



Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment **ADDENDUM**

Region 8

(Carroll, Jo Daviess, & Stephenson
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

There was some feedback from community members about licensing requirements and the need for wrap-around services for families.

- “Some providers cannot obtain their unique ID from Sams.gov for the new grants. It took me a month of frustration and now I am helping another provider. Many senior providers are frustrated because things just don't fall into place and there are many hoops to jump through that no one has time for. To prove you started a daycare in 1996, who has

paperwork from way back then? I mean we all pay taxes and have an EIN number, why keep providing more info?" - Action Council Member.

- "I would mention that we maybe find a way to utilize the schools for as-needed wrap-around. It's not always the option or feasible but that would be all I would say." - Family Council Member

Slot Gap

One community member noted that understanding the slot gap was helpful, but even if there were enough slots to provide care for all children in the Region who needed it, it would still not address the other needs the children have. The needs of children and families go beyond ECEC.

- "Each of those families had a slot, but it did not meet their needs, and for some, a slot was cumbersome and actually perpetuates poverty."

Early Childhood Education & Care (ECEC) Workforce

Another community member said that barriers and efforts to increase qualifications in Early Childhood Education and Care were discussed in the report, but mainly focused on the need for more child care workers. They said, "The licensure and staffing of school district classrooms are equally as difficult, if not more.... especially in the rural schools where the teacher is serving at-risk, special ed, and ESL [English as a Second Language] students requiring three certifications at the Early Childhood level.....the only level requiring such certifications."

Additional Community Feedback

Other community members discussed the importance of a focus on rural needs, specifically. Additionally, there was a call to better understand issues such as job and housing assistance, and to hear from more parents and homeschool families. Below is a quote collected during dissemination.

- "I would be curious to hear from homeschool families...I'm wondering if there are any homeschool families that have chosen that route because of a lack of child care and/or lack of preschool slots for their kids and then just carried on with that method of schooling because they had started it. It might be interesting to hear more from families who have moved here from more urban areas: what is their take on the lack of child care and preschool options?" - Family Council Member

Additional Family Experiences & Stories

One community member discussed the challenges of finding affordable housing in their town.

- "Low-income housing is not available in Lena, as many apartments are getting upgrades and are now \$750 to \$1,000 per month. What single mom can afford that? I feel that low income is not allowed in Lena."

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.