



Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment **ADDENDUM**

Region 49
(Rock Island 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.

Early Childhood Education & Care (ECEC) Programs

Community members had the most feedback on the ECEC program section of the report.

One community member said that providers are finding it difficult to make programmatic-level changes, such as addressing behavior issues because resources are not readily available and have long wait lists. Additionally, one community member noted that the requirements for attending publicly funded programs are too narrow and exclude too many children; because of this, many children who need services miss out because they do not fit the requirements to attend.

Some also noted that some families do not need or want to access licensed or license-exempt child care because they have found alternate supports. One community member said that some women are finding it more viable to stay at home, negating the need for outside care; another said that some families in the Region, specifically those from Africa, tend to rely on friends, family members, or neighbors to care for their children. While some families find that their child care options align with their work schedules, others struggle. It was noted that some family child care fills the needs of second shift caregivers; that same option is not readily available for third shift workers.

Another discussion that came up during the dissemination of our initial report was the involvement of the business community and how they might support Early Childhood programs. One community member asked if local businesses have considered subsidizing child care slots, while another asked if grants offered to companies (e.g., manufacturing) that promote built-in onsite child care facilities might help address barriers faced by those that work second and third shift hours.

Early Childhood Education & Care (ECEC) Workforce

Some community members provided feedback on the ECEC workforce, as well. One noted that there needs to be incentives to impact the recruitment and retainment of ECEC professionals, while another spoke to the background check that is part of the hiring process. They wondered if there was a way to gain pre-clearance through a social security number that would allow them to begin working in an ECEC program while the full background check is completed. One asked how the cost of child care versus attending college translates into salaries for Early Childhood professionals.

Another community member said that we needed more emphasis on Infant Mental Health support and questioned whether, with proper training, a bachelor's level early childhood professional could provide mental health support rather than requiring a master's level clinician.

Here are some additional quotes from other community members:

- "Is the rising minimum wage in Illinois impacting our workforce issues, too?"
- "I could not survive on that low pay (of ECEC staff) and is why I worked two jobs simultaneously over seven years."

Additional Regional Needs

- There are no children's hospitals in the Region.
- To increase language accessibility for parents and caregivers with limited English proficiency for improved service delivery and to ensure that families understand the documents they are signing.

Additional Regional Recommendations

- The State should track prior ECEC programming for children entering kindergarten.

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.