



# Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment

**Region 1-B-D**  
(North Cook County)





## Region 1-B-D Staff

Regional Council Manager: Ilinca A. Wallace (she/her/ella)

Family & Community Engagement Specialist: Irene Di Minervino (she/her/ella)

Administrative Support: Nina Brzezinska-Dybczak (she/her/ella)

Office Address: 1600 Golf Road, Rolling Meadows, IL 60008

Phone Number: (309) 393-2546

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

Web: [www.birthtofiveil.com/region1bd](http://www.birthtofiveil.com/region1bd)

## Region 1-B-D Action Council Members

Susan Cerza

Amy Cocorikis

Bettye Cohns

Kristen Ford

Clare Giuffrida

Olga Khamichonak

Cashe Knox

Lisa Merdinger

Cori Mohr

Agnieszka Moroni

Viktoria Podlipni

Carrie Rafalski

Michele Ramsey

John Ranieri

Edward Russell

Peter J. Smith

Chris Tokarski

Tina Vanderwarker

Kate Warach

Natalie Wood

## Region 1-B-D Family Council Members

Julie Center

Charlotte Erickson

Arisbet Figueroa

Sharmishtha Goel

Safiyyah Hassan

Wendy Mamola

Molly Mejia

Lizz Merdinger

Najma Nishat

Nancy Salvador

Betty William

# Table of Contents

Region 1-B-D Executive Summary .....	3
Region 1-B-D Snapshot Infographic.....	5
<b>Overview &amp; Acknowledgements .....</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 1-B-D .....</b>	<b>15</b>
Regional Community Landscape.....	16
Local Community Collaborations.....	20
Early Childhood Education & Care (ECEC) Programs .....	24
Slot Gap.....	29
Early Childhood Education & Care (ECEC) Workforce.....	31
Parent/Family/Caregiver Voice .....	34
Regional Strengths & Needs.....	37
Recommendations.....	38
Appendices .....	40



## Region 1-B-D 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 1-B-D 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

In the Cook North region, there is a disparity between the number of children under the age of six which is 69,387, and the lack of availability of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) spots. Currently, there are 14,076 spots across all ECEC program models. While we do not know all of the parents' needs currently, based on voices from the community, which include parents and providers, there is an urgent need for affordable childcare options within our region. The current income eligibility criteria of the CCAP (Child Care Assistance Program) program, which follows the federal poverty guidelines, does not match the Cook North cost of living. Therefore, leaving families in a challenging decision-making position. Programs are not accessible due to cost and lack of spots. Increasing the number of private and publicly funded spots is needed. Both families and the ECEC workforce have expressed a need for access to mental health support systems and resources. Additionally, it was highlighted that detecting and intervening early had a positive impact on the growth and development of a young child leading to the need of early screening for all. Building partnerships with pediatrician offices and other trusted community organizations would allow children not connected to the ECEC system to access early screening.



## Region 1-B-D Needs

- Increase funding and slots for ECEC programs, particularly for the birth to three population and for all publicly funded programs.
- Improve workforce recruitment and retention of ECEC staff, particularly the recruitment of multilingual educators to meet the needs of English Language Learners (ELL) and therapeutic staff.
- Affordable Child Care for all families with children under the age of six.
- Better access to developmental screenings for children not connected to ECEC programs and mental health support/services for families and the workforce.
- Increased transparency in policy and decision-making with families.

## Region 1-B-D Recommendations

- Increase investment in Early Childhood from prenatal to eight years old.
- Implement initiatives that will help recruit new educators and therapists by:
  - Actively encouraging high school students to pursue careers in the ECEC field.
  - Developing mentoring programs designed to support new teachers.
  - Intentionally recruiting potential multilingual educators.
  - Creating a networking system to post jobs or resumes to connect workers and employers.
- Raise the CCAP income eligibility to reflect the cost of living in the region.
- Build partnerships with health care providers: local mental health providers and pediatricians. Increase access to early screening and resource sharing.
- Engage diverse voices in discussion and decision-making processes (families, community, organizations, legislators).

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

**Ilinca Wallace (she/her)**

Phone Number: (309) 393-2546

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

Web: [www.birthtofiveil.com/region1bd](http://www.birthtofiveil.com/region1bd)



# REGION 1-B-D 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.



**69,387**

Children Under  
the Age of 6  
in Region 1-B-D



**15,002**

Children 0-5  
at 200% Federal  
Poverty Level



**10,569**

Children 0-5  
Without Publicly  
Funded ECEC Slots

**74%**

Percentage of focus group and interview participants who indicated that children in their classroom, their own child or family member experienced a time when they needed mental health support

“Children with special needs are further at a disadvantage in receiving services in a preschool setting with the slot gap because of number of slots, splitting time between schools, and transportation issues.” - Inclusion Director

**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 1-B-D NEEDS**

1. Increase funding and slots for ECEC programs.
2. Workforce recruitment and retention.
3. Affordable child care for families with children under the age of 6.
4. Better access to developmental screenings for children not connected to ECEC programs or mental health support/services for both families and the workforce.

