



Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment **ADDENDUM**

Region 31
(Kane County)



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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.

Local Community Collaborations

A community partner mentioned she wished they knew what the eligibility requirements were for the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) and other programs because when they want to refer families, they themselves do not know the requirements.

Aunt Martha's Health & Wellness¹ has a referral system on their website that can connect families and caregivers to wraparound services in the area, including food, housing, household supplies, transportation, education, legal assistance, health services, and child care support.

Some community members gave feedback on the Elgin Partnership for Early Learning (EPEL).

- “Siento que si hay muchos programas para los pequeños, pero falta información, o como acudir, los problemas de las listas de espera tambien. Nunca había oído de EPEL, no sé cómo funciona, lo desconozco, en las reuniones que voy veo que siempre somos las mismas caras, pudiéramos hacer como folletos para hacer más grande la propaganda para los programas, para que valla mas gente.” - Padre
- Translation: "I feel that there are many programs for little ones, but there is a lack of information, or how to access them, there is the problem of waiting lists, too. I had never heard of EPEL, I do not know how it works. In the meetings I go to, I see that we are always the same faces. We could make brochures to make the marketing for the programs bigger so that more people attend." - Parent

Another caregiver said that they would like to see more collaboration between EPEL and other agencies/organizations that serve young children and their families, such as local libraries and park districts. Additionally, community members would like to see the Collaboration help support parents as they teach their children.

It was noted that World Relief, an organization that serves refugee and immigrant families with children ages birth to five, often works with other local organizations and Early Childhood Collaborations to support their clients with the following:

- Assist with the **Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)** enrollments.
- Connect families to community resources.
- Assist with preschool and Early Intervention enrollment.
- Provide car seats and car seat safety training to families through a partnership with Northwestern Medicine.
- Co-host a playgroup with SPARK at New England Congregational Church in Aurora
- Assist families with finding child care.
- Provide training to school staff and/or community partners regarding the population of families they are serving.

According to World Relief, Kane County continues to see a high influx of refugees settle here, many of them with young children. As a result, they are working to create more programs and support for this target population.

¹ <https://www.auntmarthas.org/community-support/am4you/>

Early Childhood Education & Care (ECEC) Programs

One community partner said they wished there was a way to get updated information about ECEC programs and supports because many times what is available is not up to date. Oftentimes, they find information on group meeting times or contact person are out of date. Another provider noted that support offered to families is often segmented. There is no fluid line of support for families who need social services and tangible materials like food and diapers. Families must go to the specific types of support they need and enter a new way/registration process each time. One provider noted that, “Even if there is funding, I might have to turn a family away from what they need because of the zip code they live in.”

- “I think it isn’t just the cost, but I also know the quality has been an issue that keep[s] many parents fearful of selecting child care for their children even if they qualify for state support to pay for it. Due to this, a parent may feel the need to stay home rather than work, which leads the family to struggle even more financially.”

Another community member suggested that in the absence of a program, perhaps providers can connect with children and families in their homes.

- “Si no hay un programa debería de haber alguno que valla casa por casa, y llegar a fondo, de ver que esa persona necesita la ayuda, y la puedan ayudar, porque al final terminan diciendo que sí, y aceptando la ayuda.”
- Translation: “If there is no program, there should be [a provider] that goes house to house, and gets to the bottom of it, to see if that person needs help, and they can help them, because in the end they end up saying yes and accepting the help.”

There was concern expressed by one community member that child care centers have lost enrollment to public school preschool programs. As they have lost families to publicly funded programs, they are left with open spots they cannot fill and program costs they cannot cover.

A Head Start provider noted, “We have two Head Start programs in Elgin we are trying to fill up because we don’t want to lose those spots. We’re trying to get the word out there.”

Early Childhood Education & Care (ECEC) Workforce

The feedback on the ECEC workforce section mainly focused on partnerships between community organizations and agencies meant to increase the number of Early Childhood professionals in the Region.

- Partnering to Lead and Empower District-Grown Educators (PLEDGE) program is a partnership between Northern Illinois University (DeKalb County) and Elgin Community College (Kane County). This collaboration works on expanding and diversifying the educator workforce to match the diversity of students in Illinois’ schools.
- Northern Illinois University (NIU) partnered with Elgin Community College to establish an online, nighttime program for students interested in pursuing an Early Childhood Education degree but who are unable to relocate to attend NIU. Student teaching is

completed in their own community, which often leads to local job offers. The two schools work together for a strong transition from one school to the other for higher success rates by the students in both Elementary and Early Childhood Education programs.

