



Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment **ADDENDUM**

Region 39

(Macon & Piatt 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 reported that the only Head Start program in Piatt County, located in Cisco, has suspended services due to not being able to hire a qualified teacher, which has left the Region with 19 fewer Head Start slots. The program reported they are still searching for a new teacher and are hopeful to reinstate the preschool classroom.

- “We had students pull out of our offering [Monticello Preschool For All (PFA) classes] because they were offered a spot there full time and now no longer have a preschool to attend.” - Assistant Principal (Piatt County)

A community member also discussed how the cost of child care for her infant was as much as her college tuition. Research shows that a slot in an infant classroom in a licensed child care center in Macon County costs \$280 per week (or \$14,560 per year). The reported cost of tuition at a state school such as Eastern Illinois University is \$12,809 per year, and \$12,474 per year at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

The following is a correction to the original Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment.

The information provided in the original report mistakenly used incorrect data for Meridian School District #15. The original information provided data for Meridian School District #223; however, it should have been for Meridian School District #15. The number of preschool slots should be 80.

Unit School District	Number of Children Ages Three to Five	Children Ages Three to Five at or below 200% FPL	Preschool for All (FY 2021)	Preschool for All-Expansion (FY 2021)	Head Start (FY 2021)
Meridian CUSD 15	186	52	80	0	0

Early Childhood Education & Care (ECEC) Workforce

One community member shared that Richland Community College reinstated their Early Childhood Education associate degree, beginning for the fall 2024 semester.

Additional Regional Recommendations

One additional recommendation was developed as a result of the community discussions.

- The State should create a shared computer system to make accessing birth certificates for programs and families easier akin to the statewide system school nurses can access for vaccination records. This would help to eliminate barriers created to public and private programs for families, specifically foster families.

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.