-month post-loss period and included:

- Wages earned and hours worked
- Public assistance program use
- Child protection contacts
- Child school attendance.

To understand if the effects on families who lost BSF CCAP differed significantly from families who remained on the program, significant attempts were made to create a suitable control group of comparison families. Preliminary analysis indicated that the selected comparison group was sufficiently different from the group who lost BSF CCAP as to limit the worth of comparisons between the groups. Therefore, the results of the comparison analysis are not presented here. (See page 15 for a description on creation of the comparison group and comparability.)

Study Data, Participants and Design

Study Data and Record Matching Process

Child Care Assistance Program: Selecting the 'Loss and Gap' Families
Child care assistance was originally terminated for 505 families in 12 counties. Between the month of termination and the end of the calendar year, counties were able to reinstate assistance to 113 families. Rather than losing access to the program entirely, these families experienced an interruption in program access. These reinstated families were labeled "gap" families. Thirteen of the 505 families (2.8 percent) who originally lost BSF filed applications for reinstatement, but there was no data to indicate outcomes. These families were excluded from analysis since their CCAP status was unknown. Families who lost BSF CCAP and those who were identified as experiencing a gap in service were grouped for the analyses.

See Table 1 for a list of families included in the analysis by county in which they received their subsidy.

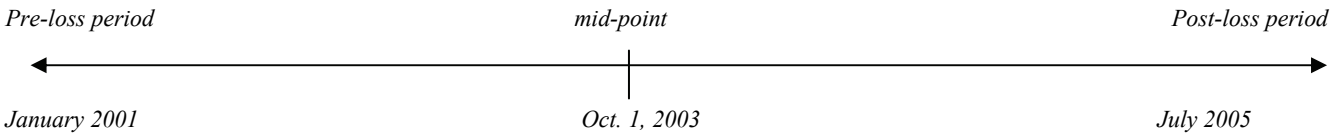
Table 1. Creation of the Core Study Group by County

12-county Core Study Group		Original Groups		
	Loss & Gap Families	Loss	Gap	Excluded
Chippewa	18	9	9	0
Clay	36	33	3	2
Crow Wing	7	7	0	0
Dakota	151	96	53	2
Freeborn	14	6	8	0
Isanti	19	13	5	1
Lake of the Woods	2	0	2	0
Lincoln, Lyon, Murray	1	1	0	0
Marshall	11	11	0	0
Ramsey	212	113	98	1
Sherburne	19	8	1	10
Watonwan	2	2	0	0
Total	492	299	179	16

Pre-loss and Post-loss Study Timeline

Each of the 12 counties were permitted to terminate assistance to their identified families as they completed their budget estimates and obtained DHS approval – therefore, not all counties closed cases at the same time. Case closures began in September 2003 and continued through December 2003. Oct. 1, 2003, was identified as the mid-point for the period during which cases identified for termination were closed, and was used as a proxy termination date for all families. The 21 months prior to that date comprised the study pre-loss period, and the 21 months following that date comprised the study post-loss period. (see Figure 3)

Figure 3. Pre- and Post-loss Study Periods Timeline (42 months)



Public Assistance Use

Minnesota has a statewide public assistance (welfare) computer eligibility and issuance system in place (MAXIS) that records program use of recipients, and includes a significant number of validated unique identifiers that makes the data particularly helpful. For example, reported Social Security numbers are validated against Social Security Administration records. This validation assists in identity determinations and facilitates wage matches which regularly occur with the Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED). An additional strength of the demographic data in the system is that cash public assistance programs require a face-to-face interview, which helps to clarify a need for interpreters (language spoken in the home), race and gender of applicants. For this study, MAXIS was used to not only obtain information on the public assistance program use of study families, but to validate existing unique identifiers on parents and children, as well as obtain missing identifiers. Minn-LInK has an agreement with the DHS to provide MAXIS data for study use upon request. Public assistance program use and identifiers were requested for study families 21 months prior to loss and for 21 months after.

To identify whether families and children matched to the public assistance system, data needed to be matched by a combination of parent Social Security number (if available), name and birth date. Child information was obtained from the household record once the parent(s) were identified. Program use information was provided in spans of program use, by program type, which was then quantified by family. A program span is the time from initial date of eligibility and receipt to the termination, or end date of eligibility and receipt. A span can cover weeks or a few months. The public assistance match rate for the core study group was 71.3 percent. Slightly fewer loss and gap families than comparison families were located in the public assistance records.

Child Protection

Once as many parent and child-level identifiers as possible were obtained from MAXIS, child protection records could be reviewed for contact with the child protection system. Minnesota also has a statewide electronic system for child welfare called Social Service Information System (SSIS). Data tables are provided to Minn-LInK periodically for the purpose of research on child well-being, so this data source was already available to the project. Having MAXIS data on families made child protection record reviews easier, as there are person-level unique identifiers common to both the MAXIS and SSIS systems, such as the Personal Master Index number (PMI).

