



Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment **ADDENDUM**

Region 20

(Edwards, Gallatin, Hamilton, Hardin, Pope, Saline,
Wabash, Wayne, & White Counties)



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Introduction

In 2021, the Illinois Commission on Equitable Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Funding issued a report with findings that highlighted the inequities in ECEC funding in Illinois and the need to create a better statewide infrastructure to support ECEC professionals, expand services and programs for families and caregivers, and increase enrollment in ECEC programs. The report focused on the importance of addressing racial inequities and the need to include local voices in the conversation funders and decisionmakers were having about ECEC.

The experiences and knowledge families, caregivers, and Early Childhood professionals gain while navigating the complexities of the State's ECEC system is valuable, and understanding their lived experience in the local context is vital for decisionmakers to ensure communities have access to the programs, services, and supports they need. To this end, Birth to Five Illinois was created to harness family and caregiver voices in ECEC and serve as a bridge between the communities and policymakers so family, caregiver, and professional experiences can guide the decisions made to expand or enhance services across the State.

Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessments

Between August 2022 and May 2023, Regional Teams throughout the State met with their local Action Council and Family Council to talk about Early Childhood data and hear about their experiences with ECEC programs and services. They also conducted focus groups, interviews, held community listening sessions, and conducted surveys to gather additional feedback from caregivers, ECEC professionals, and priority populations in their Region. A community report, the Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment, was completed in June 2023. However, recognizing that not all community members had a chance to provide their feedback on data or share their experiences in the original Regional Needs Assessment, additional feedback was collected through community events and meetings, and this Addendum was created to complement the existing report. The new information provided by community members, agencies, organizations, and other community stakeholders is listed below.

Early Childhood Education & Care (ECEC) Programs

Community members provided the most feedback on ECEC programs outside of child care, focusing on Early Intervention (EI) and Prevention Initiative (PI) programs.

- "If you cut your treatment down you get paid less. Early Intervention is the only system that still gets paid per unit, which is crazy. I feel like cutting service time is the only way to get everything done. If I have 7-8 kids scheduled in three different towns in one day, it's not working."
- "Early Intervention, you have to insure yourself. I wonder why EI can't have a group plan?"

It was noted that one PI program increased the number they are serving to include prenatal. The 2020 data stated four PI programs serving 137 children. According to the 2021 data, four PI programs served 145 children.

Providers also reiterated the need for mental health services and resources, especially in Early Childhood (EC) settings and schools. One noted that Family Resource Developers would be an asset in EC settings working with families to help link children and their families to mental health services. However, there was a concern that families and caregivers were not aware of the services available to them.

- "Who is not making it into the system? Who are we not counting? I'd love to know about those families and why are they not accessing services? I worry about those families."
- "If physicians\family doctors would tell new mothers about Early Childhood during well-child checks the information would get out to almost everyone."

One provider also talked about how the lack of ECEC programs and services impacts not only families, but also professionals.

- "Families feel very upset when they can't receive services. It's very hard as a provider to tell them they're on a waitlist and we can't provide services. They're defeated. Then it leads to burnout for me because I take more kids and work 10 hours a day."

Early Childhood Education & Care (ECEC) Workforce

EC professionals provided feedback on the workforce data in the report. They discussed the need to prioritize parent education and connect them to resources that can support their relationship with the children in their care.

They also noted that work from home jobs are impacting the workforce in the post-COVID-19 pandemic era. This has reshaped how families access and utilize child care.

Others discussed that programs need to recognize their role in fostering social-emotional learning and growth, but some do not seem to be aware of it.

Next Steps

As Regional Teams continue their conversations with caregivers, ECEC professionals, and community stakeholders, their stories and experiences with ECEC programs and services will be recorded and shared with state and local agencies, legislators, funders, and decisionmakers. We hope our work will contribute to reimagining an EC system that is more equitable for all families and support the incredible work ECEC professionals do every day.