



# Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment

## Region II

(Clark, Coles, Cumberland, Douglas, Edgar,  
Moultrie & Shelby Counties)





## Region 11 Staff

Regional Council Manager: Tammy Helm (she/her)  
Family & Community Engagement Specialist: Kayli Bontrager (she/her)  
Administrative Support: Linda Gamble (she/her)

Office Address: 704 N. Main St., Suite 109, Tuscola, IL 61953

Phone Number: (309) 270-5687

Email: [thelm@birthtofiveil.com](mailto:thelm@birthtofiveil.com)

Web: [www.birthtofiveil.com/region11](http://www.birthtofiveil.com/region11)

## Region 11 Action Council Members

Daphne Boley  
Jenifer Bonawitt  
Jennifer Buchter  
Melissa Coleman  
Kiyla DeVoss  
Amy Durdel  
Lisa Flynn  
Robin Hopper  
Jeremy Larson  
Cori More  
Dennis Pearson  
Laura Shull

## Region 11 Family Council Members

Samantha Bush  
Elizabeth Houser  
Holly Houser  
Nicole Thiel  
Morgan Waller



# Table of Contents

Region 11 Executive Summary .....	3
Region 11 Snapshot Infographic.....	5
<b>Overview &amp; Acknowledgments</b> .....	<b>7</b>
Introduction.....	8
Letter from State Leadership .....	9
Letter from Regional Leadership.....	10
Early Childhood Education & Care (ECEC) in Illinois .....	11
Timeline.....	13
Birth to Five Illinois Regions .....	14
<b>Spotlight on Region 11</b> .....	<b>15</b>
Regional Community Landscape.....	16
Local Community Collaborations.....	21
Early Childhood Education & Care (ECEC) Programs .....	23
Slot Gap.....	27
Early Childhood Education & Care (ECEC) Workforce.....	29
Parent/Family/Caregiver Voice .....	32
Regional Strengths & Needs.....	36
Recommendations.....	37
Appendices .....	39



## Region 11 Executive Summary

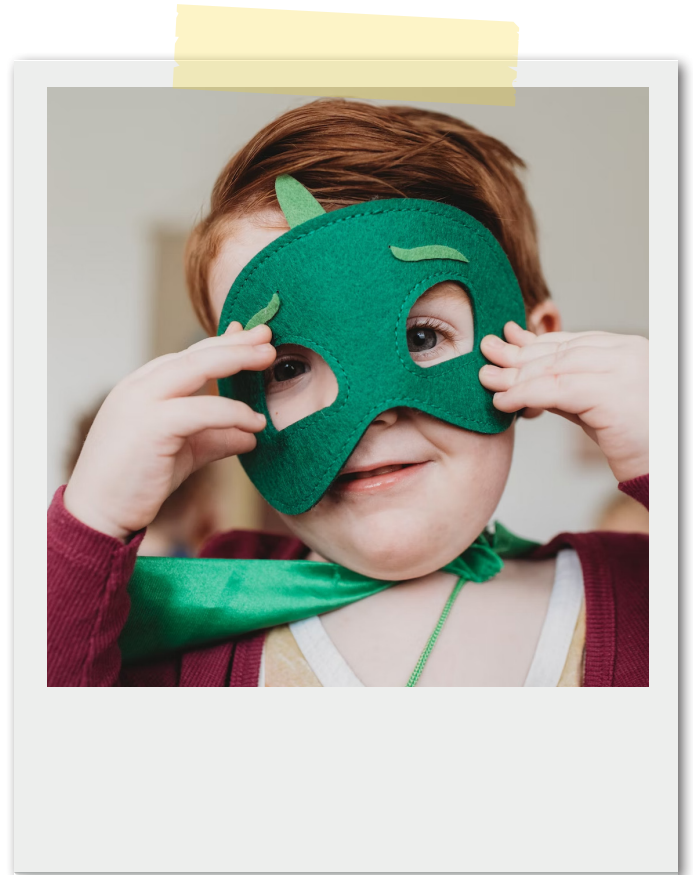
In 2021, the Illinois Commission on Equitable Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Funding issued a report with findings that highlighted the inequities in ECEC funding in Illinois and the need to create a better statewide infrastructure to support ECEC professionals, expand services and programs 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 decision-makers 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 decision-makers 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.

An Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment was created to present publicly available quantitative data and qualitative data from caregivers, ECEC professionals, and other community stakeholders collected through Action Council and Family Council meetings, focus groups, interviews, community meetings, and surveys. Throughout the process, regional barriers were documented, and recommendations were developed based on identified needs of families. This Executive Summary provides an overview of key findings from the development of the Region 11 Needs Assessment, which includes recommendations developed by our Action and Family Councils. Additional findings, analysis, and recommendations can be found in the full report.

### Key Findings

Region 11 is composed of seven counties, Clark, Coles, Cumberland, Douglas, Edgar, Moultrie, and Shelby. The Region's ECEC landscape is largely bare in smaller rural towns with clumps of programs in higher populated areas. The lack of child care slots available is an issue across Region 11, specifically for infants and toddlers. Overall, the ECEC workforce, especially family child care providers, is struggling with the lack of adequate support, respect, and wages. While the quality of staff and resources like Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies, EIASE, and Preschool For All programs are working for families in Region 11, the lack of providers, increased cost of care, standardized provider hours, and the lack of special education training and resources for providers are not. Region 11 has many strengths, like longevity and passion of providers and Project H.E.L.P. Preschool For All programs; however, there are opportunities for growth.





## Region 11 Needs

- More infant and toddler care slots and full-day preschool opportunities.
- Public transportation for local programs.
- Hands-on and available mental health, social-emotional, and behavioral resources.
- Increased staff appreciation and support.
- Collaboration between local care providers and half-day preschool programs.
- Before and after school care in smaller rural school districts.
- A comprehensive ECEC database with accurate and current data for all sectors.
- Increased amounts and access to grants for all ECEC providers.

## Region 11 Recommendations

- Promote community creation of Family Child Care Homes specifically serving infants and toddlers by increasing accessibility and offering incentives at the state and local levels.
- Significantly increase funding for public and school transportation, specifically targeting rural communities, to facilitate access to local programs and community resources.
- Increase awareness, accessibility, and the amount of mental health, social-emotional, and behavioral coaches for ECEC programs and schools.
- Expand and fund before- and after-school care opportunities for smaller, rural school districts, and full-time preschool programming.
- Increase state and local support for Head Start and Early Head Start programs.
- The State should establish an ECEC system that ensures coordination and tracking of current and accurate data across various funding sources, including slots and waitlists.
- Expansion of ECEC program outreach to begin earlier including prenatal healthcare visits and postpartum care.
- Make quality improvement and staff credentials easier to obtain for non-state funded programs.
- Increase quality improvement opportunities for current ECEC providers.
- Create a grant and funding opportunity clearinghouse specific to ECEC educators and providers.

For more information or to learn how you can become involved with Birth to Five Illinois, please contact:

**Tammy Helm (she/her)**

Phone Number: (309) 270-5687

Email: [thelm@birthtofiveil.com](mailto:thelm@birthtofiveil.com)

Web: [www.birthtofiveil.com/region11](http://www.birthtofiveil.com/region11)



# REGION 11 SNAPSHOT INFOGRAPHIC

Using a Collective Impact Model, between September 2022 and June 2023, we led our Action and Family Councils through data discussions to identify gaps and needs for children and families.

We coordinated focus groups, interviews, and surveys to gather input from community members across the Region.



**8,122**

Children Under  
the Age of 6  
in Region 11



**2,996**

Children 0-5  
at 200% Federal  
Poverty Level



**2,332**

Children 0-5  
Without Publicly  
Funded ECEC Slots

**76%**

Percentage of children ages birth to five who do not have a slot at a licensed or license-exempt child care center or home.

“The bottom line is that we do not have enough programs or child care spots available for the children in our area. My children should not have to sit on a waitlist.” - Parent, Douglas County



**After identifying the most common and pressing Early Childhood Education & Care (ECEC) needs of their communities, Regional Councils made recommendations for how best to meet them.**

## **REGION 11 NEEDS**

1. More child care options for children ages birth to two
2. Transportation for children attending preschool programs
3. More full-day child care options
4. Adjusted licensing standards and policies for providers
5. Accurate and more current data for ECEC programs

## **REGION 11 RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Promote community creation of family child care homes to expand options for children ages birth to two
2. Increase funding for public and school transportation
3. Increase support for Head Start & Early Head Start Programs
4. Make quality improvement and staff credentials easier to obtain for non-state funded programs



**"In rural, low-income, spread-out area it is hard to connect families to resources like child care with the lack of transportation and funds."  
- Parent, Cumberland County**

# Overview & Acknowledgements



## Introduction

This Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment presents data on Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) from multiple state and local sources throughout Illinois. It is a collaborative data report that relies on the expertise of entities that collect and analyze ECEC data, Birth to Five Illinois staff, Birth to Five Illinois Action Council and Family Council members, and a variety of cross-sector stakeholders in all 39 Regions across the State.

Through these Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessments, Birth to Five Illinois seeks to amplify the voices of those who have historically been minoritized, marginalized, or not invited to the decision-making table. Each Regional Needs Assessment offers parents, families, caregivers, ECEC providers, and other community stakeholders a platform for sharing valuable insights about their experiences within their local ECEC system. Additionally, it provides local, regional, and state decision-makers with qualitative information about each Region, adding critical context to the quantitative data that is available.

This report will be used in a variety of ways.

First, each Region's Birth to Five Illinois Action and Family Councils will use it to identify gaps in data that is needed to best understand ECEC in their area. Birth to Five Illinois Council members and Regional Staff will also use this report as a basis for making recommendations on how to increase enrollment in, and access to, ECEC programs and services, as well as to determine what additional services/programs and resources may be needed to support families and caregivers throughout the Region.

Second, this report will be made available to parents and caregivers so they can have a fuller picture of what is happening in their community and Region. It is our hope that families will learn more about the available programs and services, share the resources with other caregivers with young children, become advocates for ECEC, and help to drive long-term, sustainable change in their communities.

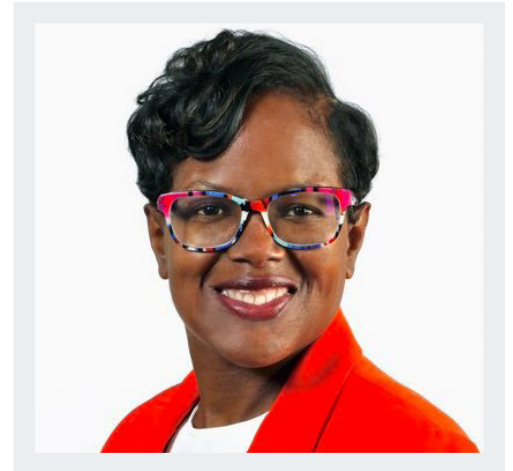
Third, policy makers, elected officials, and state agencies that administer ECEC programs will receive a copy of the report to give them a local view of the ECEC landscape in the areas they serve. The goal is to provide decision-makers with context from a community perspective so they can better understand data related to ECEC indicators and direct funding to the under-resourced areas across the State based on the feedback received from ECEC system users.