Child protection records are built upon reports of child maltreatment and investigations. Both parents and children are recorded in the system as they relate to a given incident. There may be many incidents associated with a given child over a time period, and within each maltreatment investigation process more than one type of abuse or neglect may be identified. In families where more than one child is harmed there will be a report for each child. Because this study focused on the functioning of families, child protection events were quantified at the family level (although queries were run on both the children as well as parents, and the same 91 families were matched in both instances). For each pre- and post- loss period for each family, counts of substantiated maltreatment findings (harm determined to have occurred through an investigation), and counts of reports (allegations) were quantified at the family level. Out-of-home placements were not recorded due to the unreliability of data and small numbers of matching records. As anticipated, the broad match rate to the child protection system generally was quite low (12.3 percent).

Wages and Work Hours

The Social Security numbers of wage earners from all groups were provided to the Department of Employment and Economic Development for querying wages, work hours, and number of employers for the pre- and post-loss study periods. DEED data is stored by calendar quarter; data was requested for quarter one, 2002 through quarter two, 2005. This provided data on 42 months of employment activity, or seven quarters pre-loss and seven quarters post-loss, using Oct. 1, 2003, (the start of quarter four, 2003) as the cut-point for the pre- and post-loss periods. All earnings information was gathered for all known wage-earners in the household. If there were two known adult earners in the home according to child care and MAXIS records, the earnings for those adults were obtained from DEED and added for a household total. If there was another wage earner in the home, or if the wage earner changed at a later date, earnings for that individual were unknown to the study and could not be included in the analysis.

As indicated above, DEED provided earnings information of total work hours, total wages and number of employers. Hourly wages could only be calculated for earners if they had the same job over subsequent quarters. It was common to have an earner employed by two employers during one quarter, one employer during the second, two employers again in quarter three, and so on. Because data was

summed by quarter, number of employers was obtained by calculating an average quarterly number of employers. This was a less than ideal method of determining job change and number of jobs, but it gave some sense of when earners were increasing or decreasing the number of simultaneous employers during a given time frame. For each pre- and post-loss period for each family, the number of average quarterly jobs worked, total wages, and work hours were calculated. The match rate to DEED data for core study families who worked during both the pre- and post-loss periods was 89.5 percent, or 664 families.

Education

The education records of school-aged study children were matched for the 2003 and 2004 school years. The education system assigns its own unique identifier to students, making year-to-year matching quite easy. It is the initial external identification of children in the system that can be challenging, as the public education system does not share a unique identifier with the other data sets used in this study. Record matching must be done by name and birth date, occasionally the Social Security number, or a combination of names, birth dates and name spelling variations. Various demographics are available in the public education record set, including information that relates to disability (special education, primary disability and special education instructional setting), poverty (free and reduced price meal eligibility and access), and school attendance. Each student record has multiple spans for the entire school year that represent new updates to that record. The student data must be restructured, calculations for each child completed, and in the case of this analysis, unduplicated at the family level.

For each family, there may have been more than one child attending school, thus affecting how some measures could be analyzed. In the case of attendance, the changes for each child in the family were calculated between 2003 and 2004, and then averaged to create an average change in attendance per family. This takes a conservative approach that evens out any differences in attendance rates between children in the family; if one child had a unique situation that interfered with school attendance it was off-set by their sibling who attended more often. In this way, a family-level picture of school attendance was created. Meal program eligibility was based on family income – therefore, if one child was eligible, it was assumed that all children in the household were eligible, as it was a reflection of family financial circumstances.

The children in all study families were relatively young, and many were not school-age. Some children (N=133) were born after Oct. 1, 2003, (the pre- and post-loss mid-point date). A large percentage of children were preschool age (690 were age 4 or younger), and the balance were school age. This analysis was broken out by age group. The first described the attendance rates for children who would be age-eligible for child care assistance (up to age 12) as of Oct. 1, 2003. Because the outcome focus for the education data was on school attendance, it made sense to separate children by age. [1] Younger children who failed to attend school fell under a category (for child protection) called educational neglect, and were offered a family-centered school attendance improvement plan. Once age 12, a child not attending school becomes a truant (based on a juvenile justice model), and individualized plans for improvement were identified. This was a differentiation in practice driven by state law. While failure to attend school is a negative outcome for a child at any age, the service delivery consequences are very different depending upon age. Analyses were broken into two groups: those age 5-11, and those 12 and older. (Records for preschool-aged children were not sought from the education data.) For families with school-age children up to age 11 as of Oct. 1, 2003, records were located for children from 62.3 percent of families. For older students, ages 12-18, 92 percent of student records were located.

