



# Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment **ADDENDUM**

**Region 54**  
(Vermilion 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

Community members wondered why there was no formal, local Early Childhood (EC) community collaboration in the Region, noting that, "Having a community collaboration might help with all resources in one spot."

## Early Childhood Education & Care (ECEC) Programs

A community member stated that the church that she works at is trying to open a child care center; another noted that their school district went from two part-day preschool classrooms to one full-day classroom. This helps parents who work a full-time job, because they do not have to patch together child care or provide transportation from one provider to another. However, it was

noted that there is quite a bit of paperwork and extensive requirements to get licensed without much support for organizations that are going through the process.

It was also noted that the unemployment rate in Vermilion County increased from 5.1% to 7.1% between August 2022 and August 2023. Community members wondered if the lack of child care could be a reason for the increase.

According to the Illinois Early Childhood Asset Map (IECAM) 2022 data, there are two Early Head Start (EHS) and four Head Start (HS) sites, where EHS is funded for 48 children and HS is funded for 271 children. Presently, there are no EHS programs and only two HS sites serving 40 children at one site and less than 20 children at the other. A community member stated that prior to the 2023-2024 school year four HS classrooms were closed due to the ECEC workforce; this led to over 80 spots becoming unavailable to children.

## Parent/Family/Caregiver Voice

A caregiver from a rural community, whose son has a disability, shared that, after being on a waiting list for Early Intervention (EI) services for several months, a therapist became available and has been wonderful to work with until her child aged out of the service on his third birthday. He was also referred to a development pediatrician and received questionnaires in the mail but, again, had to wait for services. The family traveled to Riley's Children's Hospital in Indianapolis, Indiana, where her son was confirmed to have Autism. Reflecting on her experiences with finding services and support, the caregiver stated that more Speech and Occupational Therapists are needed in the area, because schools that are short-staffed cannot take on the entire burden of providing services to children.

She said, "Early Intervention was a smooth transition into the special education program where he now receives the services that he needs."

## Additional Regional Recommendations

One additional recommendation was added and one correction offered for the original report.

- The recommendation is to reduce the teacher-to-child ratio in the classroom to better serve the children, especially to address the social and emotional needs of the children and children receiving special education services.

The following correction was offered:

- The recommendation, "Eliminate waitlists by increasing the number of publicly funded ECEC slots," should be updated to say, "Reduce waitlists by increasing the number of publicly funded ECEC slots."

## 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.