Lastly, the report will be shared with local government bodies, early childhood providers, and organizations so they can use the findings to assess and demonstrate the need for services as funding opportunities become available. Additionally, the data can be used to identify where ECEC services may need to be expanded to support the caregivers and children in the Region.



## Letter from State Leadership

In under two years, I have had the privilege of partnering with the State's ECEC community to build Birth to Five Illinois, an extension of decades of foundational efforts that led to the creation of this statewide community system. In true collective impact modeling, we set out to design a system that respects and builds on the work of numerous local organizations that are working hard (often underfunded) to support children, families, and providers' access to our State's confusing and hard-to-navigate ECEC system.



While our work is not perfect, it is genuine and ever-evolving, and I am proud of the effort our Team has made to bring the vision of this equity-focused infrastructure to life. Birth to Five Illinois, while still in the development stage, has made great gains in bringing community members together under one goal, to make Illinois “the best state in the nation for families raising young children”. Our Team has gone above and beyond to make meaningful community partnerships and create space for the prioritization of family voices. My extended gratitude goes to each of the 128 people who shared the vision, brought their passion, and have worked tirelessly every day to improve ECEC experiences for the children and families in their communities.

In collective impact, nothing is done alone. We have many champions to thank, including:

- The Governor, staff in the Governor's Office and the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development (GOECD), and the dedicated members of the Early Childhood Funding Commission for their early childhood visioning and dedication to racial equity.
- The Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) and Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) for their generous funding and commitment to building this community system with families and caregivers at the center.
- Illinois Network of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies (INCCRRA) for providing the institutional, technical, and organizational support needed to launch the Birth to Five Illinois department and infrastructure.
- Illinois Action for Children (IACF) and the Illinois Early Childhood Asset Map (IECAM) for training and technical support. Many of the visualizations in this report were developed by staff from both organizations based on data they collected and analyzed on our behalf.

Most importantly, I would like to thank the hundreds of community members who signed up to serve on their Region's Action and Family Councils. It is their perspective and passion that have inspired us and made this report possible. Thank you to the countless parents who trusted their Council peers with vulnerable stories; providers who emanate passion for the children in their care; business owners offering creative solutions for the identified needs; elected officials who are fierce advocates; faith leaders who opened their doors for care and are now encouraging others to do the same; and various ECEC systems partners who offer families step-by-step support through the enrollments process, blending together the supports families need.

These Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessments are a compilation of community members' experiences; not ours. We thank them for sharing and hope we have represented them well.

**Cicely L. Fleming (she/her)**  
Director, Birth to Five Illinois



## Letter from Regional Leadership

Completing the Regional Needs Assessment was made possible through the countless hours invested by a variety of stakeholders. First, and foremost, we thank the Governor's Office, the Early Childhood Funding Commission members, and the numerous State and community partners whose contributions and commitment to addressing equity in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) have made this work possible.

Additionally, the critical input from our Action Council and Family Council helped us to analyze quantitative and qualitative data from all seven counties within Region 11. We truly appreciate the dedication of everyone as they sacrificed their time and shared their expertise as we navigated through the data together. Our analysis, through multiple perspectives and diverse lenses, allowed us to provide an in-depth view of the strengths, needs, and recommendations for Region 11.

Capturing family and community voices was a top priority for this report, and we are grateful for all who trusted us with their personal stories and for those that took time out of their busy schedules to participate in townhalls, focus groups, interviews or completed surveys. We understand that data only tells part of the story, so capturing the voices from those impacted by our current ECEC system was of utmost importance. It is these stories that provide a more holistic view of what Region 11 is experiencing and what is truly needed.

Much of our success is due to the community and volunteer support that we received. Many individuals and organizations were instrumental in helping spread the word about Birth to Five Illinois, helping to provide clarity regarding data analysis, create connections with other stakeholders, donating supplies/materials for outreach, and/or providing us with opportunities to meet with families. We are excited to report that we have received support from every county within Region 11, and we are extremely grateful for their commitment to this work for our youngest learners.

Specifically, we would like to express our gratitude to the Regional Office of Education (ROE 11), librarians, higher education professionals, local businesses, licensed and licensed-exempt child care providers, and all ECEC workforce in Region 11. Without your input and support, this Regional Needs Assessment would not have been possible.

Thank you,

**Tammy Helm (she/her)**

Regional Council Manager: Region 11  
Birth to Five Illinois



## Early Childhood Education & Care (ECEC) in Illinois

ECEC in Illinois is made up of several programs, including publicly funded programs such as Head Start/ Early Head Start, Early Intervention, Early Childhood Special Education, home visiting, preschool, and center- and home-based child care. ECEC also exists within a larger system of services and supports for families, including pediatric health care, mental and behavioral health care, child welfare, and family-focused economic supports. When available, these services and supports can be confusing and difficult to navigate.

While programs and services for families and children exist across the state of Illinois, they are not accessed equitably. For example, families in rural areas oftentimes live in child care deserts and are forced to travel long distances to place their child in any program, regardless of its quality. Another example is families who speak a language other than English who may live in an area without programming in their home language, making it difficult to find educational options. A family that has little to no access to economic or material resources may live in a city with many programs but be unable to enroll their children due to the excessive cost of tuition and long waitlists for access to publicly funded slots.

Additionally, funding for ECEC has been siloed across multiple state agencies and has lacked a cohesive process for distributing funds to providers. Decentralized funding has led to unintended equity issues, leaving some areas of the State with nominal public funding for ECEC programming and others without enough funding to meet the demands of communities.



In 2019, Governor JB Pritzker declared, “Illinois will become the best state in the nation for families raising young children, with the nation’s best early childhood education and child care. My promise is this: our work won’t be complete until every child in this state enters kindergarten with the cognitive skills to think, learn, read, remember, pay attention, and solve problems, but also the social-emotional skills to communicate, connect with others, resolve conflict, self-regulate, display kindness and cope with challenges.”

To honor this commitment, the Governor’s Office formed the Illinois Commission on Equitable Early Childhood Education and Care Funding to study and make recommendations on funding that would provide more equitable access to high-quality ECEC services for all children ages birth to five. Work groups met throughout 2020 and published a report of findings and recommendations in March 2021.

The Commission made the following recommendations to address the racial, geographic, and economic inequities found in Illinois’ ECEC system:

1. Increase public investment to help better subsidize the cost families pay out of pocket.
2. Create a coordinated funding approach by centralizing state and federal funding and distribute funding in new, more targeted ways.
3. Provide a single source for information and funding for ECEC with designated regional structures to make the system easier for families and providers.

Following these recommendations, the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) established the Division of Early Childhood (DEC) to help centralize and streamline the State’s existing child care, home visiting, and Early Intervention programs.

Additionally, after the Commission report recognized, “community input and data can fuel distribution of funds more effectively and equitably” and urged for the creation of a community and regional infrastructure to ensure input from families and providers is included in the state level decision-making process, the State partnered with the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (INCCRRA) to launch our equity-focused regional system. Named Birth to Five Illinois, the goal of this new infrastructure is to create a network of community Councils across the State tasked with identifying the service needs in each region.

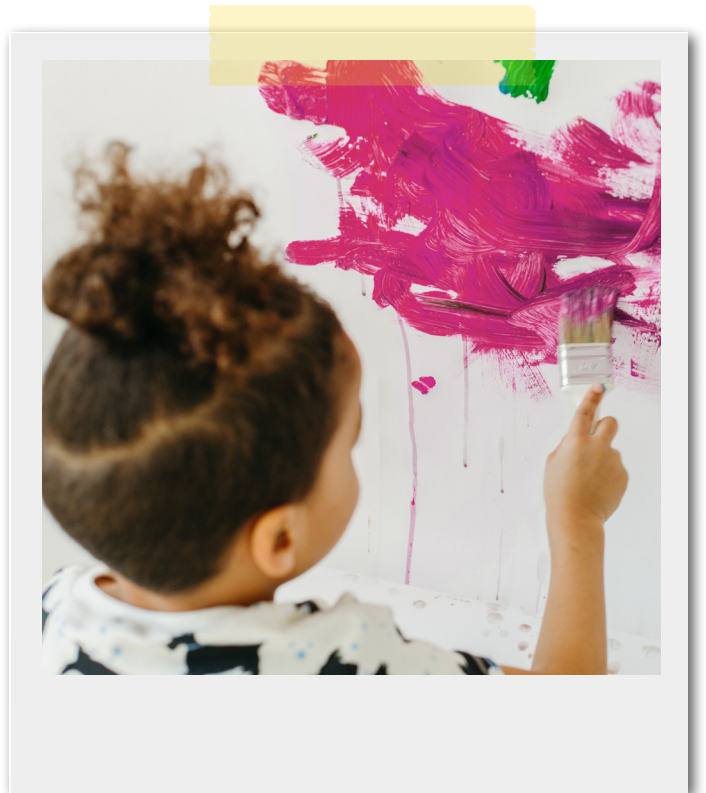
The **mission** of Birth to Five Illinois is to create a statewide regional infrastructure that will amplify input from communities in the development of policies and funding priorities. We support the mobilization of communities to build and sustain equitable access to inclusive, high-quality early childhood services for all children and families in the state of Illinois.

Our **vision** is reimagining a more equitable ECEC system that respects family and community voice and works to ensure it is centered and prioritized at every level of decision-making in Illinois.

Our **values and goals** are:

- **Family Voice:** Through this transformation centered on authentic family and community engagement, we will address the inequitable distribution of resources and services and rebuild our State’s ECEC system.
- **Racial Equity:** In an effort to move our ECEC system to one where racism no longer impacts a child’s success, we will work to dismantle barriers that have limited access to high-quality services for minoritized children in every corner of our State.
- **Collective Impact:** Birth to Five Illinois will build a system that harnesses knowledge directly from families and providers and encourages decision-makers to ensure new and/or expanded services are created to meet community needs. This community-driven framework will directly influence policy/funding at the local, regional, and state level.

Staying true to our mission and vision, Birth to Five Illinois has standardized the use of pronouns to affirm all genders and has included a land acknowledgement in each Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessments to honor the Indigenous Peoples who were forcibly removed from their land.