## **REGION 1-B-D RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Increase investment in Early Childhood to open new centers and classrooms, and to recruit and retain Early Childhood professionals.
2. Raise the CCAP income eligibility to reflect the cost of living.
3. Build partnerships with health care providers such as local mental health providers and pediatricians.



**"If you are a middle class family, who does not qualify for subsidy, you are in a constant state of stress, cobbling it together because you can't afford private childcare but have to work."**

**- Community Member**

# 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.

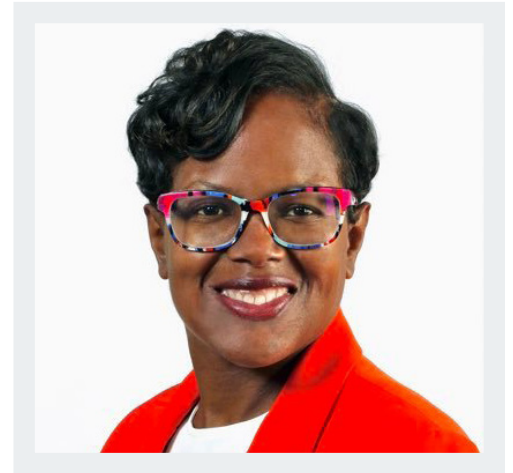
Third, policy makers, elected officials, and state agencies that administer ECEC programs will receive a copy of the report to give them a local view of the ECEC landscape in the areas they serve. The goal is to provide decision-makers with context from a community perspective so they can better understand 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

This Regional Needs Assessment could not have been possible without the support of the communities we serve. First, we would like to acknowledge and thank our amazing Family Council members for their insight and openness about their experiences and barriers that they faced while accessing the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) system in our Region. Their voices and leadership are at the heart of the Regional Needs Assessment and the future work of our Region. We would like to deeply thank our Action Council and Family Council for the many hours of rich discussions, sharing of ideas, and analyzing data collaboratively. Without the commitment and input of each individual, we would not have been able to elevate the stories and facts needed to re-imagine a more equitable ECEC system.

Many thanks go out to all the community organizations, libraries, and programs that allowed us to set up tables, speak with families, participate in events, and gather community input over the past year. A huge thank you to each and every individual that took the time to meet with us and share their perspectives through interviews, focus groups and community meetings. All the ideas that were shared contributed to our understanding of the needs of the communities we serve.

Region 1-B-D could not have reached as many voices without the support of the organizations throughout our Region that have built strong, trusting relationships with families. We continue to be amazed by the dedicated work of the collaborations and coalitions coming together on behalf of children and families, and we have witnessed and felt the power of mobilizing local resources to improve outcomes. A heartfelt thank you to our Birth to Five Illinois State Team for their guidance, to our elected officials for engaging in this crucial dialogue, and to each family that gave us the privilege of elevating their story. We are humbled and grateful!

Thank you,

**Ilinca Wallace (she/her)**

Regional Council Manager: Region 1-B-D

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.

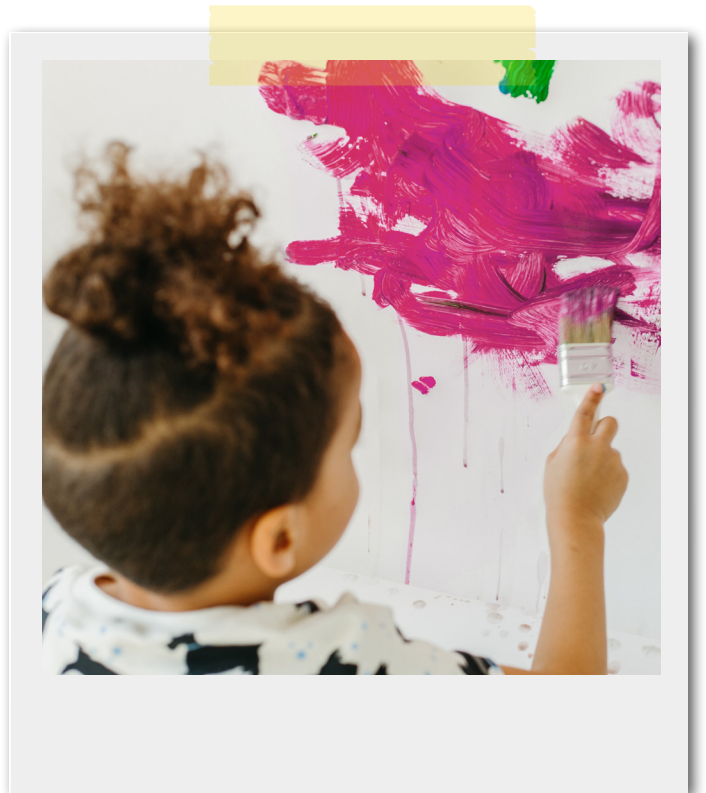
The **mission** of Birth to Five Illinois is to create a statewide regional infrastructure that will amplify input from communities in the development of policies and funding priorities. We support the mobilization of communities to build and sustain equitable access to inclusive, high-quality early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

