Union County is located in the southwestern part of Illinois, with a population of 17,808 (2010 U.S. Census). Union County is home to persons identifying themselves as White (94.8%), Black (0.9%), or Hispanic/Latino (4.8%). According to the U.S. Census, 20% of residents live at or below the federal poverty level (FPL), compared to the state rate of 13.3%.

Union County was formed in 1818, the same year that Illinois joined the union, hence, the name “union county.” The county seat is Jonesboro, a community of about 2,000 people.

Children under the age of 5 years constitute approximately 6% of the population of Union County. Early care and education in the county are provided by Head Start, Preschool for All (PFA), and child care settings (including licensed child care centers, licensed family child care homes, and license-exempt child care centers or homes).

The Illinois Early Intervention Program (funded by IDHS) provides services in the home to children with disabilities, birth to age 3. Preschoolers with special needs (ages 3-5) may be served in PFA sites, Head Start programs, child care settings, early childhood special education classrooms, or the home.
According to population estimates reported on IECAM (2008 census estimates), 44% of 3- and 4-year-old children in Union County are living in families at or below 185% FPL (first PFA priority level).

The map (top right) shows the distribution of publicly funded preschool sites in Union County (divided into townships). The color ramp (in the legend) indicates the percentage of 3- and 4-year-old children who live in households with an income at or below 185% FPL. Note that those townships in the darker shades of brown reveal a higher percentage of poverty. The map highlights the importance of locating PFA and Head Start sites in areas of highest need.

Child Care in Union County

The map (bottom right) shows the distribution of child care settings superimposed on the county (divided into townships). Note that the red squares indicate licensed child care centers and the green dots family child care homes. Although child care centers serve children who live above 185% FPL, many children from low-income families are cared for in child care settings all over the county.