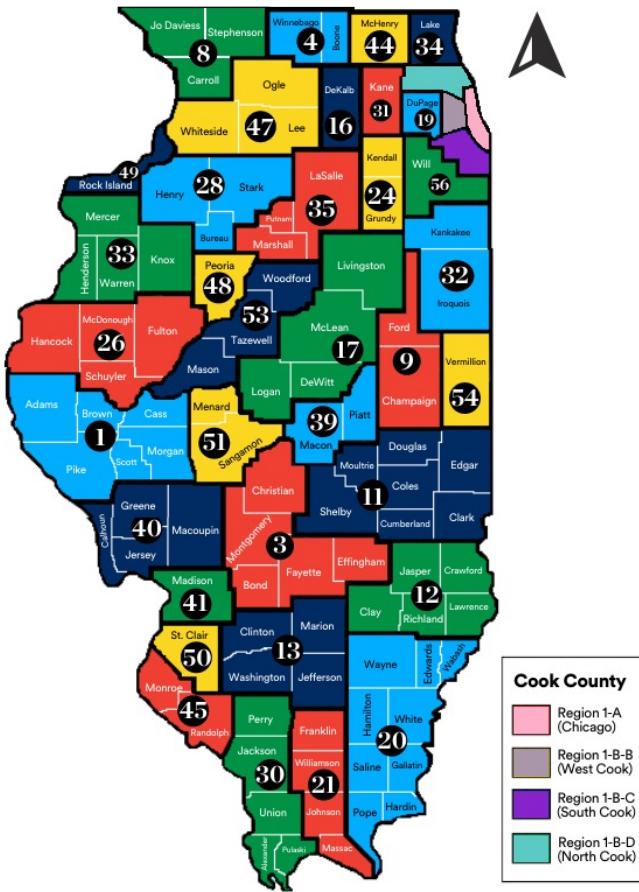
# Timeline

- **March 2021**  
Early Childhood Commission Report Published
- **September 2021**  
Birth to Five Illinois Director, Cicely Fleming, Hired
- **February 2022**  
Official Public Launch of Birth to Five Illinois
- **March 2022**  
Held Regional Community Engagement Live Webinars
- **April 2022**  
Established Partnerships with Existing Regional Early Childhood Collaborations
- **May – July 2022**  
Hired 39 Regional Council Managers across the State
- **August – November 2022**  
Hired Additional 78 Regional Support Staff
- **September 2022**  
Awarded \$2.6 Million to 24 Implementation Grantees
- **October – November 2022**  
Established 39 Birth to Five Illinois Action Councils
- **December 2022**  
Established 39 Birth to Five Illinois Family Councils
- **January 2023**  
Awarded \$575,000 to 9 Planning Grantees
- **January – April 2023**  
Council Meetings & Ongoing Community Engagement (Focus Groups & Interviews)
- **June 2023**  
39 Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessments Released
- **July – August 2023**  
Report Dissemination & Public Input





# Birth to Five Illinois Regions



To provide a structure for communities, families, and caregivers to engage with the data and share their experiences, our new statewide infrastructure was created across 39 Regions. The Regions align with existing Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) Regional Offices of Education (ROE) boundaries. To better match demographic data to the needs for ECEC programs, Illinois Action for Children (IAFC), along with the Illinois Early Childhood Asset Map (IECAM), provided maps that reflect the true boundaries of the Birth to Five Illinois Regions. Birth to Five Illinois regional boundaries align with school districts instead of strictly following county lines, which can be a challenge for gathering and interpreting data because many early childhood services are provided by, or tied to, school districts.

After the Regions were established and staffed, Birth to Five Illinois Action and Family Councils were created by Regional Selection Committees. To ensure diverse perspectives, outreach efforts focused on community members who might be new to this type of work. Action Councils are comprised of ECEC professionals, healthcare providers, faith leaders, elected officials, and other community members. Each Action Council reserved two seats for parents/caregivers to ensure

family voices were included in every discussion. Family Councils are comprised of parents/caregivers from a wide variety of family types: single parents, adoptive and foster parents, caregivers of relatives, underage parents, two parent families, multi-generational families, and more. Each Regional Selection Committee reviewed Interest Forms, and recommendations were made based on a full consideration of a submitter's role/sector, location within the Region, race/ethnicity, gender, and answers to open-ended questions.

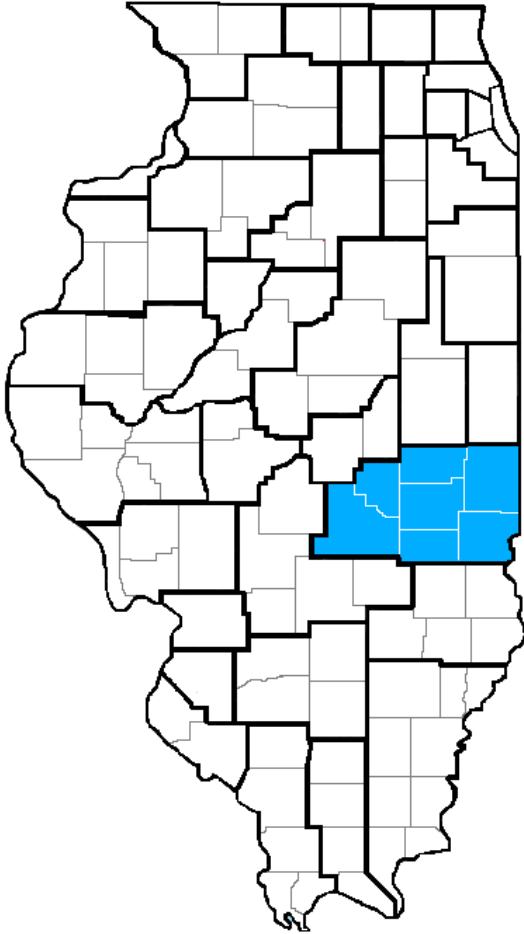
## Regional Needs Assessment Methodology

Regionally based demographic, programmatic, and service provider data from IECAM and workforce data from INCCRRA were presented to Action and Family Council members during meetings and is included in the following section. The data comes from both IECAM (2020-2021) and INCCRRA (2021), unless otherwise noted. Some Regions included additional data collected during Community Based Planning or from state and/or local organizations and agencies. Action Council members were invited to bring additional aggregated data on programs and services provided by their agency/organization to complement IECAM data, while Family Council members brought their stories and experiences with the ECEC system to help contextualize quantitative data presented and discussed during meetings.

Additional qualitative data was collected community-wide through focus groups and interviews, and all Council members were invited to provide input on their Region's report. Council members developed the strengths, needs, and recommended next steps that are unique to each Region. Regional Teams, along with the support of their Action and Family Council members, created a dissemination plan and are holding community meetings virtually and in-person to share their report's findings. Throughout the fall of 2023, Regional Teams will lead their Councils through implementation planning based on the recommendations made in their report.

# Spotlight on Region 11

# Regional Community Landscape



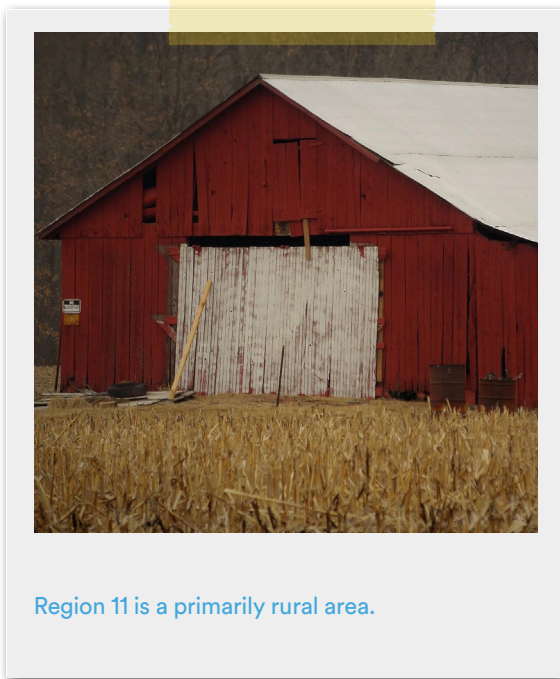
## Regional Boundaries

Region 11 is in central-southeastern Illinois and covers Clark, Coles, Cumberland, Douglas, Edgar, Moultrie, and Shelby Counties. Much of the Region is characterized by small towns and villages; however, each county has one or two more densely populated areas that contain most services and resources available for families. Such places include Casey and Marshall (Clark County), Charleston and Mattoon (Coles County), Neoga (Cumberland County), Arcola and Tuscola (Douglas County), Paris (Edgar County), Sullivan (Moultrie County), and Shelbyville (Shelby County). It is important to note that the largest areas of families living on poverty incomes are also located in these densely populated areas. There are 25 school districts throughout the Region and two institutions of higher education that are both located in Coles County.

Region 11 is primarily rural, and the primary sources of economic opportunity are agriculture, manufacturing industry, health care services, education, and local small businesses. Some major employers in the Region include Eastern Illinois University, Lake Land College, Sarah Bush Lincoln Health Care Center, Rural King, Vesuvius, Consolidated Communications, Justrite, Mars Petcare, Bimbo Bakeries, Mattoon Precision, and Blue Cross Blue Shield located in Coles County; Bolin's, Charles Industry and Pap R Products located in Clark County; Kern's Manufacturing, Brighton Cabinetry, Ervin Equipment, and Evapco, located in Cumberland County; Paris Community Health and North American Lighting in Edgar County; Hydro Gear, Agri-Fab, and Wilson Pallet located in Moultrie County; Tri-County Welding, CHI Overhead Doors, and the Libman Company located in Douglas County; and Graphic Packaging International, Software Solutions Integrated, IHI Turbo America, and Shelbyville Hospital located in Shelby County.

## Land Acknowledgement<sup>1</sup>

Region 11 honors and acknowledges that our Region is the traditional land of the Kiikaapoi (Kickapoo), Kaskaskia, Myaami (Miami), and Očeti Šakówinj (Sioux) Peoples. We honor elders, families, and children past, present, and future, and those who cultivated this land throughout generations. We also recognize that many institutions were founded upon and continue to exclude and erase Indigenous Peoples. May this acknowledgement demonstrate a commitment to working to dismantle ongoing legacies of oppression and inequities and recognize the current and future contributions of Indigenous



Region 11 is a primarily rural area.

communities within Clark, Coles, Cumberland, Douglas, Edgar, Moultrie, and Shelby Counties.

<sup>1</sup>Based on information provided at <https://native-land.ca>

## Regional Demographics

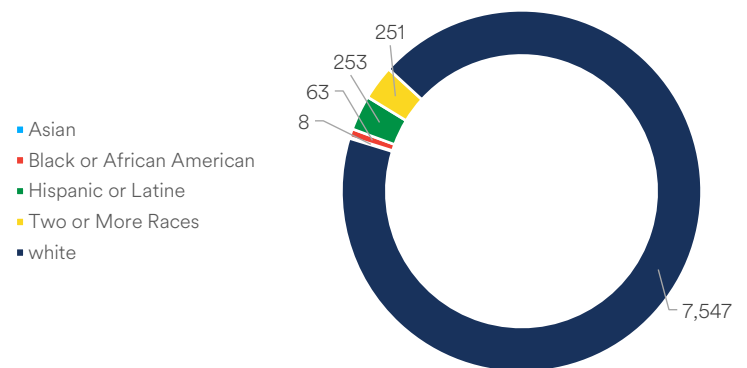
According to the 2020 Census, Region 11 has an overall population of 144,890, which includes 8,122 children who are ages birth to five. While most of the children are white, there is a small and growing number of those who identify as Hispanic or Latine or two or more races (Figure 1). Arcola, located in Douglas County, is the most diverse city in the Region, with 43% of the population identifying as Hispanic or Latine. It should be noted that the President of the Mi Raza Community Center (Arcola) believes that the Hispanic or Latine population was underreported to the Census and is closer to 50% of the city.

Arcola is a rural community of approximately 2,900 community members and is located twenty-five miles south of Champaign and twenty miles north of Mattoon. Arcola is also a racially diverse community, where 3% of all students identified as Hispanic or Latine. However, many adults over the age of 25 in Arcola have not graduated from high school or only have a high school degree. Of all children enrolled in the school district's preschool program, 30% received priority points for enrollment based upon their parent's low education attainment levels.