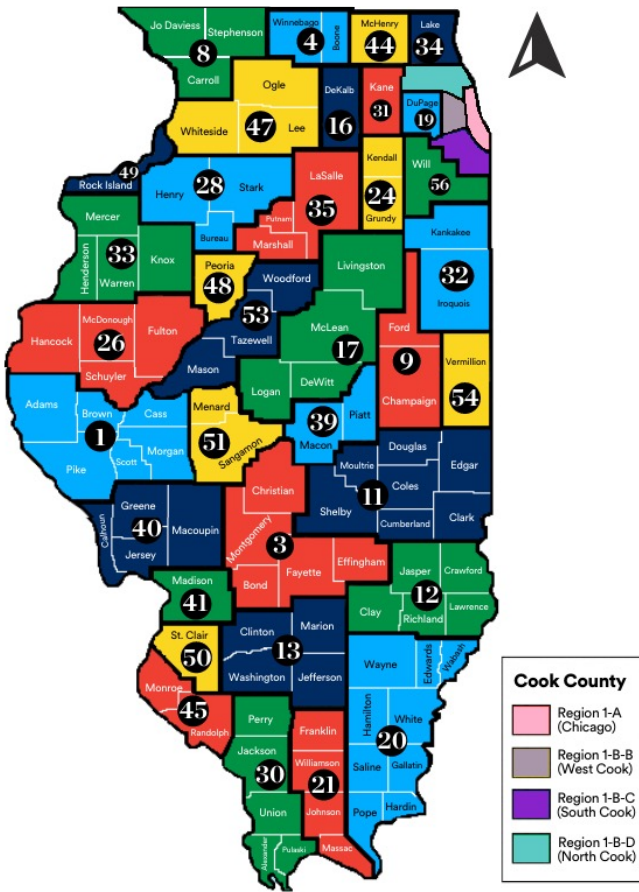


# Timeline

- **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

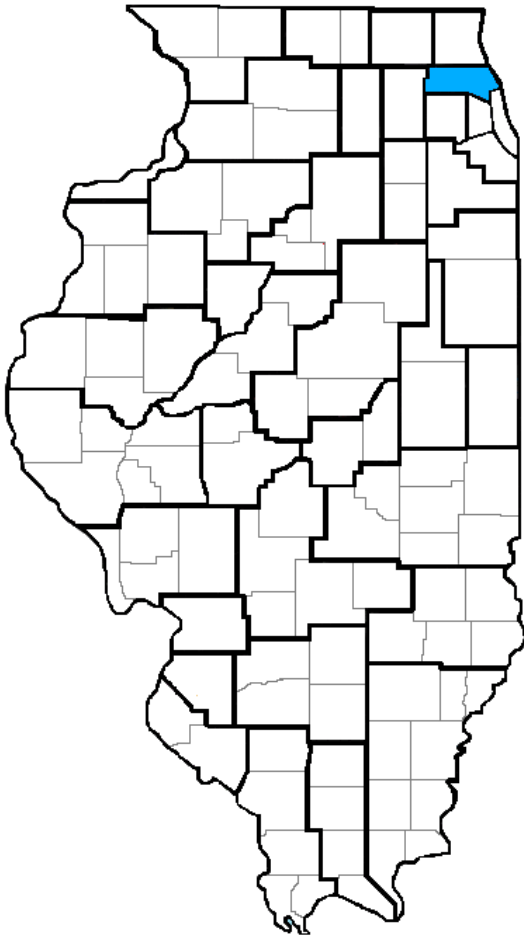
Regionally based demographic, programmatic, and service provider data from IECAM and workforce data from INCCRRA were presented to Action and Family Council members during meetings and is included in the following section. The data comes from both IECAM (2020-2021) and INCCRRA (2021), unless otherwise 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 1-B-D



# Regional Community Landscape



## Regional Boundaries

Region 1-B-D is in the northern part of Cook County, the most populated county in Illinois with approximately 5.2 million people. The Region includes partially or fully 11 townships: Barrington, Elk Grove, Evanston, Hanover, Maine, New Trier, Niles, Northfield, Palatine, Schaumburg, and Wheeling. Cook North is unique in that it borders several county lines including DuPage, Kane, Lake, and the rest of Cook County.