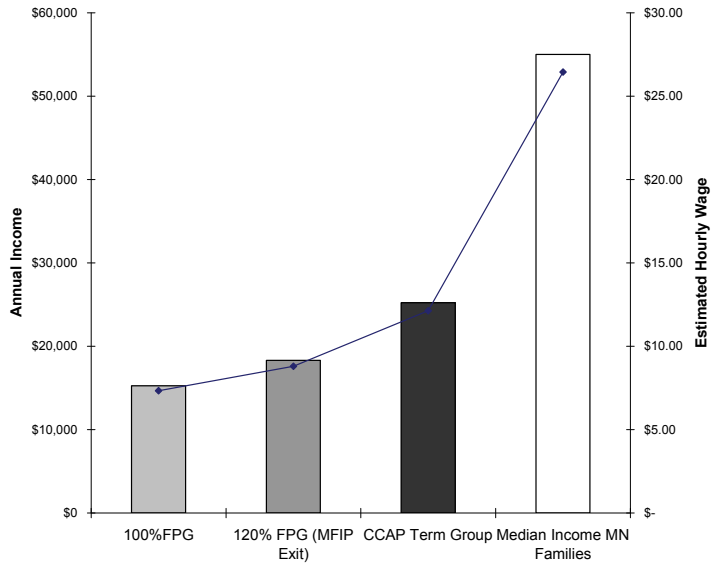
[1] Another practical factor was related to state agency staff time available to retrieve child-level data in phases.

Results

Characteristics of the 12-county Group (all those who originally lost CCAP)

The following descriptive analysis relates to families who either lost BSF entirely (loss families), or lost BSF temporarily (gap families) (N= 492). Nearly three-quarters of study families (71 percent) were headed by single parents, and heads of households (usually mothers) were on average 28 years of age. The average household size was three persons (usually a single parent and two children); an average of one child per household was using BSF child care assistance. At the time of termination from BSF, families had been on the program an average of just over one year (14 months);[2] the average annual income reported at their last eligibility review was $25,220 (165 percent of FPG for a family of three, and 46 percent of Minnesota's average state median income, 2001-2003, Census Bureau, Web accessed 9-6-06: http://www.census.gov/hhes/income/income03/statemhi.html). See Appendix A for further information on the Federal Poverty Guidelines.

Figure 5. Comparative Incomes – 2003 – Family of Three
(one wage earner, two children)



Economic Hardship – Wages and Use of Public Assistance

Wages

The average annual pre-loss earnings of BSF loss and gap families were $26,175 and post-loss, $29,198. Excluding those with $0 earnings in either the pre- or post-loss periods (N=20), these averages were $30,240 pre-loss and $34,462, post-loss, an increase of $4,000 to $5,000.

[2] Mean months of use were 13.79, median = 11.1, mode, 11.3, SD = 15.7, minimum months 0, and maximum 212 months.

When examining all BSF loss and gap family wage changes (including those with $0 income) by whether or not they experienced an increase or decrease in wages, comparing the pre- to post-loss periods, more than half (57.8 percent) experienced an increase, 10 percent experienced no change, and 32.2 percent experienced a decrease. Among those that experienced an increase, the average was $13,085 over the study period (21 months pre-loss, 21 months post-loss). Those experiencing a decrease saw their wages fall an average of $14,125.

Work Hours

Pre-loss, BSF loss and gap families worked an average of 2,122 hours and increased to 2,198 hours post-loss. In contrast to the wage analysis, work hours were not annualized, but were examined over the entire 21-month period (therefore, they were not comparable). When excluding families whose earners did not work in either the pre- or post-loss periods (working zero hours) (N=20), these averages changed to 2,451 hours pre-loss and 2,595 hours post-loss.

Examining all families (including those who were not working) by whether their work hours increased or decreased pre- to post-loss, exactly half (50.1 percent) experienced increased work hours, 10.4 percent had no change, and 39.5 percent experienced a decrease. For those with increased work hours, the average increase was 930 hours (comparing the 21-month post-loss period to the 21-month pre-loss period), and among those whose hours decreased, work hours fell by an average of 987 hours.

Jobs

Most families affected by the loss of BSF (74.5 percent) worked the same number of jobs, pre- to post-loss periods, 12.0 percent experienced a decrease, and 13.2 percent increased the number of jobs they were working. Those loss and gap families with increased jobs pre- to post-loss experienced increases on average of .85 jobs, while those who decreased jobs did so by the same amount (-.85). For the most part, families affected by the loss of BSF child care responded by increasing work hours in their existing jobs; the magnitude of this increase was approximately 22 hours per month on average, or about an additional five to six hours per week. The majority of families saw their incomes increase over this time period. This was linked to an increase in the number of jobs or the number of work hours or a combination of both.

Public Assistance Use

For BSF loss and gap families whose records matched the public assistance system, the average number of programs used during the pre-loss period was 1.9, and 1.2 during the post-loss period, a slight decrease. Families receiving BSF child care subsidies do not receive cash assistance from the state of Minnesota. However, some of the families were eligible for public assistance programs, including Minnesota's cash assistance programs (MFIP/DWP), Food Support or Medical Assistance. Families 'bumped' from the BSF program (or any family being served by the BSF program) could apply for MFIP or DWP (although income and asset limits are lower for MFIP/DWP and MFIP child care). If eligible and compliant with program requirements, they could receive not only cash assistance but a guaranteed child care subsidy during the hours they are in an approved activity (e.g., working).