Other towns in Douglas County have experienced similar growth in the Hispanic or Latine community, notably in Arthur; Tuscola and Villa Grove have seen small to modest growth. Immigrants from countries who speak languages other than English or Spanish comprise a very small percentage of Douglas County population. The Refugee Center shared that, in recent years, 15 Afghan refugees made Douglas County their home. The Mi Raza Community Center serves people from the local area that originated from 36 countries who mostly live in Douglas County and small pockets of rural east central Illinois.

Nearly 4,500 Amish live just outside the Village of Arthur (in Moultrie and Douglas Counties) and is home to the largest and oldest Amish community in the state of Illinois<sup>2</sup>. It is important to note that this population have their own language, Amish, which is a combination of German and Dutch languages. Per the Eastern Illinois Area Special Education (EIASE), several Amish children attend Preschool for All (PFA) in the Arthur-Lovington-Atwood-Hammond School District and receive preschool screenings, in which issues with vision, hearing, speech, and learning disabilities are discovered, and Early Intervention (EI) services might be offered. Overall, while many Amish families do not use child care services, they do partake in EI services and PFA programs.

Figure 1: Children Under Five by Race and Ethnicity



Source: IECAM  
Created by: Birth to Five Illinois



Douglas and Moultrie Counties have a thriving Amish community.

“ In the Amish culture, we keep to ourselves for the most part and prefer to use our own community shops and schools. Like my aunt has not been outside the area in over 20 years because if they can't reach it by horse and buggy, then they aren't going. I've used resources like EIASE and Project H.E.L.P. for my son's delays but that's really it.

- Amish Parent (Douglas County)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.arthuril.us>



While there are many different and new professions in Region 11, farming is still very common and widespread. Farming families have different struggles than those who work eight hours per day, specifically during harvest and planting seasons. Planting season usually takes place between the end of March and early May and Harvest season is from mid-September to early November.

During these seasons, farmers usually work 16-18-hour days days, including weekends, with minimal breaks. These long hours cause issues when it comes to ECEC, as many farmers need to be in the field before providers, schools, and centers open. Finding seasonal or part-time care is extremely hard for families in rural farming communities due to lack of providers, long-waitlists, and minimal openings for part-time care. Many families rely on each other to get through these busy seasons.

Across the Region, 95% of households identified that English was their primary language. Two percent of households identified that their primary household language was Spanish and 3% of households identified that their primary household language was a language other than English or Spanish.

“ Often planting and harvest season are the biggest stressors in our family, mainly due to child care and timing. During these months I feel like a single parent, and I know that’s what I signed up for, but it’s still hard. There aren’t many resources for parents like me when there are seasons when it gets stressful.

- Community Member  
(Cumberland County)

## Children in Priority Populations

The Early Learning Council (ELC) identifies certain groups across the State as priority populations.<sup>3</sup> These are groups of people who have limited access to economic or material resources, who do not receive equitable resources compared to other children in the academic pipeline, and do not have adequate access to ECEC programs due to the programs’ location, cost, enrollment requirements, or capacity to serve the comprehensive needs of families. The purpose of identifying priority populations is to drive resources and attention toward efforts to improve access to high-quality, responsive services for children and families with systemic barriers, and to promote coordination and alignment across ECEC programs and services. While the priority populations list addresses the access issue, Birth to Five Illinois strives to focus the attention of policymakers and early childhood stakeholders on identifying ways to engage these impacted communities to remove the systemic barriers causing the access issue within each Region. The Action Council and Family Council identified the following priority populations in Region 11: children in families living on poverty- or deep poverty-level incomes, underage parents, children in families experiencing homelessness or unstable housing, and children involved in the welfare system.

## Children Living in Families Experiencing Poverty or Deep Poverty

The Federal Poverty Level (FPL) is a measure of income level created by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that calculates the minimum amount of money needed by a family to cover their basic household needs, such as food, housing, utilities, and other necessities. In many cases, it is used to determine eligibility for programs and services. Someone living at or below 100% FPL is defined as living “at the poverty line”; someone living at or below 50% FPL is defined as living in “deep poverty” (Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Federal Poverty Level at 50%, 100%, 185%, and 200% for a Family of Four**

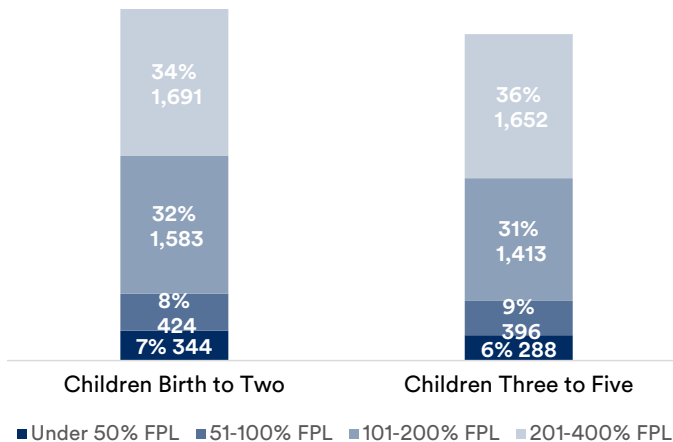
	50% FPL	100% FPL	185% FPL	200% FPL
Family of 4	\$13,100	\$26,200	\$48,470	\$52,400

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Created By: Birth to Five Illinois

<sup>3</sup> <https://oecd.illinois.gov/content/dam/soi/en/web/oecd/earlylearningcouncil/access/documents/priority-populations-updated-2021.pdf>

Most of the children and families in the Region live on incomes at or below 200% FPL, with pockets of deep poverty (measured as someone living at or below 50% FPL) located in many of the smaller towns and villages throughout Region 11.

**Figure 3: Children Under 6 by Age by Federal Poverty Level**



Source: IECAM

Created by: Illinois Action for Children CS3

### Children Born to Underage Parents

While the rate of Illinois underage births has continuously decreased since 1991, there is still a significant number of underage parents in Region 11. In 2020, there were 83 underage births (defined as children born to mothers aged 19 and under). Edgar County’s underage birth rate was the highest for Region 11 at 14%, well above the state average of 4%.<sup>4</sup> Region 11, specifically Coles County, provides support to underage parents by offering homebound instruction, parent education, child care priority, and support groups. The Director of Early Childhood at Leaders Innovating For Tomorrow (LIFT) in Mattoon is a notable supportive resource for underage parents in the Mattoon School District. Underage parents have priority at LIFT’s child care facility, Little Leaders. Underage Parents are also offered participation in LIFT’s Prevention Initiative (PI) and Home Visiting Birth to 3 program, which provides parent education, mental health, and community resources. Community members working with underage parents have noted that many struggle communicating with providers, available child care hours, and balancing all their responsibilities.

While Coles County is leading the charge to make it easier for underage parents who attend school, other counties in Region 11 are also providing support to underage parents through their school districts. Homebound services are available to students who need to be temporarily educated in a location other than school for a minimum of two or more consecutive weeks or ongoing intermittent absences totaling 10 or more school days. Most commonly, homebound services are provided to students with a medical

<sup>4</sup> (Illinois Department of Public Health, 2020).

“Most of the small towns and villages around here don’t have much. Like in Neoga, we were so excited when Dollar General came to town because the closest Walmart is 30 minutes away. So, getting diapers was a short car ride instead of a full-blown trip. I mean you hop on I-57 or U.S. Route 45 and it’s just farmland after farmland with super small villages sprinkled throughout for 30 minutes.”

- Parent (Cumberland County)

“Being a new mom trying to balance work, school, and learning how to be a parent has been the hardest thing I’ve faced in my life. I had so many questions because my parents haven’t been the most supportive so my home visitor, who was more than willing to give me advice and tricks, really helped.”

- Parent (Coles County)

condition that prevents them from attending in-person classes. For underage parents, this opportunity supports them continuing their education postpartum. School districts participating in homebound services meet with the student and their family and work to get the student back in school by providing resources and empathy.

## **Families Experiencing Homelessness or Unstable Housing**

McKinney-Vento defines homelessness as individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. According to recent McKinney-Vento data, Region 11 currently has a total of 49 children in families experiencing homelessness; 13 are children who are aged three and 36 are preschool aged children. Given the broad definition of homelessness and that families must self-identify as experiencing homelessness, this number is likely to be much higher due to the stigmatization families experience and/or misinformation on what qualifies them for services because of not having permanent housing.

Coles County has the only homeless shelter, Mattoon Area PADS (Public Action to Deliver Shelter), within the Region. PADS officially opened in January of 2003 and the kitchen followed in December of 2003. In 2018, PADS changed their name to “The Haven”, which is now used today.

## **Children Who are Child Welfare-Involved**

As of March 2023, 452 children were in foster care in Region 11 according to the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). Almost half (44%) of those children are in the care of a licensed foster family. Per the Charleston DCFS office, placement caseworkers prefer to keep foster children in a foster home or with a relative that is in a nearby town or county, if possible, for ease of visits and support. Region 11 is served by surrounding DCFS offices and agencies in Charleston, Champaign, Urbana, Danville, Effingham, and Decatur. Many foster parents have expressed issues with foster care and ECEC, specifically regarding trauma-informed providers, Early Intervention (EI), and lack of availability.

While Region 11 is a very rural area, priority populations are evident throughout the seven counties. This information is needed to understand the needs or strengths of a community to guide planning, policy development and/or decision making.

“ At one time, a high school teacher took work for all subjects to a teen mom’s home and worked with her for about an hour each visit. Now, the most likely option would be e-learning with in-person support as needed.

- Community Professional (Edgar County)

”

## Local Community Collaborations

A Community Collaboration is defined as a diverse group of community stakeholders from many sectors that meet regularly to address gaps in local Early Childhood systems, support families and caregivers by referring them to Early Childhood services and supports, and help children become Kindergarten ready. There is one Local Early Childhood Community Collaboration located in Douglas County; however, there are several community groups that are informally doing this work because they have identified an ECEC need within their community.

The only formal Collaboration that exists within Region 11 is in Arcola, Douglas County.

The Arcola Community Economic Development (ACED) has brought together community stakeholders consisting of city officials, business leaders, licensed child care providers, and individuals operating license-exempt child care. Due to the linguistic needs and the low level of educational attainment specific to this area of the Region, the need for quality ECEC programs is even more critical. In 2022, ACED received a Birth to Five Illinois Planning Grant to help assist with the development of a strategic plan to secure a site that was forced to close during the COVID-19 pandemic. This site is fully furnished and set up for child care services. ACED conducted a needs assessment, and from this they learned that the community's greatest need is for child care services. The Arcola School District currently has two Preschool for All programs, and their goal is to secure this site to allow for the expansion of school-based programming, provide services for infant-toddler care, and a before/after school program.

“ We are so excited to see something being done with that building because it's too good to pass up, especially because the kids like my grandkids could benefit from a center. I know their current provider gets calls after calls looking for spots for infants and toddlers, so this is really going to help our community especially the young working parents or grandparents raising their grandkids.

- Grandparent (Douglas County)

A second Early Childhood Local Community Collaboration is in the process of being developed in Clark County; it has yet to be officially named. A group of individuals and community stakeholders are working to build a child care center that will have seven classrooms to serve 111 children from birth to age five. An additional classroom will provide before and after school care for school-age children. The school-age classroom will focus on academic support with opportunities for tutoring services. The group now has a board of community stakeholders and has strong support from the community. However, finding funding for the project has been a barrier.