Region 1-B-D includes 32 elementary school districts, including Des Plaines (District 62), Palatine (District 15), Wheeling (District 21), Evanston (District 65), and Schaumburg (District 54), among other top-ranked private and public schools. There are many accredited colleges and universities, including Oakton College, Harper Community College, National Louis University, and Northwestern University.

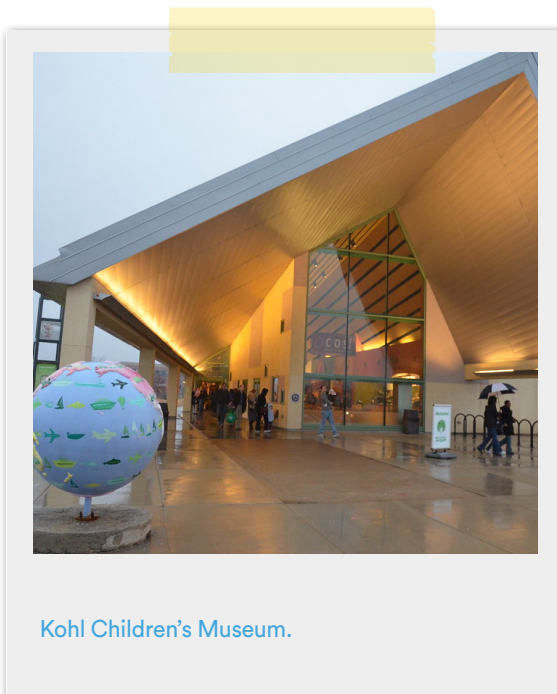
Region 1-B-D boasts acres of forest preserves, access to Lake Michigan, and many well-loved and utilized libraries and parks. Some of the landmarks in Cook North include the Kohl Children's Museum in Glenview, the Chicago Botanic Garden in Glencoe, the Leaning Tower of Niles, the Trickster Cultural Center in Schaumburg, and the Home Alone House in Winnetka.

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

Region 1-B-D acknowledges the Region is the traditional homelands of the Peoria and Bodewadmi (Potawatomi) Nations. Many other Nations consider this area their traditional homeland, including the Myaamia (Miami), Očhéthi Šakówiŋ (Sioux), Hoocąk (Ho-Chunk), and Kiikaapoi (Kickapoo). We acknowledge the historic and ongoing injustices experienced by Indigenous communities. We honor all Native Peoples on whose ancestral lands we gather, as well as the diverse communities who make their home and continue to contribute to the North Cook County Region today.

## Regional Demographics

In Region 1-B-D there are a total of 69,387 children under the age of six: 34,124 who are ages birth to age two and 35,263 who are ages three to five. While most children in the Region are white, according to the Census, 11,736 are Hispanic or Latine, 9,749 are Asian, non-Hispanic, 2,857 are Black, and 4,133 are two or more races.



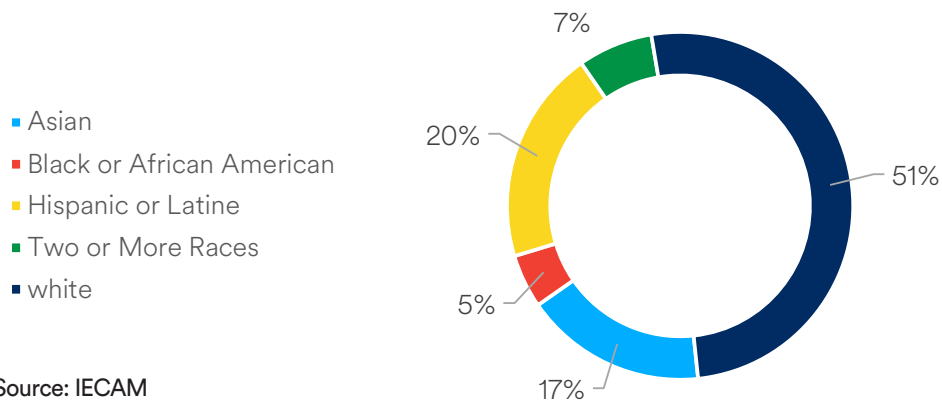
Kohl Children's Museum.

