



# Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment **ADDENDUM**

## **Region 45**

(Monroe & Randolph 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.

## Regional Community Landscape

New data was provided by a community partner regarding the number of students who were reported to be experiencing homelessness during the 2022–2023 school year.

“Affordable and livable housing is the biggest need. There is also a need for an evening/night food pantry. Also, we see a big issue with dental care as people must travel far distances. The number of homeless in the Region is greater than reported.” - ROE #45 Director of Student Services (Monroe & Randolph Counties)

In total, 296 children were reported as experiencing homelessness in ROE #45 during the 2022–2023 school year. Below are the number of students, per town:

- Valmeyer: 16
- Columbia: 5
- Waterloo: 24
- Coulterville: 38
- Red Bud: 104
- Prairie Du Rocher: 9
- Steelville: 1
- Chester: 19
- Sparta: 80

## Early Childhood Education & Care (ECEC) Programs

One community partner shared news about expanded programming and services in the Region. Brightpoint received a grant to provide Home Visiting services to 64 families in Monroe and Randolph Counties. They will have four to five Home Visitors in the Region and are hoping to also add a bilingual Home Visitor to their staff.

## Early Childhood Education & Care (ECEC) Workforce

Two community members offered feedback on the ECEC workforce in the Region.

- “We are short on teachers. One teacher finished her coursework to become certified and the ROE told me that it was going to take 12 weeks (about 3 months) to get her certificate. I needed her to work sooner than that; it is like they do not care about Early Childhood Education and Care like they do K-12.” - Child Care Center Director (Monroe County)

Another voiced concerns about the delay in obtaining funds from the Strengthen and Grow grant they had received, saying that it was difficult to continue operating when the money was not available.

## Additional Community Feedback

One community member shared that there is a new bus route in the works for Belleville Memorial Hospital from the cities of Steelville, Chester, and Waterloo. Days, times, and the cost of the service are still being determined. There is also a new program called “Go Local” where residents in the cities of Sparta, Steelville, Chester, and Red Bud can get bus transportation within their city for a reduced price of \$3.00.

## Additional Regional Needs

Community members discussed and reiterated the need for more steps to be taken to ensure equitable wages and compensation for the Early Childhood Education workforce.

## 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.