There are informal networks of individuals and community stakeholders in Edgar, Moultrie, and Shelby Counties that have identified the need for ECEC services and programs, and they are in the planning phase of addressing those needs. Additionally, twice per year, Eastern Illinois Area Special Education (EIASE) hosts a meeting consisting of the Advisory Board for Head Start, Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) Agencies, and Coffee with Constituents. All three groups invite the community to

network, collaborate on initiatives, and bring awareness of services to assist families in making linkages where needed, including not only child care and preschool providers, but also Early Intervention (EI), health care providers, welfare and social service agencies, and local college faculty. This collaboration helps to provide better understanding of the roles each agency plays, helps education families, instructional staff, and providers to ensure services are coordinated and not duplicated.



“ If there is any ECEC Collaborations in our area, I’m unaware of it. It’s a silent issue that many parents and providers deal with but isn’t usually openly talked about to fix... with actual solutions.

- Community Member (Coles County)

”

Unfortunately, no Collaborations or informal networks exist in Coles and Cumberland Counties. However, a Collaboration could have a significant impact on families if one were developed. Currently, there is only one infant and toddler program for Coles County and no infant and toddler program in Cumberland County. Additionally, most programs are offering half-day programs to try and reach more children; therefore, caregivers are struggling to find child care to fill the rest of the day. A Collaboration could help to advocate for and establish more child care options for families and caregivers in both counties.

“ I notice a very weak collaboration between early childhood mental health, Early Intervention, state preschool, and Early Childhood Special Education.

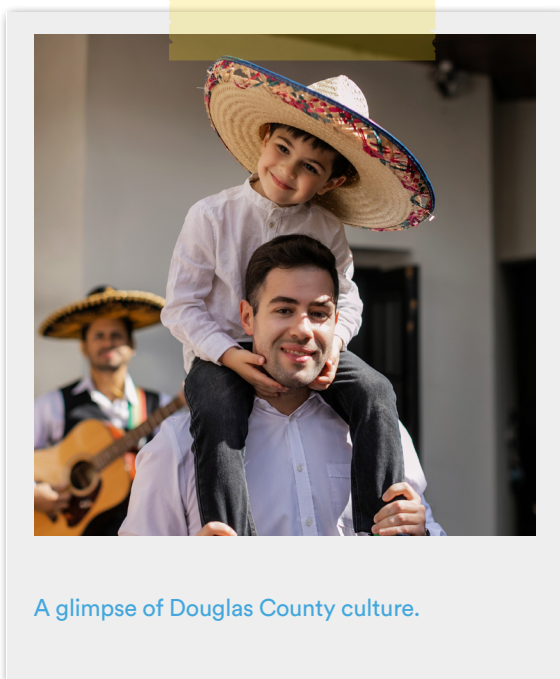
- Community Member (Coles County)

”

Each of the groups focusing on providing resources, services, or information is vital to the Region’s families and children. These groups also understand the importance of regularly convening a diverse group of stakeholders as they work to improve future outcomes for children and families in their communities. This collaborative work directly aligns with the mission of Birth to Five Illinois. In addition to elevating family voice and ensuring that racial equity is at the heart of all discussions, the collective impact model used will help Birth to Five Illinois build a system that harnesses knowledge directly from families and providers and encourages decision-makers to ensure new and/or expanded services are created to meet community needs. This community-driven framework can be used to influence policy and funding at the local, regional, and state level.

# Early Childhood Education & Care (ECEC) Programs

Region 11’s current ECEC landscape is largely bare in smaller rural towns with clumps of programs in higher populated areas. Within the seven counties comprising Region 11, there are 159 programs, including Preschool For All, Preschool For All-Expansion, Head Start, licensed child care centers, license-exempt child care centers, licensed family child care providers, and Prevention Initiative programs (Figures 4 and 5). These programs are located primarily in larger towns including Mattoon (Coles County), Charleston (Coles County) and Paris (Edgar County). However, most of the Region is comprised of smaller rural towns and villages where there are limited to no programs. Three areas can be classified as child care deserts including Tuscola (Douglas County), Arthur (Douglas and Moultrie Counties), and Windsor (Shelby County) according to ISBE. A child care desert, as defined by the Center for American Progress, is an area with at least 30 children under the age of five and either no child care providers at all or so few that there are more than three times as many children under the age of five as there are child care spots available.



A glimpse of Douglas County culture.

**Figure 4: Number and Capacity of Licensed, License-Exempt Providers**

Provider Type	Number of Sites	Capacity
Licensed Child Care Center	18	1,218
Licensed Family Care Home	87	853
License-Exempt Child Care Center	8	277

Source: IECAM  
Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

**Figure 5: Number and Capacity of Publicly Funded Providers**

Program Type	Number of Sites	Capacity
Early Head Start	0	0
Head Start	12	297
Preschool for All	25	1,449
Preschool for All Expansion	3	106
Prevention Initiative	6	264
IDHS Home Visiting	0	0

Source: IECAM  
Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

“In such a rural area, open spots in child care and early childhood education are hard to come by so families are not picky on who they choose to watch their children which has created a lot of awful and harmful situations for children and families. In a poor, spread-out area it is hard to connect families to resources like child care with the lack of transportation and funds.

- Parent (Cumberland County)

While the number of programs in Region 11 is low, utilization rates for almost all programs are high and/or have waitlists. Providers have noted that it is not hard finding clientele, especially if they provide infant-toddler care. However, some programs that include enrollment qualifications like income guidelines have lower utilization rates due to many families not meeting eligibility criteria. Utilization rates for some

Preschool For All programs are also low in some areas due to only providing half-day programs.

The Eastern Illinois Area of Special Education (E.I.A.S.E.) administers Project H.E.L.P. (Helping Educate Little People), a free Preschool for All program that is funded by the Illinois State Board of Education that is housed in local school districts. Project H.E.L.P.’s purpose is to provide high-quality preschool experiences for children between the ages of three and five. A preschool screening is conducted to determine eligibility and priority is given to those who face barriers for academic success. Project H.E.L.P. programs have been noted as the biggest ECEC support for Region 11 as they are able to serve large numbers of children at no cost to families. However, these programs can serve many children because they utilize half-day programs. While half-day programs are beneficial because more children can take part in preschool, it can cause issues for families trying to find care for the other part of the day. Some programs like licensed centers, license-exempt centers, and family child care providers work alongside Project H.E.L.P. by providing part-time care and transportation to help families needing care the rest of the day, however, there are still many parents and caregivers struggling with this schedule.

Despite using half-day programs like Project H.E.L.P. to increase the number of children in ECEC, there are still children being waitlisted due to a lack of classrooms in Region 11. For example, Franklin Preschool (Coles County) and Tuscola Project H.E.L.P. (Douglas County) consistently have waitlists due to the lack of space for another classroom and lack of funding. These waitlists are similar for local ECEC programs that accept Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) payments. These programs often have longer waitlists, as many licensed and license-exempt child care centers in the Region do not accept CCAP.

“Whenever my youngest was in preschool I was not able to find child care for her when she was not in preschool, and so actually my mother, who lives 45 min away. She drove up to my house to help me with child care because I couldn’t find anyone to watch her. So, she drove 45 min to watch her, and so I’m very fortunate for that because if she wouldn’t have done that, I wouldn’t have been able to work because I had no one to watch my child.

- Parent (Cumberland County)

“I guess just for the preschool aspect - I love Project Help. I think it’s a great program to the school, and it was sad for me to hear that so many people can’t take advantage of it because they don’t have something else to do with their kid the other part of the day.

- Parent (Moultrie County)

“I think the places that take the CCAP are literally packed to the brim as much as they can so they can help as many as they can, but the teachers who have the packed classrooms don’t have a lot of support and are just trying to get through the day so the quality may could be better. But that’s just because they work dealt with hand, and they’re trying to deal with it.

- Parent (Cumberland County)

**Figure 6: Number of Licensed, License-Exempt Providers Accepting CCAP**

Provider Type	Number of Sites Accepting CCAP
Licensed Child Care Center	13
Licensed Family Care Home	53
License-Exempt Child Care Center	2
License-Exempt Family Care Home	45

Source: IECAM  
 Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

Child care programs and preschools are not the only type of ECEC that struggle with not being able to serve more children who need their services. In Region 11, there are only six Prevention Initiative programs, serving 264 children. These research-based, comprehensive, and intensive prevention services are provided to expecting parents and families with children from birth to age three who face barriers for academic success. Unfortunately, more children and families would benefit from these services; however, there are very few programs and even fewer staff to be able to reach more families. Prevention Initiative providers are having a hard time finding staff to meet the demand.

While there is a shortage of early child education and care services, there is a large amount of local and regional programs supporting or funding them. Community Action Agencies like C.E.F.S. Economic Opportunity Corporation and Embarras River Basin Agency, Inc. (ERBA) covers Region 11 and provides Head Start programs for the area. Eastern Illinois Area Special Education (EIASE) is another regional resource that supports ECEC through administering preschool screenings and Preschool For All programs (Project H.E.L.P.) for all seven counties. EIASE also provides support to local school districts with their special education programs to make sure all the special needs of all the children in the area are being met. The Macon County Mental Health Board houses Child and Family Connections #19 which is a part of the statewide system for referrals of Early Intervention. This program provides intake and referral for community service providers to address a child's developmental delays or disabilities.

Offices like the Regional Office of Education for Region 11 (ROE #11) and local CCR&R Agencies provide professional development resources for ECEC programs. 2 CCR&R Agencies serve Region 11 including Child Care Resource Service through the University of Illinois - Champaign and CCR&R through Eastern Illinois University. These CCR&R agencies also aid families looking for child care by providing them with information on current openings or waitlists in the area families need care. CCR&R agencies also offer support with CCAP to both providers and parents/caregivers.

Local colleges and universities like Lakeland College and Eastern Illinois University also support ECEC services by providing education to current and future early childhood education staff. Another program that supports ECEC services includes Illinois Association for the Education of the Young Children (ILAEYC) chapters. This organization acts as a professional resource and community for ECEC Professionals. Douglas County is served by the East Central Chapter while the Spirit of Illinois Chapter covers Clark, Coles, Cumberland, Edgar, Moultrie, and Shelby Counties. Not only do these programs support local early childhood education programs, but the Spirit of Illinois Chapter also hosts an annual Festival of the Young Child in Coles County where families can come learn about different ECEC programs and local resources.

The Festival of the Young Child is a great example of how outreach for ECEC programs in Region 11 is different compared to urban areas. Since the Region is primarily composed of rural areas, outreach regarding programs relies on annual resource fairs, paper marketing, local resources, and word of mouth. Unlike bigger cities, early childhood education is not a topic that events focus on leaving families to rely on different options to find child care or early childhood education

“ We are the only home visiting program in the area, and we have a hard time keeping home visitors. There's just a huge workload and the huge amount of paperwork, and we are probably spending over 50% of our time on paperwork versus child connections. The difficult thing for home visitors right now is that we do all these assessments, all of these screenings, and we make referrals, but all of the referrals are full. So then, that lands back into the laps of home visitors. Our program is 12 months a year, and it's really hard to compete with the schools who pay more for nine months of work... and being in a rural area, it's hard to find someone with the qualifications when we need a replacement.