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

While 51% of the Region identified as white, there is racial/ethnic diversity in certain communities. In Hoffman Estates, Palatine, Des Plaines, and Skokie the predominant ethnicity is Asian. In parts of Wheeling, Prospect Heights, Des Plaines, and Evanston the predominant ethnicity is Latine/Hispanic. Evanston also has communities of Black or African American families, Latine/Hispanic families, families that identify as two or more races, and white families.

Like racial/ethnic diversity, home language varies across the Region. The languages represented include Spanish, Russian, Polish, Ukrainian, Arabic, Urdu, Hindi, Bengali, Korean, Japanese, Hebrew, and French Creole among many others. Skokie reports that there are 90+ languages in that village alone and the Early Learning Center in Schaumburg District 54 reported 68% of students were English Language Learners (ELL).

**Figure 1: Percentage of Children Ages Six and Under by Race, Ethnicity**



Source: IECAM  
Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

## Children and Families in Priority Populations

To further understand the landscape of Region 1-B-D, it is important to look at priority populations, which are defined as underserved and underrepresented groups. The Illinois Early Learning Council identified criteria for determining a population to be a priority.<sup>2</sup> The criteria items include a population being “at-risk” (children and families who face economic disadvantage and need additional supports), under-served (children and families who do not receive equitable resources compared to other students in the academic pipeline and do not have adequate access to early childhood programs due to the programs’ location, cost, enrollment requirement, or capacity to serve the comprehensive needs of families), measurable (programs can identify and track the population for the purpose of evaluating changes to a population’s access to programs and services), timely (needs or challenges are particularly relevant to the current landscape) and distinctive (population that is well-defined and standalone).

The purpose of the priority populations list is to drive resources and attention toward improving access to high-quality, responsive services for children and families with limited to no access to economic or material resources. 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.

Based on Birth to Five Illinois’ community outreach work, there is strong evidence that resources are needed for the following priority populations represented in the Cook North Region: children with disabilities; children of underage parents; children experiencing homelessness; children in families experiencing poverty or deep poverty; children in families that face barriers based on culture, language, religion; and children of families with refugee or asylum status or immigration status.

<sup>2</sup> <https://oecd.illinois.gov/content/dam/soi/en/web/oecd/earlylearningcouncil/access/documents/priority-populations-updated-2021.pdf>

There is some data available for children with disabilities, however, more data would be useful to understand the complexity of needs. The local Child and Family Connection 6 shared that as of December 2022, there were 2,156 children from birth to age three with an active Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP). In 2022, the Early Learning Center in the Schaumburg School District 54 reported that 59% of students had an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Similarly, Evanston’s District 65 reported that 36% of students in pre-K had an IEP and the Early Learning Center in Community Consolidated School District 59 reported 61% of students had an IEP.

When looking at data about families living on poverty-level or deep poverty-level income in the Cook North Region, there are 15,002 (22%) children that are living at or below the 200% Federal Poverty Level (FPL). The Federal Poverty Level is a measure of income issued each year by the Department of Health and Human Services. The guidelines are used to determine whether an individual or family qualifies for certain benefits and programs. Most children under five years of age are living at 400% FPL or below. Figure 2 displays the 2020 Federal Poverty Guidelines based on family size and Figure 3 demonstrates children under the age of six, divided by age group, that are living at 400% FPL or below in Cook North.

Based on Census tracks in parts of Cook North, there is a significant number of children living at 200% FPL or below. For example, a part of Cook North, between Elk Grove and Des Plaines, has 82% of children under the age of six living below the 200% FPL. In addition, in parts of Wheeling, Palatine, Glenview, Schaumburg, Skokie, Evanston, and Niles there are higher numbers of children birth to age six living below the 200% FPL.

**Figure 2: Federal Poverty Guidelines at 100%, 150%, 200%, 400% at Various Household Sizes**

2020 Federal Poverty Guidelines				
Household Size	100%	150%	200%	400%
1	\$12,760	\$19,140	\$25,520	\$51,040
2	\$17,240	\$25,860	\$34,480	\$68,960
3	\$21,720	\$32,580	\$43,440	\$86,880
4	\$26,200	\$39,300	\$52,400	\$104,800

Source: Department of Health and Human Services  
 Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

**Figure 3: Number of Children 0-2 and 3-5 under 50%, 100% 200% 400% FPL**

Federal Poverty Levels	Ages Birth to Two	Ages Three to Five
Under 50% FPL	1,178 (3%)	1,206 (3%)
51-100% FPL	1,637 (5%)	1,736 (5%)
101-200%FPL	4,647 (14%)	4,598 (13%)
201-400% FPL	9,058 (27%)	9,145 (26%)