Therefore, some program use during either period was expected. Nearly one-quarter (22.5 percent) of families experienced an increase in public assistance program use (other than BSF CCAP), pre- to post-loss, with the balance of the group having either no change in program use (11.8 percent, N=42), or a decrease in use (65.6 percent).

In addition to examining the change in the number of programs that families used before and after losing BSF child care, it is important to consider for how long families needed to use certain programs.

For some programs, the length of use by families was strongly influenced by program policies and requirements. For example, Emergency Assistance is a short-term program and the time-relevant data on use would usually be no more than 30 days. MFIP, the cash program for families in Minnesota, has a natural, 60-month time limit since the 1996 passage of federal welfare reform legislation. Medical Assistance use among working families has become increasingly common as fewer low-wage jobs offer health insurance. Therefore, it may be less effective as an indicator of severity of economic need. The remaining program for which eligibility is tied to income and has no natural time limits is Food Support (formerly called Food Stamps).

Of the families affected by the loss of BSF, 143 used Food Support sometime during the study period. Nearly half (49.5 percent) increased the average number of months of Food Support use after losing BSF, 44.8 percent decreased their use, and 5.7 percent had unchanged use. Among the families that increased their average months of Food Support, a handful (three) received only a few weeks more benefit than the pre-loss period. Of the remaining 65 families with increased months of Food Support, the average use was seven months, with a range of one month to 24 months.

Families affected by the loss or interruption of BSF Child Care did not dramatically increase their use of public assistance programs in the wake of the change. The use of the Food Support program was one possible exception to this general trend, nearly half of former BSF families increased the number of months in this program. Further linkages between wages and public assistance use were not explored due to the confounding factor of eligibility for public assistance programs being tied to the level of earnings.

Child Well-being, Child Maltreatment and School Attendance

Change in Child Protection Reports

When examining child protection reports, 63 families affected by the loss of BSF matched records in the child protection system. This match indicated only that they had some pre- or post-loss contact with the child protection system in Minnesota, and in most cases, this contact constituted a report that did not result in an investigation or finding. For a majority of families (70 percent) there was no change or a decrease in the number of reports to child protection pre- to post-loss, but for 20 families (30 percent), there was an increase in the number of contacts (reports or substantiated maltreatment). Twenty-one families had pre-loss period reports and 22 had post-loss reports. Of the 21 families with pre-loss reports, five also had post-loss reports.

Change in Child Protection Substantiated Maltreatment Findings

The numbers of families involved in a substantiated maltreatment finding were few: three families had a substantiated maltreatment finding pre-loss, and three post-loss. Substantiated maltreatment findings follow a report that is subsequently investigated and harm or neglect was determined to have occurred. When examining counts of substantiated maltreatment findings, 60 of the 63 matching families experienced a decrease or no change in the number of substantiated maltreatment findings pre- to post-loss, while three increased (4.8 percent). Of those families that had substantiated maltreatment during the pre-loss period, none appeared with substantiated maltreatment findings during post-loss.

Changes in School Attendance

Elementary Aged Children

The school records for elementary aged children (ages 5-11) from 116 families were located for the 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 school years. The attendance rates by family were averaged if there was more than one student in the home. In this group, 14.7 percent of families had children with stable

school attendance, and 42.9 percent (N=70 families) had attendance that improved from one year to the next. A nearly equal number (N=69 or 42.3 percent) had decreased attendance.

Middle and High School Aged Children
The families in this study were relatively young and few had older teens in the home. Sixteen families had teens in the home whose education records could be located for the 2003 and 2004 school years. More than half of these families' teens (68.8 percent or 11 families) experienced decreased average school attendance. Among five families with teens having decreased school attendance between 2003 and 2004, three also had elementary aged students with decreased attendance. This group is too small to be able to draw further conclusions, but may indicate that attendance problems can affect all children in a given family.

Families with Elementary Aged Children with Average Decreased (Poorer) Attendance
During the 1970s laws changed to decriminalize children (those under age 12) who were truant, in recognition that at young ages a child's school attendance is the responsibility of the parent. Older children who fail to attend school are considered truant and the intervention strategies are usually student-based, in contrast to interventions for young children which are family-centered. Attendance problems in young children are increasingly recognized as a strong predictor of later school failure and dropping out. Many researchers feel that the school attendance problems of young children are an indication of challenges (social, health, or economic) within the family that are creating barriers to school attendance. For this reason, the 69 families with elementary age children with decreased attendance in the wake of the loss of BSF were examined more closely through linkages in the administrative data. In particular, nearly all of the families (84.1 percent, N=58) matched public assistance records and about one-quarter (24.6 percent) matched the child protection system. Two of the three families with increased substantiated maltreatment findings were among these 69 families, and nine of the families (13 percent) had been involved in child protection reports. Fourteen (20.3 percent) of the 69 families had increased public assistance program use, pre- to post-loss.