- Prevention Initiative Provider  
(Douglas & Edgar Counties)

”



Families in Region 11 often learn more about ECEC programs through health providers and other community resources like libraries and parent/caregiver support groups. Many times, flyers are posted in or near these resources where families frequent. However, most of the ECEC program awareness comes from word of mouth. In terms of child care, many families share their current provider's information or point them in the direction of other programs they may know about.

However, many families still struggle connecting with local ECEC programs, especially if they are not from the area. If families do find ECEC programs in the area, it is very unlikely they have open spots available due to the decrease in local providers. It is important to include current local ECEC program information including their resources and family perception in this Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment to highlight gaps in care and common themes in programs like the lack of infant-toddler care. Overall, Region 11's current ECEC landscape is largely bare in smaller rural towns with clumps of programs in higher populated areas.

“ We moved here [Kansas - Edgar] in 2017. We didn't know anybody we weren't from around here. We are Chicago transplants so definitely one of those where we had no idea even where to begin, because our youngest was 3 when we moved here, so he hadn't been we haven't really had the diagnosis for Autism or developmental delay yet nor hadn't been super apparent at that point, so it wasn't until we went to his 3-year checkup. There they had a posting for preschool round up, and I had no idea what it was. It's just it's so different than the way things are done obviously in major cities.

- Parent (Edgar County)

“ I honestly think that a lot of people go by word of mouth, especially in Mattoon. I know I didn't know about a whole lot of just child care providers, or even any preschool programs, until people started telling me about them. And it was just one of those things if I trusted the person, and they told me it was like I was referred to both child care providers. They're both in-home child care providers, and just people told me about them.

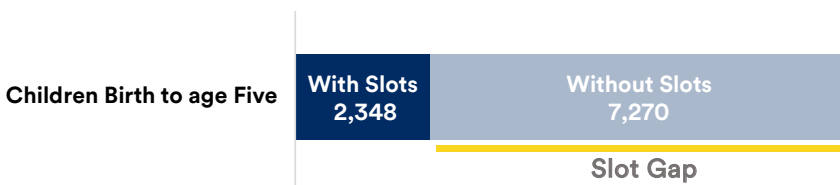
- Parent (Coles County)

# Slot Gap

Slot gap is a term used to describe the difference between the number of children who might need child care and the number of theoretically available slots across all child care options: child care centers, preschools, Head Start programs, licensed in-home child care, and other options. Slot gap can be used to understand ECEC deserts and highlight the quantitative need for ECEC in specific counties and towns within the Region. In Region 11, there are 2,348 slots for children birth to five, despite the fact there are 9,618 children in the Region, leaving most children unable to receive child care due to the lack of availability.

Overall, the main drivers of slot gap within Region 11 include a lack of providers, centers, and programs, and staffing issues. Within counties where there are more centers like Coles County, staffing issues cause program closures like the Head Start in Mattoon, IL. ECEC centers and providers often struggle to keep staff and face big turnover rates. Reasons behind this include low wages, long training and onboarding times, children’s behavior, and lengthy wait periods for background checks. These staffing issues worsen the lack of providers, centers, and programs in the creation of a large slot gap.

**Figure 9: Child Care Capacity Slot Gap**



Source: IECAM  
Created by: Illinois Action for Children CS3

“ There is a downward trend of the available providers within Region 11. Many providers and teachers are retiring, but there is not enough staff to replace them.  
- CCR&R (Coles County) ”

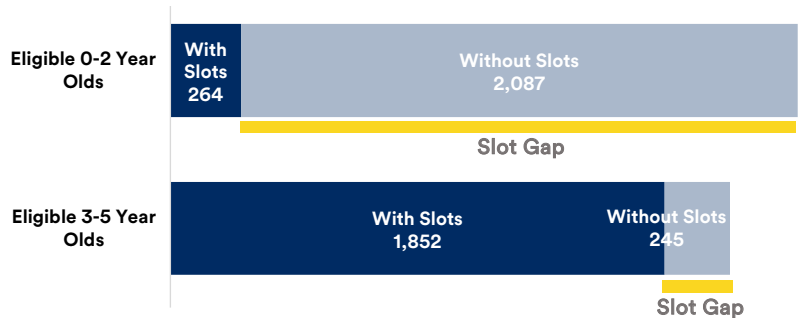
Overall, the main drivers of slot gap within Region 11 include a lack of providers, centers, and programs, and staffing issues. Within counties where there are more centers like Coles County, staffing issues cause program closures like the Head Start in Mattoon, IL. ECEC centers and providers often struggle to keep staff and face big turnover rates. Reasons behind this include low wages, long training and onboarding times, children’s behavior, and lengthy wait periods for background checks. These staffing issues worsen the lack of providers, centers, and programs in the creation of a large slot gap.

For children in families who qualify by income for publicly funded programs like Preschool for All, Preschool for All-Expansion, and Head Start, the slot gap is more prevalent in children birth to age two (Figure 10). The driving factor for this large slot gap is the lack of Early Head Starts and programs for children ages birth to two in general. There are only 2 Early Head Start programs, located in Sullivan, IL (Moultrie County) and Shelbyville, IL (Shelby County). These programs are provided by C.E.F.S. Economic Opportunity Corporation, a Community Action Agency. Embarras River Basin Agency, Inc. (ERBA) is the other Community Action Agency that covers Region 11 counties (Douglas, Edgar, Clark, Cumberland, and Coles); however, they do not offer Early Head Start programs. There are six Prevention Initiative programs with a proposed capacity of 263 according to IECAM data; however, staff was only able to verify four programs including BabyTalk (Moultrie County), Birth to 3 (Coles County), Crawford Clark Prevention Initiative (Clark County), and Partnership in Parenting (Douglas and Edgar Counties).

“ On average every year we have 20 or more children on our waitlist which is basically one entire classroom. But even if we had the staff to cover that classroom, we don’t have the space to educate those children.

- ECEC Provider (Douglas County)

Figure 10: Publicly Funded Slot Gap



Source: IECAM  
Created by: Illinois Action for Children CS3

The slot gap for children ages three to five whose families qualify by income for publicly funded programs is smaller compared to the slot gap for children ages birth to two. In Region 11, there are 2,097 children aged three to five who qualify for publicly funded programs but only 1,852 available slots (Figure 10). The driving factor behind this smaller slot gap is the usage of Preschool For All programs, Preschool for All Expansion programs, and Head Start programs. However, many of these programs also still have waitlists, especially in bigger areas like Tuscola, IL (Douglas County) and Mattoon, IL (Coles County) where there are not enough staff or space to serve more children.

It is important to consider the slot gap because there are many children who are not receiving ECEC due to a lack of spots available. Children are often placed on waitlists and can remain on them for 1 to 2 years. Many mothers find out they are pregnant and immediately contact child care providers to put their unborn on a waitlist. Waitlists are even longer for families who use CCAP as only certain providers accept it.

Waitlist criteria are different for each type of program. For example, Family Child Care Providers and ECEC Centers typically prioritize siblings to support their current families while local PFA programs prioritize high individualized risk factor scores. These scores look at environmental issues, developmental delays, family wellbeing, and more. While prioritized waitlists help some families, they can also negatively impact children and families who would benefit from the socialization within child care and working caregivers. In an ideal world, there would be more than enough slots so that families could make choices based upon personal preferences and program quality.

“ A lot of families have to go through places like CCR&R to get their funding for child care, and then only certain places accept them. Those places are very booked up because the couple of places that accept the funding. So, then they sit on a waitlist.

- Community Member (Clark County)

“ The bottom line is that we do not have enough programs or child care spots available for the children in our area.

- Community Member (Douglas County)

# Early Childhood Education & Care (ECEC) Workforce

The ECEC workforce landscape in Region 11 is composed of hard-working professionals spread out across seven counties with the majority in Coles County. According to INCCRRA, there are only 510 licensed ECEC providers. 69% identify as Licensed Center Teaching staff, 9% identify as Licensed Center Directors, and 23% identify as Family Child Care Providers.

While the diversity of the ECEC workforce in Region 11 has increased in recent years, most licensed providers identify as white and female. According to INCCRRA, there are only 12 males (2%) working in the ECEC Workforce with one being a Licensed Center Director, eight being Licensed Teaching staff, and four being Family Child Care Providers.<sup>5</sup> The Region’s workforce is predominantly white: 94% of Licensed Center Directors, 91% of Licensed Teaching Staff, and 99% of Licensed Family Child Care Providers (Figure 11). While a more racially diverse ECEC workforce would be wonderful, the current workforce is representative of the communities in Region 11 with 93% of children under the age of five identifying as white (Non-Hispanic/Latine). Many families note this issue when it comes to race and ethnic diversity in ECEC.

“We’re not diverse at all but in the same token that’s the majority of the school population. So, I mean, yes, they are representative of the community but there is no diversity.”

- Parent (Edgar County)

Figure 11: Race and Ethnicity by Licensed Provider Type

	Asian	Black or African American	Hispanic or Latine	Native American/ Alaskan, Pacific Islander, or Other	Multi-Racial	White
Center Directors	0%	2%	2%	0%	2%	94%
Teaching Staff	0%	5%	1%	< 1%	1%	91%
FCC Staff <sup>6</sup>	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	99%

Source: INCCRRA  
Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

Most Licensed Center Directors either have an associate or bachelor’s degree as their highest level of education while most Licensed Center Teaching Staff and Family Child Care Providers report a High School Diploma/GED as their highest level of education. Most Licensed Center Directors do not hold an Illinois Director Credential (77%). For Licensed Center Teaching staff, only 29% have an Early Childhood Education (ECE) Credential and only 7% have an Infant Toddler (ITC) Credential. For those with the ECE credential, most have obtained level 1 (64%). For those with the ITC credential, most have level 2 or 3 (64%). For Family Child Care Providers, only 35% have an ECE Credential with level 1 being the most common (90%). Only five Family Child Care providers (4%) have their Family Child Care Credential.

Workforce recruitment is a struggle for providers across Region 11. Despite the range of recruitment methods, few applicants apply, fewer respond, and even fewer attend in-person interviews. Providers note issues with long wait times and turnaround times for DCFS background checks. Many college students going into the field of ECEC or K-3 Education work for centers to gain experience but then leave for better financial opportunities once they receive their degree.

<sup>5</sup> Workforce data reflects those who were registered in the Gateways to Opportunities Registry as of March 2021

<sup>6</sup> FCC includes family child care providers and assistants, substitute/floaters, and other direct and indirect service providers



The ECEC workforce is very vocal regarding the issues they face as professionals yet often feel unheard. Common challenges that providers report include financial issues, lack of respect, lack of staff, and burnout. Burnout is common among ECEC professionals as children’s behaviors and support staff turnover rates have increased since the start of COVID-19. The need for socio-emotional development is at an all-time high. Attempting to tackle these challenging behaviors while low-staffed can cause educators to feel unsupported and mentally exhausted, leading to high turnover.

Many ECEC professionals in Region 11 receive below Illinois average wages. According to the 2021 Salary and Staffing Survey of Licensed Child Care Facilities, the average hourly wage for Administrative Directors in Service Delivery Area #11 Charleston is \$19.34 compared to the Illinois Average of \$22.58. For Director/Teacher, Early Childhood Teacher, and Early Childhood Assistants, hourly wage averages range from \$10.71 to \$15.56 with higher roles receiving more. Benefits are rare in many ECEC facilities. If benefits are offered, they are minimal and don’t typically include health insurance or a retirement package. For providers, there may be little to no leftover income after the costs of owning a family child care business. Accepting CCAP can also cause financial issues when payments are late.