- Valley Education for Employment System (VALEES) member district high schools and Area Career Centers in southern Kane County offers Illinois State Board of Education approved Early Childhood Education and Education Programs of Study (POS) for high school students; these POS provide a sequence of high school coursework aligned to a career area of interest that includes academic, technical, and essential employability skills, is aligned to the needs of the labor market, progresses in specificity, and culminates in the attainment of a postsecondary credential or early college credit. The program is currently available at five high schools.
- Education Navigators, who work at the YWCA connect those interested in Early Childhood Education with appropriate programs at two- and four-year colleges to obtain additional degrees/licenses/credentials and bring awareness to scholarship opportunities. The goal is to increase the number of degree-holding early childhood professionals, which will provide the opportunity to receive higher pay and hopefully stay longer in the industry.

Early Childhood professionals discussed the challenges they have had working in the field. They reiterated the need for better pay, with some suggesting the State do more to supplement the pay of child care workers.

- “Yes, I have a baby that is 1.5 years old, and I was trying to find a child care where she can go so I can start working or going to school because only my husband works. There is a program that visits me at my home from a child care, but they have a huge waitlist, they told me it will take like a year for my baby to be able to go there. We don’t have enough teachers, because they don’t have enough incentives, and people don’t want to do the job. There is a lot of what was mentioned in this presentation in my community.” - Parent
- “Some people I know, they wanted to work in the child care centers, and their requirements are horrific, she was willing, she was able, back in her country she was educated, a university graduate, they asked her to get all the things back home and translate them, by the time she was done she didn’t want to work for \$11 an hour. It’s a big responsibility just to go through the entire process to get the license, but the people that have the desire are not compensated well. This is why we don’t have a lot of child cares. Who wants to work like that with all the responsibility?”
- “I’m an OT [Occupational Therapist], I go to different centers, there is a language barrier. We’re also not understanding how best to support the teachers and staff, but it ranges, because there are centers where they have great funding, and there are other centers where they have the space but don’t have the resources. There are translators, but the progress is slower because there’s a lack of communication. There is a lack of resources and support as a provider, at school they teach you where not to go, like don’t do EI because of this, but it would be nice if they said do EI and here’s the support.”

- “We are not compensating the people that are bilingual and also culturally competent accordingly. Everybody speaks Spanish, so they’re not getting compensated for what they offer. They need to start valuing our skills, it’s a skill that not many people have.”

Lastly, one member expressed concerns about staff having the necessary qualifications to work as a provider, and that someone is ensuring providers are meeting training requirements.

Parent/Family/Caregiver Voice

Many parents and caregivers provided feedback during dissemination on what they felt was missing or what they wanted emphasized in the Addendum. Some reaffirmed that income limitations were a barrier to accessing child care, and others spoke to the challenge of completing paperwork (specifically the State’s insurance application). Others talked about not qualifying for services and programs because they lived outside of the service delivery area.

- “Yo cuando estaba en el programa ponía en el Facebook a donde íbamos, y una amiga me contacto, no recuerdo donde se llama el lugar donde ella vive y su niño tiene autismo... y ella quería saber del programa, pero el programa no estaba donde ella vive. Como padre es desesperante.”
- Translation: “When I was in the program, I put on Facebook where we were going, and a friend contacted me, I don't remember the name of the place where she lives and her child has Autism.... and she wanted to know about the program, but the program wasn't where she lives. As a parent it is exasperating.”

Another caregiver discussed their experience with a Parent as Teachers program, saying:

- “Apenas recibió la visita. Ellos traen su programa, pero dijeron que no siempre traen material didáctico, que nosotros teníamos que proveer el material. El gobierno debería de dar mas fondos para esos programas.”
- Translated: “He just received a visit. They bring their program, but they said that they do not always bring teaching material, that we had to provide the material. The government should provide more funds for these programs.”

Finally, one parent discussed the need for more economic and workforce development supports for stay-at-home caregivers, who are unable to pursue work opportunities outside of the home due to their familial responsibilities.

Additional Regional Needs

Community members noted some additional Regional needs:

- More outdoor activities organized by community organizations, aimed at improving the health and wellbeing of children.
- An organization to support parents/caregivers to teach their children how to be a contributing and successful member of the community.
- More parent/caregiver support groups.
- Increased awareness of Early Intervention (EI) programs, and addressing the stigma related to utilizing EI.

Additional Regional Recommendations

One additional recommendation was created:

- A study should be conducted that follows children from birth to age five, from different socio-economic backgrounds, to show how their accessibility to ECEC programs and services impacts life outcomes.

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 Early Childhood system that is more equitable for all families and support the incredible work ECEC professionals do every day.