Summary of the 12-county Group Analysis
Using administrative data to examine the outcomes of families who lost or experienced interrupted Basic Sliding Fee Child Care Assistance in 2003 has shown a mixed picture, with few outstanding trends. There is some indication that losing BSF had an impact on some families. Some used more public assistance programs following the loss of BSF, and most families affected increased their employment activity in the wake of the loss. There was no significant increase in child protection maltreatment findings, but reports to child protection did increase for a small proportion of families who lost child care. School attendance was very stable for elementary aged children in affected families. Given the small number of older teens who were associated with loss and gap families, it was difficult to draw conclusions about the possible relationships between those teens with decreased attendance and the attendance status (in this case, relative stability) of younger children. However, the drop in school attendance among the few teens in this study was cause for concern and may warrant future study.

Comparison Group

Creating the Comparison Group
In an attempt to determine whether the outcomes observed for loss and gap families were significantly different from families who may have remained on the Basic Sliding Fee program, comparison BSF cases were randomly selected from study counties. In winter 2005-06, the original termination

reporting data was referenced and those 12 counties that eliminated families from the BSF program were contacted and asked to participate in the study via the random selection of comparison cases. All Minnesota counties have familiarity with random case selection methods used for monthly federal reporting that involved use of the fourth and fifth digits of the Social Security number for head of household. This method was employed for the random selection of comparison cases. To avoid the possible selection of termination cases, participating counties were instructed to select cases that were active in the BSF program in the month following their county's month of termination. For example, if a county terminated their BSF loss cases during September 2003 they were asked to randomly select their comparison cases from BSF eligibility rolls during October 2003.

Examining Suitability of the Comparison Group

There was evidence that comparison families differed considerably from loss and gap families - sufficiently so as to make them less useful as comparisons for child and family outcomes. In particular, there were significant differences in race, with comparison families being much less likely to be Asian than loss or gap families. This difference was later discovered to be due to the removal of teen parents who had recently begun receiving BSF child care, many of whom were Asian in one large study county. In addition, the records of both the comparison families and the reduced sample of loss and gap families were matched to the public administrative data systems. Comparison families differed significantly from loss/gap families during the pre-loss study period in employment trends and income. Finally, not all 12 study counties were able to randomly select comparison cases, which greatly reduced the number of families who could be studied. In a number of ways, comparison families were considerably different from loss/gap families, resulting in an unhelpful comparison group for study.

Discussion

Study Context

It is important to consider characteristics of the families who were affected by the Basic Sliding Fee allocation reductions in 2003. BSF families were either no longer on or had never used cash public assistance programs (such as MFIP). They may have utilized Medical Assistance, or occasionally Food Support, but generally BSF was their main public program connection as they worked or attended school. If the degree to which families were connected to public programs had a bearing on their use of other public programs (public assistance or the likelihood of coming in contact with child protection services), then the loss of BSF may have been the reason why so few families showed up in the other data systems available for this study. If a family entered BSF without having first been connected to MFIP, their awareness of public programs and their ongoing eligibility for those services may have been relatively low. If the low awareness of child care assistance availability among working populations was any indication, there may have been a similar lack of awareness of other programs, and subsequent low utilization.

Self-care and Child Protection

Advocates and administrators have long speculated on whether or not there would have been child protection evidence of self-care when families did not have help paying for child care. This study revealed that although there may have been some evidence of increased reports to child protective services, families who lost Basic Sliding Fee Child Care Assistance did not appear in the child protection system associated with substantiated neglect findings. This finding did not necessarily

indicate that self-care was not occurring. It may have been that if self-care was a common response to the loss of a child care arrangement, it did not meet the threshold of severity to warrant child protection investigations. Child protection researchers often refer to a "surveillance effect," which describes the higher likelihood that children connected to other public systems (such as economic assistance programs) were likely to also come to the attention of child protection. If the surveillance effect was relevant to the BSF Child Care Assistance program, it may warrant monitoring of evidence of problems within families who lost access to this program.

Economics

Those who lost BSF assistance added work hours and increased wages. Based on timing, the increase in wages and work hours did appear to be a response to the loss of BSF. Work is a goal of welfare reform, yet evidence was lacking as to how this additional work activity may have affected families, and more important, whether additional earnings actually made up for the loss of BSF child care assistance. There was evidence that some families had higher rates of public assistance program use following the loss of BSF child care assistance. Use of additional public assistance programs was one indication of economic stress and constituted an expense to communities, as opposed to the tax revenue benefits that could have been realized when families' incomes were sufficient to contribute taxes and not use public services.

What Remains Unknown?

Administrative data only allows for certain perspectives
Administrative data captures information about certain types of hardship and needs, but not others. A number of factors that contributed to or indicated familial stress were invisible to the data sets used for this study. For instance, there were no data to indicate the safety, stability, or overall quality of child care that families were using, and for how many hours per week. In addition, it was unknown whether parents began working different shifts to make ends meet, doubled-up on housing to prevent homelessness, or were experiencing depression or mental health issues – all stressors that adversely affect child well-being.