“ I accept CCAP payments, and I really haven’t had any issues except for the delay in payments. When the payments are late, it’s a struggle because this is my income. It’s my only income.

- Family Child Care Provider  
(Edgar County)

”

Providers also struggle with not feeling respected by the community. Many commented on the amount of work that goes into ECEC versus the lack of recognition they get. Being labeled as “babysitters” is viewed as a sign of disrespect, and they noted that it is not just the public that has a lower outlook on ECEC professionals, it is government employees and legislators too.

Despite low pay, lack of support staff, and struggles with respect, ECEC providers continue in this field because of the impact they have on young minds and hearts. Parents and providers often mention the struggles are worth it to see the difference in children’s lives and “light bulb moments.”

The Regional Office of Education (ROE #11) provides professional development opportunities to professionals that work within the school districts. Last year, 22 early childhood professionals utilized training opportunities through ROE 11. Douglas County providers are served by Child Care Resource Service through the University of Illinois - Champaign while Clark, Coles, Cumberland, Edgar, Moultrie, and Shelby County providers are served by CCR&R through Eastern Illinois University.

“ The State needs to trust us. We are educated, credentialed professionals. We shouldn’t have to prove everything that we do. We spend so much time doing the paperwork that we are forgetting what is most important, building relationships with children. Rules and mandates are made by people that have never stepped foot into a classroom. They have never had the compassion fatigue that we experience. It’s a daily struggle to do our jobs. We do the best we can for our students, and sometimes every little thing cannot get done because we are doing more important things. And nowadays it seems like our primary focus is social emotional development because you can’t teach the children until they know how to self-regulate. You cannot teach anything until their basic needs are met, so if a child is coming to school with food insecurities, that’s the primary focus. Forget the lesson plan.

- Family Child Care Provider (Edgar County)

”

“

I feel like most educators, like myself, that are in early childhood, do it because they love that connection with their students. They love the connection with the families, and as a whole I feel like we just love our jobs like we like being able to have that play-based learning. We like being able to see the light bulb come off for the very first time for some of our students. We like being able to implement the love of learning at a very young age, to set them up for success in the future.

- PFA Teacher (Cumberland County)

”



The entire family helps in a farming community.

Caregiver Connections is a statewide program that helps reduce early childhood suspension/expulsion rates and offers support, capacity building, and training to providers. A Mental Health Consultant is located in Coles County where they provide consultation, social-emotional development, training support for staff, connections to resources that can identify developmental delays, and referrals to evaluations and family services. Last year, 200 providers took advantage of the training opportunities offered through CCRR, Caregiver Connections, and the Mental Health Consultant.

Region 11 has three high school programs for future ECEC educators including Kermitt's Cove at Charleston High School (Coles County), Shelbyville High School Preschool (Shelby County), and Little Leaders at Leaders Innovating For Tomorrow (LIFT) (Coles County). These programs act as child care laboratories that serve children but also help high school students prepare for the ECEC workforce. Students earn dual credit for 2 to 4 ECE courses and 1 year of field experience in the child care laboratory. Upon graduation, students will have earned a Level 1 ECE Gateways credential and Child Development Associate (CDA) credential, which will allow them to be infant/toddler teachers in DCFS-licensed programs. Currently, LIFT has 14 high school students participating in the Early Childhood track.

Lake Land College offers an associate degree in ECE, a Gateways Level 4 ECE credential, and two courses toward a Gateways Director credential. They also house the Laker Louie Jr. Academy, a child care laboratory that provides practicum experience for students. Eastern Illinois University (EIU) offers three ECEC programs including a bachelor's in Early Childhood Education, certificate in Early Childhood Special Education, and a minor in Early Childhood Program Administration. A B.S. in Early Childhood Education leads to teacher licensure with an Early Childhood (birth through grade two) endorsement. Completing the minor leads to Illinois Director's

Credential Level 5 through the Gateway to Opportunity Illinois Credentialing Program. EIU houses the Child and Family Life Education Center (CFLEC), a practicum site.

While there are many hard-working ECEC professionals in Region 11, there are also many challenges they face. It is important to discuss the ECEC workforce as they are the backbone of this system and without them, the system would fail. Overall, the ECEC workforce, especially family child care providers, are struggling to stay afloat.

## Parent/Caregiver/Family Voice

Throughout Region 11, families are experiencing highs and lows with ECEC. Many caregivers and parents are vocal about what's working or needs improvement. Family stories are crucial to include because they help paint the whole picture. Data is presented in black and white while families provide details and real experiences when trying to access or use early childhood education services. While there are seven different and unique counties in the Region, families are experiencing common issues and benefits.

In terms of access to ECEC, many families have found local CCR&R offices, social media, and local staff to be helpful. Parents and caregivers who are current or former staff or students at Eastern Illinois University are more aware of the local CCR&R office due to its location in the University and either utilize it themselves or refer others when in need of child care. However, most families turn to social media and personal recommendations when it comes to finding access. For example, small towns utilize Facebook Groups as a town forum to keep community members up to date, ask questions, and discuss common issues. Often, local caregivers and parents and caregivers in need of child care will post about their issues and ask for recommendations. This method has been very useful for families in the Region. Local staff from early childhood education and programs have also been helpful in acting as a resource for their families when trying to find child care.

According to local families, the quality of individual staff members is one of the things that is working in ECEC. Many families mention seeing early childhood education providers' passion and the positive impacts on their children's experiences in ECEC. Other families highlight staff credentials and creativity as something that is working well. While Region 11 does not have a large amount of ECEC programs, it does have many creative programs like the County Learning Center in Tuscola (Douglas County) where staff combine the traditional style of learning and hands-on experiences including the care and maintenance of the country school property, plants, and animals together. Another asset to ECEC highlighted by families includes Preschool For All programs. Due to the lack of availability for 0-2 early childhood education, many parents/caregivers jump at the chance to enroll their child in local Preschool For All programs, specifically Project H.E.L.P. Project H.E.L.P. is a Preschool For All program coordinated by EIASE and local school districts. This free program for parents provides preschool opportunities for all areas, no matter how small.

“ I don't know what we would do without Project H.E.L.P. I mean, like without it there would be no pre-Kindergarten programs in our area.

- Provider (Cumberland County)

“ So, in our school system, Project Help, thank goodness for Project Help, anytime that he has triggers or whatever, the main teacher or assistant is on the phone letting me know, hey, what's been going on at home? Because we saw him throw a chair or he's being super defiant today.

- Foster Parent (Clark County)

“ The support from teachers and caseworkers at Head Start has been great. I feel like even though I am a single mom of four kids, I can still chase my dreams because I have the support of staff and know my kids are safe. They even give me resources for when they are not in session, like the local YMCA hosts summer camps and programs with financial help so I can send the children there and feel comfortable.

- Parent (Cumberland County)

”

”



The last thing commonly mentioned by families in terms of what's working in ECEC is EIASE. Caregivers highlight EIASE's availability and support as a large resource for families needing early intervention. Overall, individual staff passion and creativity, Preschool For All programs, and EIASE have been highlighted by families as things working in ECEC.

On the flip side, families highlighted many things that could be improved on in ECEC including a lack of providers, cost of care, provider hours, and special education training and resources. The lack of providers, specifically for infants and toddlers, was heavily mentioned by parents, caregivers, and providers across seven counties.

Many families must travel away from their home and/or work area to find ECEC for their children. For example, a local nurse practitioner, living and working in Tuscola (Douglas County), needs full-time care for her 2 children. Currently, her preschooler attends a full-day preschool program in Mattoon (Coles County), and the younger child attends child care in Atwood (Douglas County). Between her and her husband, they drive to Mattoon and to Atwood twice a day because they are unable to find a full-day program in Tuscola, where they live and work, that had openings for both children. The daily commute is approximately 131 miles. Unfortunately, this story is not unique as many other families spend more time in the car with their children traveling to and from ECEC due to the lack of local availability. This is prevalent in ECEC deserts in Region 11 including Windsor (Shelby County), Arthur (Moultrie and Douglas Counties), and Tuscola (Douglas County) but many other small-town families are forced to travel over 20 miles to find care. The lack of local child care availability also impacts family's utilization of local PFA programs since most Preschool For All programs are half-day which leaves parents/caregivers struggling to find care for the other part of the day and travel to each program.



Sharing smiles and laughter.

“ Each time we found out we were pregnant, we immediately put our children on waitlists (3 providers) so I could go back to work as a Nurse Practitioner. Our first child (age 3) was able to get on one at 8 weeks old. Now, we are pregnant with our third and we don't even have placement for our second (age 1).  
- Parent (Clark County) ”

“ I stepped down from my job that I had for five years whenever we became a foster parent because I knew it was going to be an issue. So, I actually stepped down from my job because I knew that there was no child care.  
- Parent (Douglas County) ”

Another common issue families are facing is the cost of care. Parents and caregivers have mentioned issues affording child care, working it into their family budget, or making sacrifices to make it work financially. Sacrifices like quitting careers or education are not uncommon. A parent in Edgar County said “A lot of my mom friends are just going to be stay-at-home moms because families can't find child care, and if you do, it is so outrageously expensive you can't afford it. It is cheaper to be living on one income.” Region 11 is losing workers who contribute to our local, state, and federal governments because they are having to make a choice.



“

I drive 20 plus minutes to Camargo and back every day for care which puts a damper on time we could be spending together as a family. I would also like my child to be enrolled in preschool so he can get a better adjustment to school life, however there has been no movement on the waitlist so he can attend 1 of the 4 preschools in Tuscola. Even then the programs are half-day and do not provide transportation to Camargo for child care so I would have to leave work in the middle of the day for an hour just to drive to get my child from school to Camargo and back to Atwood for work.

”

- Parent (Clark County)

Being a stay-at-home parent used to be a privilege in many families' eyes because one parent had a job with a higher paying salary; however, now it has become a necessity because the cost of child care for a year can be more than an average salary. While there are some resources available for families struggling to afford child care like the Child Care Assistance Program, many families are still at a loss due to income limitations and provider acceptance.

“

Being a therapist has always been my dream, but I chose to be a stay-at-home mom. Why, you may ask? Because every child care option we looked at in Shelbyville and Charleston had waitlists. When we did find one place in Charleston, their rate was absolutely ridiculous, especially since we were working off one income.

- Parent (Shelby County)

”

“

When I started looking at the cost and putting it in our budget, I had a panic attack. How can it cost that much when child care employees are barely making anything? I started looking at options to possibly reduce the cost like CCAP but we make too much money to qualify. So then our family (as well as all the other middle-class families in Illinois) are stuck in the middle where we make too much to qualify for help but make too little to afford child care.

- Parent (Edgar County)

”

Trying to work with provider hours is another struggle families are facing. Region 11 is comprised of many different workforces including factories and farms. Many providers are only open during the typical work hours, 8 AM - 4 PM which excludes first and third-shift workers. While it is the family child providers' prerogative to have hours that work for their home, it does create a hassle for families with differing work hours. Diversity in provider hours is essential for working families and those in school. There are two local colleges that offer night classes for those working during the day to progress their degree.