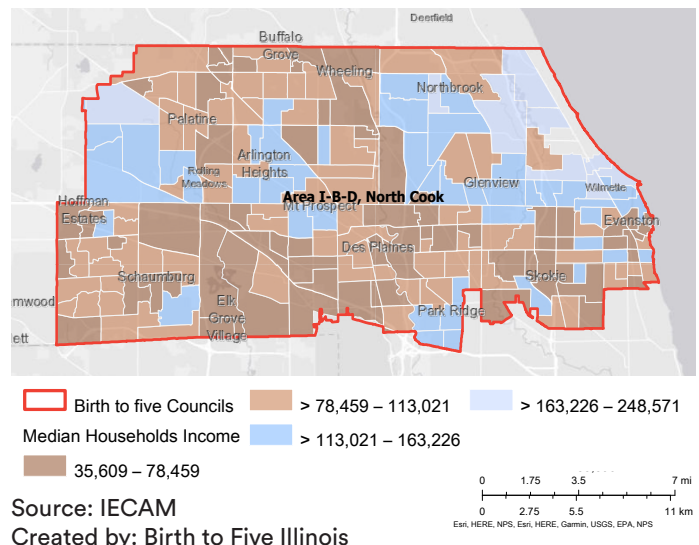
Source: IECAM  
 Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

Further data is needed to better understand what other priority populations reside in the Region and how many families would benefit from more resources and individualized support.

Most of the children in Cook North under the age of five have parents or caregivers that work. There are 12,750 children living with one working caregiver and there are 33,376 children living with two working caregivers. The median household income ranges from \$35,609 to \$248,571. Refer to the map in Figure 4, for a visual representation of the median household income across the Cook North Region.

In a recent study, the median cost for center-based infant care in Cook County was \$16,506 per year, decreasing each year as the child gets older with the median cost for center-based care at \$12,307 per year. In the Cook North Region, the cost per year for child care from infancy through preschool is much higher. For example, the average rate for infant care at private for-profit center in the Region is \$510/week (\$26,520/year). It is also important to consider that families may have more than one child under the age of six that needs care. Based on community conversations, focus groups, and the data, it is clear we need more full-day, affordable, and quality Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) options for families in the Cook North Region.

**Figure 4: Location of Children Under Age Six by Median Household Income**



## Local Community Collaborations

Community Collaborations are an integral part of the Early Childhood landscape. Illinois Action for Children (IAC) and Partner Plan Act (PPA) define a local Early Childhood Collaboration as a group of local, diverse, cross-sector stakeholders that come together to advance equitable outcomes for children and families. Community Collaborations recognize that for children to thrive, families must be supported, and communities must be invested in it. They also connect with the broader regional community because their efforts have a direct impact on the community at large. They impact the workforce, families of young children and take on the task of bringing the community together to support one another living in the community.

Region 1-B-D has a rich landscape of Collaborations and coalitions all working to advance goals for children and families and strengthen communities. The Region has Collaborations in Winnetka, Niles Township (which covers Skokie, Lincolnwood, Golf, and sections of Morton Grove, Niles, and Glenview), Evanston, and Palatine, among other communities.

### Region 1-B-D Local Collaborations

- Elgin Partnership for Early Learning
- Evanston Cradle to Career
- Evanston Early Childhood Council
- Jewish United Fund Early Learning Collaborative\*
- Niles Township Early Childhood Alliance
- Palatine Early Learning Alliance
- The Alliance for Early Childhood
- United Palatine Coalition

\* Denotes Region-wide service area

### Elgin Partnership for Early Learning

Elgin Partnership for Early Learning is a non-profit Early Childhood Collaboration that has partnerships with eleven communities across three Birth to Five Illinois Regions. The Collaboration serves families and children in the western edge of Region 1-B-D (such as Hanover Park), Region 19 (DuPage County) and Region 31 (Kane County). They work with partners to raise awareness about the importance of early learning, resources, and Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) programs and initiatives. They serve children ages birth to five and use local data and parent input to drive decisions about how to build local Early Childhood systems that are easier for families to navigate. In fall 2022, Elgin Partnership for Early Learning was awarded a Birth to Five Illinois Implementation Grant. The \$133,840 grant was used to increase caregivers and community awareness about ECEC programs by holding events, door knocking, expanding community partnerships, and going into community spaces such as laundromats to connect with parents and caregivers. Funds also allowed them to expand their reach through the development and purchase of physical materials such as advertisements and information cards and helped them to continue slot gap discussions with community partners about increasing Early Childhood slots.

There are two local Early Childhood Community Collaborations that serve the Evanston area specifically: Evanston Cradle to Career and the Evanston Early Childhood Council.