One indication of this potentially important disconnect between the research questions and the available administrative data was provided by a post-loss survey that Ramsey County administered to its 212 families terminated from the program in fall 2003. A majority of respondents (82 percent) indicated that their household finances had been affected by the loss of BSF child care. These families also indicated that their employment or education had been affected (68 percent), and that their child care arrangements had changed (62.5 percent). Among those families whose child care arrangements had changed, 60 percent reported removing their child from care, 44 percent reported changing child care providers, and 29 percent reduced the number of hours their children were in care.

For those families whose employment or education were affected, almost half (48.3 percent) reported changing a work schedule, 42 percent had an adult reduce work hours, just over one-fourth (28 percent) reduced school hours, and the balance either quit school entirely (13 percent), or quit a job (18 percent). Among those who reported that their finances were affected by the loss of BSF, just over half were cutting back on housing costs (55.6 percent reported that they did not pay for all housing costs), and others were using credit cards more often, taking out loans, or paying bills by using savings; 29 percent, 25 percent, and 26 percent, respectively.

The survey offered respondents an opportunity to make additional comments about how the loss of child care affected their families. These comments were coded into general categories of effects (e.g., increased overall stress, cut-backs on food, faced a housing crisis), and a handful of respondents were selected based on the categories that were believed to have the highest family stress potential. There were 28 respondents whose comments included either increased general stress, cut-backs on food purchases, dealing with a housing crisis (such as eviction or foreclosure), or the sense that a new child care arrangement was less safe. Families generally reported cutting back on other things (such as food or housing) when they lost child care assistance, yet only a small portion (0-14 percent) reported applying for help with these areas from economic assistance. These results were consistent with the findings in the study. Although this survey was limited to one county, and had a relatively low return rate (47 percent), the results identified many issues that families faced in the loss of an economic support like child care assistance that could not be captured in the study's analysis of administrative data.

Child Care Provider Perspective is Absent

As a program intended to enhance access to child care in the marketplace, the success of CCAP relies heavily on the availability of child care providers willing to accept children whose parents receive a CCAP subsidy. This study did not investigate what community-level impacts may have transpired in the wake of BSF cuts. Without having access to child care data for these families, it was not possible to speculate about how providers may have been affected. The availability of providers may have been a critical factor for parents as they tried to maintain their employment and training.

Educational Findings are Limited

A true picture of how children were doing in the wake of their family's loss of BSF assistance was unclear. While education outcomes were an important measure of child well-being, a fairly significant portion of the children in BSF study families were of preschool age. For this reason, it is critical that future studies include analysis of child care data. Child care, particularly when children were in care for significant periods of time, was/is a critical component of early childhood development and school readiness. Therefore, the outcomes for a large proportion of this study group could not be adequately measured. Teens can also be vulnerable to economic changes in the family. Because the numbers of teens in the study families were very low, little could be said with certainty about the impact of the loss of BSF child care assistance on the few teen members of these families.

Other General Limitations to the Data

There were some challenges related to availability of data that inhibited the ability of the study to offer definitive conclusions about Basic Sliding Fee Child Care Assistance. Having reliable data on the length of time families used BSF prior to loss would have been helpful in determining the impact of the program. If BSF is considered a supportive or intervention-style program, knowing how long families relied upon it would be a critical piece of analysis when assessing its utility.

County agency variations in social service practices can play an important role in child and family outcomes; this study was limited in its geographic scope. Added to this is the relevance of local economies. If the intent was to examine the economic well-being of families and children, there has to be consideration of the economic well-being of the communities in which they reside. This will vary by city and county; these particular families may not have represented the outcomes of families and children elsewhere in Minnesota.

Related to the geographic focus of data, an unexpectedly high proportion of families affected by the loss of BSF child care were headed by teen parents; this was a reflection of an occurrence in one

county. Because assistance was terminated using the "last on, first off" method, and one large county had recently added a large group of teen parents onto the program, these families were disproportionately affected. The impact of the loss of BSF child care on families headed by teen parents with respect to the outcomes measured in this study was likely to differ from the impact on adult headed households. For example, teen parent starting wages in the pre-loss period were likely to be much lower than an older parent because of limited education and work experience, and their children were more likely to be younger.

Current Conditions and Recommendations

As of June 2007 the waiting list for Minnesota's Basic Sliding Fee child care assistance had 2,678 families; 35 counties had waiting lists. It is likely that there will continue to be interest in studying the outcomes of families who utilize this program, as well as those who do not have access to it. Because child care assistance helps to meet the second-highest major household cost for working families with children, the benefits of this program need to be carefully assessed within the family system (ideally measuring aspects of family investment and family stress).

