



Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment **ADDENDUM**

Region 56
(Will County)



Regional Council Manager: Keven Kerr (he/him)
Phone number: (309) 393-2551
Email: kkerr@birthtofiveil.com
Website: www.birthtofiveil.com/region56

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 included below.

Local Community Collaborations

The Local Interagency Council (LIC) is embedded under the Child and Family Connections #15 (serving Will, Kankakee, Grundy, and LaSalle Counties) and is a collaboration of families, community agencies, and providers supporting families with children birth to five years old. The LIC offers free developmental screenings, child development information, community resources, family events, family support groups, networking, workshops/training, and information on becoming a provider for Early Intervention.

Early Childhood Education & Care (ECEC) Programs

Service Delivery Area (SDA 5) serves as the Child Care Resources and Referral Agency (CCR&R) providing services to families, child care providers, and employers in the area. The CCR&R was founded in January of 1991 with the United Way of Will County as its fiscal agent. The organization serves Will, Grundy, Kendall, and Kankakee Counties and is part of the Illinois Statewide CCR&R system of the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS).

As a pivotal community system, the CCR&R promotes and facilitates the availability of affordable, high-quality child care through the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), Early Head Start (EHS), Preschool for All (PFA), Professional Development, Family and Provider Resources, and Social Emotional Learning Facilitation (SELF).

Through this programming, along with strong community partnerships, the CCR&R works alongside families, child care providers, and other professionals to review the process and approve CCAP documentation. CCR&R professionals work in the field in person, over the phone, and in electronic correspondence with families and providers. The data points below reflect the tireless work that the local CCR&R has produced from fiscal year 2022 (FY22) and fiscal year 2023 (FY23).

SDA 5 covers over 2,282 square miles with a total population of approximately 992,000. SDA 5 offers satellite offices across all counties, phone lines/contact centers, and walk-in services to ensure equitable access to services. To ensure access in the most remote areas of the Region, satellite offices play a pivotal role in ensuring all children and family needs are met. Staff at Region 56's local CCR&R have suggested that meeting the needs of families, children, and community members are their top priority and have noted that they are working to increase staffing and retention, expanding satellite offices, extending business hours to meet the needs of working families, and increasing technology/systems.

New Data Provided by Community Members

The following data was received from the SDA 5 CCR&R.

Table 1: SDA 5 CCAP Workload by Type comparing FY 2022 and FY 2023

| Paperwork Type | Approved | | Denied | | Total Complete | |
|---------------------------------------|----------|-------|--------|-------|----------------|-------|
| | FY 22 | FY 23 | FY 22 | FY 23 | FY 22 | FY 23 |
| Application | 2,259 | 2,127 | 1,305 | 1,091 | 3,564 | 3,218 |
| Change Of Information/Provider Change | 2,441 | 2,352 | 318 | 358 | 2,759 | 2,710 |
| Redetermination | 2,426 | 2,795 | 343 | 509 | 2,769 | 3,304 |
| Request for Addition Information | ----- | ----- | ----- | ----- | 3,945 | 4,450 |

Source: SDA 5 CCR&R
Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

Table 2: SDA 5 Child Care Assistant Program (CCAP) Workload by Activity Comparing FY 2022 to FY 2023

| Service/Activity Type | Approved | |
|--------------------------------------|----------|--------|
| | FY 22 | FY 23 |
| CCAP Phone Calls Answered & Returned | 14,466 | 10,193 |
| Assistance Emails | 27,240 | 37,861 |
| Walk-In Clients | 5,796 | 10,010 |
| CCAP Payments Processed & Paid | 38,686 | 60,763 |
| CCAP Appeals Processed | 31 | 82 |

Source: SDA 5 CCR&R
Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

Table 3: SDA 5 CCAP Referral Type and Activity Total Comparing FY 2022 to FY 2023

| Activity Type | Activity Total | |
|--|----------------|-------|
| | FY 22 | FY 23 |
| Referrals (total number of families) | 407 | 325 |
| Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Enhanced Referrals | 20 | 7 |

Source: SDA 5 CCR&R
Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

Table 4: SDA 5 CCAP Approval Status, Type of Care, and Number of Children from FY 2022 to FY 2023

| Type of Care | Employment Only | | Education Only | | Both Employment & Education | | Total | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|-------|----------------|-------|-----------------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| | FY 22 | FY 23 | FY 22 | FY 23 | FY 22 | FY 23 | FY 22 | FY 23 |
| Licensed Center | 3,077 | 3,174 | 115 | 135 | 50 | 67 | 3,242 | 3,376 |
| License-Exempt Center | 311 | 360 | 24 | 25 | 1 | 7 | 336 | 392 |
| Licensed Home | 922 | 969 | 38 | 51 | 8 | 14 | 968 | 1,034 |
| Licensed Group Home | 134 | 158 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 10 | 136 | 170 |
| License-Exempt Non-Relative | 81 | 81 | 0 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 84 | 84 |
| License-Exempt Relative | 1,074 | 1,212 | 20 | 19 | 18 | 14 | 1,112 | 1,245 |
| Non-Relative Child Home | 139 | 111 | 3 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 142 | 115 |

Additional Family Experiences or Stories

Based on continued conversations with families and caregivers in Region 56, people are concerned about the overall health and longevity of the current child care system. Families are feeling the effects of the current child care crisis through long wait lists, high teacher turnover, and unaffordable child care costs. Families who have children aging out of ECEC continue to express concerns surrounding the impact this may have on future generations. Along with these continued concerns, families are reporting they struggle with a lack of streamlined communication resulting in disjointed systems. Families are craving one place to find out how to navigate child care and all other ECEC programming options and referral paths.

Below is direct feedback that Region 56 families have requested additional support with:

- How to apply for assistance programs.
- How to qualify for publicly funded programming.
- What are the child care options?
- When to start their child in a program.
- Do they need to start their child in a program?
- How to find what's best for their child.
- What programming and services include the whole family unit?

"I am a mom of five and I am having a hard time understanding all the child care options that are available to me. Where do I go to find this and how would I learn more? It all seems very confusing." - Parent (Will County)

Other feedback from parents addressed the need for the consolidation of information sharing, and connecting with their local CCR&R.

"As a parent, I try to attend as many community meetings as possible and it seems to be the same people at all the meetings. It would be so much easier for us to all get on the same page and all attend one meeting." - Parent of a 5-year-old child (Will County)

"As a full-time working single parent, I struggle to find time to come in person to the CCR&R office to get my questions answered and submit paperwork, although I desperately need CCAP for my kids. I would love extended phone hours where I could call to get my questions answered and an online portal for paperwork submission." - Parent (Will County)

Additional Community Experiences & Stories

"Will County has so many agencies and community members that meet on a regular basis to discuss making services more accessible for families. I know my child care center meets with other centers quarterly, and I've heard this from other professionals/agencies as well." - Early Childhood Professional (Will County)

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.