## **Evanston Cradle to Career**

The Evanston Cradle to Career Collaboration has a network of over 40 organizations and 150 individuals that are working together to remove long-standing racial and economic barriers for children who have been historically marginalized so they can access the best opportunities in life. There are five Action Teams; one that specifically focuses on early childhood outcomes. Teams have partnered with home family visiting programs to improve intake and referral coordination; launched a Talk, Read, Sing campaign to help parents and caregivers understand how simple engagement on a regular basis with their child can increase their readiness for Kindergarten; and is working on a partnership with Evanston Hospital to launch a home visiting partnership for newborns and their families. The Strong Start to Kindergarten/Healthy Start teams work with Early Childhood providers and local school districts to help ensure a smooth transition between ECEC and Kindergarten. They have also been involved in supporting Early Childhood programs with training and coaching around trauma-informed practices, helped to develop a universal definition for Kindergarten readiness for both educators and parents/caregivers, and connected Early Childhood educators with Kindergarten teachers to help make the transition into Kindergarten easier for children.

## **Evanston Early Childhood Council**

The Evanston Early Childhood Council is a Collaboration of more than 25 organizations, Early Childhood providers, and individuals dedicated to promoting high-quality services in local Early Childhood Education and Care. They meet on a regular basis to share resources; disseminate best practices; support families and children; and advocate for equity, inclusion, access, and the highest quality care. In fall 2022, the Early Childhood Council was awarded an Implementation Grant from Birth to Five Illinois for \$106,150. The funds went to hiring Family Liaisons, monitoring how many preschool and child care slots were available in the service area, and collecting data on Early Childhood event attendees.



An adult smiling and playing with a small child.

## **Jewish United Fund Early Learning Collaborative**

Jewish United Fund Early Learning Collaborative serves all Jewish families, caregivers, and children throughout the Chicagoland area. There are 37 non-profit, center-based, Jewish Early Childhood programs in the Greater Chicago area that reach 600 educators, more than 2,400 families, and more than 3,000 young children. Their goals include strengthening teachers and leaders by hosting leadership retreats; partnering with the Erikson Institute to offer a Master of Science in Early Childhood Education for select teachers; and leading the Chicago Teachers Project, which is a two-year fellowship to train Early Childhood educators to use innovative teaching practices. Additionally, they host learning and anti-bias sessions for educators and provide Early Childhood programs with age-appropriate books that celebrate diversity.

## **Niles Township Early Childhood Alliance (ECA)**

The ECA advocates for and coordinates comprehensive community-based support for young children and their caregivers that promote equity and honor strengths and diversity. The ECA is made up of leaders from Niles Township public schools, local private Early Childhood providers, nonprofit organizations, and libraries. They work together to support professional development for ECA members; collaborate to provide Coordinated Intake, screening, placement for Early Childhood Education, Early Intervention mental health supports, medical or dental care, and emergency funding; as well as work together to provide prenatal supports,

home visiting, center-based child care, family child care, and school-based early learning. In 2022, the ECA was awarded an Implementation Grant from Birth to Five Illinois for \$124,010 to hire a Family Engagement team that speaks many languages in the area. The goal is to work to eliminate barriers and make early learning information and resources more accessible to the entire community.

### **Palatine Early Learning Alliance (PELA)**

PELA is a Collaboration that received an Illinois Action for Children (IAFC) grant to use the community systems development approach to create systems-level change that increases enrollment in early learning programs. Currently, the Collaboration is working with the Village on opening an ECEC center, Advance Preschool in Palatine, to serve the Rolling Meadows and Palatine families. In addition, PELA meets and shares community resources, engages in data analysis, and discusses ECEC issues arising in the community.

“Communities are successful when comprised of stakeholders who are able to effectively collaborate in ways that are inclusive, productive, and meaningful for sustainability and the good of the community.”

- Action Council Member

### **Alliance for Early Childhood**

The Alliance for Early Childhood supports and guides families and educators to nurture the healthy, well-rounded development of children from birth to eight years old. The Alliance includes 22 partners from the faith community, park districts, public libraries, mental and behavioral health, philanthropy, and the business community. Additionally, 41 public and private preschools and elementary schools are members of the Alliance. They host speakers to teach parents and caregivers on topics such as social-emotional development, school readiness, support of children with special needs, and hold parenting workshops on developing parenting skills. Additionally, they have held roundtables for families of children with disabilities, new parenting groups, and during the COVID-19 pandemic, connected families with an Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant (I/ECMHC) to help support families.

### **United Palatine Coalition**

United Palatine Coalition strengthens collaboration between organizations, businesses, and community members to promote equity and create an infrastructure that fosters resilience and a thriving community. Government organizations include the Community Consolidated School District 15, the Palatine Park District, the Palatine Police Department, the Palatine Public Library District, and the Village of Palatine. There are various social services organizations such as Children’s Home and Aid, Family Forward, JOURNEYS, Northwest Compass, and WINGS Inc., among others. There is also strong representation for education programs such as Advance Preschool, The Center: Resources for Teaching and Learning, Early Childhood Developmental Enrichment Center (ECDEC), and F.I.N.D. PI program, Harper College, and the Northwest Education Council for Student Success (NECSS). The coalition’s priorities are to build awareness of available resources in the community and increase connections to it.