Recommendations for Future Research

1. To promote a more robust analysis of the efficacy of the program, future studies should control for a number of factors that can influence family economic outcomes, as well as child outcomes. In particular, the design should control for maternal education level and type of activity in which parents are engaged (such as education and training and intensity of work). Other issues such as local agency case management practices and local economics can also affect outcomes and should be addressed. To control for these factors, a study may need to be conducted within one or more specific counties and results analyzed within rather than across counties. For child outcomes, the special education and disability status of children would need to be considered – factors that are relevant to both child educational outcomes, family stress, and often the ability to locate appropriate child care (which can in turn affect parental employment).

2. Child care data on the types of arrangements for children at all eligible ages should be incorporated into a study of program results. Important outcome variables would be the quality and stability of these arrangements. Transportation may also be a critical issue for some parents, as well as housing stability, and the presence of domestic violence.

3. Some consideration may be given to the employers of Basic Sliding Fee parents. Given the BSF program's role as a work support, assistance may allow employers to have access to employees who may otherwise be unable to work. The effect of the loss of BSF on employers would contribute to a broader understanding of the program's impact.

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APPENDIX A

Percentages of Federal Poverty Guidelines for 2003

Income Entry Point

Fam Size	100% Annual	100% Monthly	100% Hourly*	125% Annual	125% Monthly	125% Hourly*	150% Annual	150% Monthly	150% Hourly*	175% Annual	175% Monthly	175% Hourly*	185% Annual	185% Monthly
1	$ 8,980	$ 748	$ 4.32	$ 11,225	$ 935	$ 5.40	$13,470	$1,123	$ 6.48	$ 15,715	$1,310	$ 7.56	$16,613	$1,384
2	$ 12,120	$1,010	$ 5.83	$ 15,150	$ 1,263	$ 7.28	$18,180	$1,515	$ 8.74	$ 21,210	$1,768	$10.20	$22,422	$1,869
3	**$ 15,260**	**$1,272**	**$ 7.34**	**$ 19,075**	**$ 1,590**	**$ 9.17**	**$22,890**	**$1,908**	**$11.00**	**$ 26,705**	**$2,225**	**$12.84**	**$28,231**	**$2,353**
4	$ 18,400	$1,533	$ 8.85	$ 23,000	$ 1,917	$11.06	$27,600	$2,300	$13.27	$ 32,200	$2,683	$15.48	$34,040	$2,837
5	$ 21,540	$1,795	$10.36	$ 26,925	$ 2,244	$12.94	$32,310	$2,693	$15.53	$ 37,695	$3,141	$18.12	$39,849	$3,321
6	$ 24,680	$2,057	$11.87	$ 30,850	$ 2,571	$14.83	$37,020	$3,085	$17.80	$ 43,190	$3,599	$20.76	$45,658	$3,805
7	$ 27,820	$2,318	$13.38	$ 34,775	$ 2,898	$16.72	$41,730	$3,478	$20.06	$ 48,685	$4,057	$23.41	$51,467	$4,289
8	$ 30,960	$2,580	$14.88	$ 38,700	$ 3,225	$18.61	$46,440	$3,870	$22.33	$ 54,180	$4,515	$26.05	$57,276	$4,773
9	$ 34,100	$2,842	$16.39	$ 42,625	$ 3,552	$20.49	$51,150	$4,263	$24.59	$ 59,675	$4,973	$28.69	$63,085	$5,257
10	$ 37,240	$3,103	$17.90	$ 46,550	$ 3,879	$22.38	$55,860	$4,655	$26.86	$ 65,170	$5,431	$31.33	$68,894	$5,741
11	$ 40,380	$3,365	$19.41	$ 50,475	$ 4,206	$24.27	$60,570	$5,048	$29.12	$ 70,665	$5,889	$33.97	$74,703	$6,225
12	$ 43,520	$3,627	$20.92	$ 54,400	$ 4,533	$26.15	$65,280	$5,440	$31.38	$ 76,160	$6,347	$36.62	$80,512	$6,709
13	$ 46,660	$3,888	$22.43	$ 58,325	$ 4,860	$28.04	$69,990	$5,833	$33.65	$ 81,655	$6,805	$39.26	$86,321	$7,193
14	$ 49,800	$4,150	$23.94	$ 62,250	$ 5,188	$29.93	$74,700	$6,225	$35.91	$ 87,150	$7,263	$41.90	$92,130	$7,678