“

The biggest issue I have is timing. I'm currently looking for someone to watch my daughters (8 and 5) and 2-year-old son while I work. I work from 6 to 4:30 at a local factory so I would have to drop off at 5:15 am and pick up at 5:30 pm. I've lost a job previously because of this same issue. Finding someone with those hours is impossible. I'm a single mother and can't afford to lose another job so it's an impossible necessity.

- Parent (Cumberland County)

”

“

Timing is not the best for our family right now as I work 9-3 and have a class from 3:30-5:30 in Charleston on Tuesdays and Thursdays. With the drive back to Tuscola, I am sometimes late for the pickup time (6 pm) and have a late fee for it. But no other provider is open later than 6 pm. I actually had to put off one of my classes at night due to no care.

- Parent (Douglas County)

”

“

Our pediatrician would suggest items for school to help sensory-wise. It got to the point where we were donating items for them to use because they didn't have the resources to get those things. My mother-in-law sewed a weighted vest for him and sent it to school. We send various fidgets and resources for him - they're not expensive individually, but when you think about if 10 kids that all need these individual things in different classrooms, it racks up. I mean, we're fortunate that we're in a position that I donate it to the school, but not everybody can, and they shouldn't have to.

- Parent (Edgar County)

”

For families with children with disabilities and developmental delays, the lack of special education training and resources for staff is a struggle. During conversations with this population, it is clear that rural ECEC providers do not have the same resources and training as urban areas, particularly in publicly funded programs like Head Start and school districts. A parent in Cumberland County utilized the local Head Start funded through E.R.B.A. and struggled with the staff's knowledge and resources for supporting their child, saying, "They weren't able to do much with my son other than speech, mostly because they did not have enough staff to work with him one-on-one or resources to give him in the meantime." Parents and providers also see a need to broaden resources for early childhood educators to be more than just pencils and paper.

Families are experiencing highs and lows with ECEC in Region 11. While the quality of staff and resources like Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies, EIASE, and Preschool For All programs are working for families, the lack of providers, increased cost of care, standardized provider hours, and the lack of special education training and resources for providers are not. These stories shared by families across the Region are essential to understanding the full picture of ECEC.

## Regional Strengths & Needs

Region 11 encompasses many strengths within the current ECEC system; however, there are opportunities for growth. Qualitative and quantitative data combined with perspectives from Family Council members, Action Council members, and community members have revealed many areas worth highlighting. Birth to Five Illinois recognizes that though each county within Region 11 has individual strengths and needs, the following encompass the entire Region.

### Strengths

- The longevity and passion of current ECEC providers.
- Provider diversity is representative of the communities and children they serve.
- Preschool For All programs have a high utilization rate throughout the Region.
- There is collaboration between local community resources and providers.
- Many high-quality Prevention Initiative programs, including Birth to 3 (Coles County), Partnerships for Parenting (Edgar and Douglas Counties), and BabyTalk (Moultrie County).
- Coles County has a large number of ECEC programs, including Gold and Silver Quality-rated programs.
- There are numerous high school, college, and university educational programs for ECEC.

### Needs

- More infant and toddler care slots.
- Public transportation for local programs.
- More full-day preschool opportunities.
- Hands-on and available mental health, social-emotional, and behavioral resources.
- Current and accurate licensing standards and policies for providers.
- Increased staff appreciation and support.
- Collaboration between local care providers and half-day preschool programs.
- Before and after school care in smaller rural school districts.
- Local and state support for Head Start programs.
- A comprehensive ECEC database with accurate and current data for all sectors.
- Information on ECEC programs provided earlier to families.
- More accessible opportunities to improve quality ratings and earn credentials for staff.
- Improved quality of programs across the Region.
- Increased amounts and access to grants for all ECEC providers.

## Recommendations

Combining Region 11's strengths and the opportunities for growth, our Action and Family Council members have produced the following recommendations to improve the ECEC system in Region 11.

- Promote community creation of Family Child Care Homes specifically serving infants and toddlers by increasing accessibility and offering incentives at the state and local levels.
  - By providing easier opportunities to open and operate Family Child Care Homes, the number of available ECEC options and slots will increase.
- Significantly increase funding for public and school transportation, specifically targeting rural communities, to facilitate access to local programs and community resources.
  - By increasing financial resources, we can bridge transportation gaps and remove the barriers that hinder individuals in underserved communities from reaching essential destinations.
- Increase full-time preschool programming opportunities.
  - By offering more full-time preschool programs, we can support working families by removing the barrier of having to find multiple ECEC providers to care for their children during a single workday.
- Increase awareness, accessibility, and the amount of mental health, social-emotional, and behavioral coaches for ECEC programs and schools.
  - By providing easier access to mental health, social-emotional, and behavioral coaches, ECEC staff will have increased opportunities to build their skills toolbox and feel supported in moments of high-stress.
- Construct reasonable adjustments and clarification to the Department of Children and Family Services' standards and policies based on common issues with Illinois ECEC providers.
  - By revising and clarifying Licensing Standards for Day Care Homes and Day Care Centers, current and future providers will be able to effectively and safely operate and create programs.
- Expand support programs and develop continuation incentives for current ECEC staff.
  - By actively supporting current ECEC staff, we increase the retention rates.
- Facilitate collaboration between ECEC providers and programs, specifically half-day programs.
  - This vital support aims to promote community unification and support for families. By offering solutions for full-day care, families are able to utilize local PFA Programs (Project H.E.L.P.).
- Expand and fund before- and after-school care opportunities for smaller, rural school districts.
  - Specific counties like Cumberland, Clark, Shelby, Edgar, and Douglas have community resources available to host before- and after- school care options specifically in smaller school districts.
- Increase state and local support for Head Start and Early Head Start programs.
  - By providing state and local recognition, funding, and staff incentives, federally funded Head Start and Early Head Start programs can be better utilized by our communities.
- The State should implement a comprehensive framework to establish an ECEC system that ensures coordination and tracking of current and accurate data across various funding sources, including slots and waitlists.
  - By implementing this framework, we can simplify data management, promote data transparency, and enhance the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the ECEC system.



- Expansion of ECEC program outreach to begin earlier including prenatal healthcare visits and postpartum care.
  - An increase in early outreach and marketing of ECEC programs can benefit families new to the area and with children with disabilities.
  - By providing easier access to ECEC information, families can make informed decisions and have access to resources to better support their children’s development and the entire family’s well-being.
- Make quality improvement and staff credentials easier to obtain for non-state funded programs.
  - By creating this comprehensive framework, we empower educators to enhance their skills, deepen their expertise, and thrive in their professional journey.
- Increase quality improvement opportunities for current ECEC providers.
  - By providing more opportunities to improve quality in current ECEC providers, we can ensure that every child receives quality care and an evidence-based education.
- Create a grant and funding opportunity clearinghouse specific to ECEC educators and providers.
  - This centralized platform could serve as a reliable hub where vital information regarding grants and funding can be readily accessed and exchanged, enabling providers to find and prepare grant proposals efficiently.

In compiling this report, it is our hope that local and state leaders will use this information to advance ECEC services in the Region. We will continue our community engagement efforts to expand our understanding of the ECEC needs of local families and providers. If you have further questions about these recommendations or would like to get involved with the work of Birth to Five Illinois in Region 11, please find our contact information on the front inside cover of this Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment.

# Appendices

## Appendix A: References

1. Illinois Commission on Equitable Early Childhood Education and Care Funding (2021). Commission Report of Findings and Recommendations: Spring 2021. Site name: <https://oecd.illinois.gov/content/dam/soi/en/web/oecd/documents/early-childhood-funding-commission-full-report.pdf>
2. Illinois Early Childhood Asset Map (2023). Report Creation Page. Site name: <https://iecamregionalreports.education.illinois.edu/dash-snapshot-report/landing>
3. Native Land Digital (2023). Report Creation Page. Site Name: <http://native-land.ca>
4. United States Census Data (2023). Explore Census Data. Site name: <https://data.census.gov>
5. United States Department of Health and Human Services. (2020). Poverty Guidelines. Site name: [https://aspe.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/migrated\\_legacy\\_files//194391/2020-percentage-poverty-tool.pdf](https://aspe.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/migrated_legacy_files//194391/2020-percentage-poverty-tool.pdf)
6. Whitehead, J. (2021). Illinois' Early Childhood Workforce 2020 Report. Site name: [https://www.inccrra.org/images/datareports/Illinois\\_Early\\_Childhood\\_Education\\_Workforce\\_2020\\_Report.pdf](https://www.inccrra.org/images/datareports/Illinois_Early_Childhood_Education_Workforce_2020_Report.pdf)

## Appendix B: Focus Group and Interview Questions

Throughout the development of the Regional Needs Assessment, focus groups and interviews were conducted with caregivers, providers, elected officials, and other community stakeholders. Below are questions developed for caregivers and others. In the interest of time and space, only select questions are included.

### Parents, Families, and Caregivers

1. There are many Early Childhood services available in our Region. What Early Childhood services does your family use/has your family used?
2. How have you found out about Early Childhood programs or services, or found care for your child(ren)?
3. Do the child care services you're using now meet your family's needs? If not, please describe what would better fit your family's needs.
4. What, if anything, has been particularly helpful in making Early Childhood Education and Care work for your family?
5. What barriers or challenges has your family had with using Early Childhood services in your community?
6. Have any of the children in your care been referred to services? What was that process like?
7. What services don't currently exist in your community that you think would help families, in general? What services would help parent/caregivers, specifically?
8. Is there anything else you think I should know about Early Childhood education, care, or services in your community, our Region, or in the state?

### Early Childhood Professionals and Others

1. What challenges do you think families have in accessing Early Childhood Education and Care programs and services?
2. What programs do you know of in the Region that serve children birth through age five and their families?
3. What services don't currently exist in your community and/or this Region for young children and/or their families that you would like to see?
4. What data do you think would be helpful in better understanding how priority populations access Early Childhood care and services, or the barriers/challenges they have accessing care and services?
5. Is child care readily available and close to employers in your community?
6. What accommodations has your business or company made for professionals with young children? How have these accommodations impacted your business or company?
7. Have you connected with child care providers in the community to build relationships and build relationships with partners to provide the care you need for employees?

## Photo Credits

Photo Credits: cover, Kha Ruxury on Pexels; cover, Nathan Dumlao on Unsplash; cover, Lawrence Crayton on Unsplash; cover, Emma Bauso on Pexels; cover, Cottonbro on Pexels; cover, Hasan Albari on Pexels; cover, Efigie Lima Marcos on Pexels; cover, Aaron Burden on Unsplash; cover, Gautam Arora on Unsplash; page 1, Terricks Noah on Unsplash; page 2, Patty Brito on Unsplash; page 3, Jessica Rockowitz on Unsplash; page 7, Markus Spiske on Unsplash; page 8, Gift Habeshaw on Unsplash; page 11, photo from iStock; page 12, Anastasia Shuraeva on Pexels; page 13, Josh Willink on Pexels; page 13, Anna Shvets on Pexels; page 15, Tina Floersch; page 16, Birth to Five Illinois Region 11 Team; page 17, Birth to Five Illinois Region 11 Team; page 23, Alena Darmel on Pexels; page 31, Birth to Five Illinois Region 11 Team; page 33, Trust Tru Katsande on Unsplash.





Illinois  
State Board of  
Education



---

Birth to Five Illinois is funded by the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) and the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) and is a department of the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (INCCRRA).