Ineligible

Fam Size	200% Annual	200% Monthly	200% Hourly*	250% Annual	250% Monthly	250% Hourly*
1	$ 17,960	$1,497	$ 8.63	$ 22,450	$ 1,871	$10.79
2	$ 24,240	$2,020	$11.65	$ 30,300	$ 2,525	$14.57
3	**$ 30,520**	**$2,543**	**$14.67**	**$ 38,150**	**$ 3,179**	**$18.34**
4	$ 36,800	$3,067	$17.69	$ 46,000	$ 3,833	$22.12
5	$ 43,080	$3,590	$20.71	$ 53,850	$ 4,488	$25.89
6	$ 49,360	$4,113	$23.73	$ 61,700	$ 5,142	$29.66
7	$ 55,640	$4,637	$26.75	$ 69,550	$ 5,796	$33.44
8	$ 61,920	$5,160	$29.77	$ 77,400	$ 6,450	$37.21
9	$ 68,200	$5,683	$32.79	$ 85,250	$ 7,104	$40.99
10	$ 74,480	$6,207	$35.81	$ 93,100	$ 7,758	$44.76
11	$ 80,760	$6,730	$38.83	$100,950	$ 8,413	$48.53
12	$ 87,040	$7,253	$41.85	$108,800	$ 9,067	$52.31
13	$ 93,320	$7,777	$44.87	$116,650	$ 9,721	$56.08
14	$ 99,600	$8,300	$47.88	$124,500	$10,375	$59.86

* Hourly wage assumes that parent is working full-time. Most Child Care Assistance families are headed by single parents with two children in the household for a family size of 3.

Data Source: Office of the Assistant Secretary of Planning and Evaluation, U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services
http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/03poverty.htm

Appendix B

The Cost of Living in Minnesota, 2002

Monthly Budget for Two-parent Families Both Parents Working, one Child

	1 Child
Housing	$757
Transportation	$569
Child care	$488
Net taxes	$482
Food	$406
Health care	$293
Clothing/other necessities	$249
Monthly total	**$3,244**
Hourly wages needed	**Two earners, $9.36 per hour, full time**

Monthly Budget for Two-parent Families, Both Parents Working, Two Children

	Two children
Housing	$1,009
Child care	$697
Net taxes	$540
Food	$509
Transportation	$469
Health care	$339
Clothing/other necessities	$290
Monthly total	**$3,953**
Hourly wages needed	**Two earners, $11.41 per hour, full time**

Monthly Budget for Single-parent Families, one Child

	One Child
Housing	$757
Child care	$488
Net taxes	$410
Transportation	$389
Food	$248
Health care	$228
Clothing/other necessities	$203
Monthly total	**$2,763**
Hourly wages needed	**$15.71 per hour, full time**

Monthly Budget for Single-parent Families, Two Children

	Two Children
Housing	$757
Child care	$697
Transportation	$389
Net taxes	$380
Food	$365
Health care	$275
Clothing/other necessities	$249
Monthly Total	**$3,112**
Hourly wages needed	**$17.95 per hour, full time**

Methodology on family expenses available at http://www.jobsnowcoalition.org/index.asp?Type=B_PR&SEC={1FD51215-3203-4166-8190-6AD41BE1DD8A}&DE={24EFE804-2B2F-4C74-9533-8ACD936C036C}

Appendix C

Self care Guidelines from Three Minnesota Counties

Dakota

Counties will establish guidelines for investigating lack of supervision/neglect:

- Reports of children ages 7 and under left alone for any period of time
- Reports of children ages 8 and 9 who are alone for more than two hours
- Reports of children ages 10-13 alone for more than 12 hours
- Reports indicating that children ages 14-17 are unsupervised while parents are absent for more than 24 hours will be screened, considering adequate adult supervision.

Web site: http://www.co.dakota.mn.us/Departments/Attorney/FAQ/WhatAgeChildLeftHomeAloneHowLong.htm
Accessed on: Mar. 30, 2007

Hennepin

Assessments for neglect/lack of supervision will be conducted upon the following:

- Children under age 8 left alone for any period of time.
- Children ages 8, 9 and 10 left alone for traditional latchkey hours under certain circumstances (before and after school).
- Children alone for more than 24 hours if parents' whereabouts are unknown to children. In all of above CPS will involve police for immediate safety check of children where appropriate.
- Children ages 11-14 may baby-sit with the expectation that an adult will return later in the day.
- Children ages 15 and older may baby-sit for more than 24 hours.

Web site:
http://wwwa.co.hennepin.mn.us/portal/site/HCInternet/menuitem.3f94db53874f9b6f68ce1e10b1466498/?vgnextoid=159b60a6bb9fc010VgnVCM1000000f094689RCRD&vgnextfmt=default
Accessed on: Mar. 30, 2007

Ramsey

The child is left alone or is held responsible for siblings or other children for extended periods of time and in circumstances beyond the child's chronological age, social maturity or judgment to handle safely. This includes the child's exposure to or expectations to manage environmental hazards. Assessments will be conducted on the following:

- Children ages 5 and younger left alone for any period of time.
- Children ages 6-9 alone for more than three hours.
- Children ages 10-13 alone for more than 12 hours.
- Children alone for more than 24 hours if parents' whereabouts are unknown to children. In all of above, CPS will involve police for immediate safety check of children where appropriate.
- Children 11-14 may baby-sit with the expectation that an adult will return later in the day.
- Children ages 15 and older may baby-sit for more than 24 hours.

Web site: http://www.mnchildcare.org/businesses/summer.php#home
Accessed on Mar. 30, 2007