Community members expressed the need for further development of Early Childhood Community Collaborations. The area served by Consolidated School District (CSD) 59 and the Schaumburg/Hoffman Estates area do not have formal Collaborations. If Local Community Collaborations were present in these areas, it would provide an opportunity for dialogue about strategies that are working and barriers in the community and would enrich and strengthen services provided to families. There are wonderful organizations advancing the work on behalf of families and children already, but together, the impact would be greater. “We are more than the sum of our parts.”

“

My perspective is that all stakeholders in a community - residents, businesses, city council/ legislators, educational systems - are vital to the well-being of the community. In order for this to happen, there has to be inclusivity, communication, and collaboration between all stakeholders. Every stakeholder deserves to have a voice in discussions and decision-making processes. When systems are just and inclusive, the needs of community stakeholders can be identified, evaluated, with the potential for positive resolutions and outcomes.

- Community Member

”

The work of these Collaborations illuminates how a united effort by community advocates and leaders can make a lasting difference in a community. When community partners work collaboratively on a shared goal, everyone benefits. Family and young children get their needs met, there is an ECEC workforce that's driven and passionate, and caregivers know that when they have community who will support them.



# Early Childhood Education & Care (ECEC) Programs

In Region 1-B-D (Cook North), there are a variety of education and care programs offered to children from birth to five years old. Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) programs are offered within a family’s home, the park district, the school district, family child care homes, and licensed and license-exempt facilities. In addition to these programs, some families use Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) care.

Before exploring the various available programs in the Region, it is important to unpack families’ hopes for their ideal ECEC programming for their children. Some parents and caregivers in the community have shared that they would like for ECEC programs to facilitate school readiness, while other parents shared that they are interested in “play-based learning,” which focuses on exploration, hands-on, sensory experiences, and routines.

## Child Care & Family Child Care

The Cook North Region has an abundance of licensed Early Childhood Education and Care programs. There are a total of 146 licensed Early Childhood Centers with around 12,710 spaces for children. In addition, there are 64 licensed Family Child Care homes with 614 possible spaces.

Figure 5: Number of Licensed and License-Exempt Care, Capacity

Program Name	Number of Sites	Capacity
Licensed Child Care Centers	146	12,710
Licensed Family Child Care Homes	64	614
License-Exempt Child Care Centers	9	752

Source: IDHS, ISBE, IECAM  
Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

Families in the Region have shared that these programs offer flexible and reliable program hours, a safe environment, and intentional developmental activities to support their child’s development and growth. Other strengths include early development screenings as well as developmentally appropriate activities.

A few of the barriers that were shared by families include the cost and availability of spaces for enrollment, especially for the youngest learners from birth to age three. When children are sick, they are not able to attend the program, which often leaves caregivers without care. The providers working for licensed early childhood centers or family child care homes have shared challenges with retaining staff due to disparities in compensation and benefits.

A specific strength of the family child care program is that it allows for a smaller number of children and includes mixed ages, which offers parents and caregivers the opportunity to have siblings in the same program. Further, a family child care home provides linguistic and cultural responsiveness which was elevated as a priority by families in focus groups and interviews. Based on community and Action Council discussions, many family child care home programs have closed since the pandemic.

Family Care providers have shared the desire to improve relationships and the flow of communication with DCFS regarding regulations. Providing on-going technical assistance on licensing related topics was reported as a need by family child care providers. Further, similarly to Early Childhood private programs, the compensation is very low.

“ Although family child care providers love to teach and take care of children, they are leaving the field. Why is this? A combination of low compensation, lack of benefits, along with the lack of support and feeling burnt out.

- Family Child Care Center Co-Owner

”

Licensed Exempt Centers must meet specific conditions or qualify as exempt from licensure under Illinois Rule. Although these programs are exempt from licensure, families can find assurance that they are monitored and regulated by the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) via a health and safety checklist conducted by Health and Safety Inspectors. In the Cook North Region, there are a total of nine license-exempt programs with 752 slots.

### License Exempt Family Child Care

Also known as Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) care, license exempt family child care providers can care for up to three children or children from one family without being licensed. This is a common practice in our Region. There is no concrete data on how many families utilize FFN care. During focus groups and interviews with families, many shared that a family member helps care for their children during the day, before and after the program hours.

“ We don’t have a living wage, because where will the money come from? Many families in our program do not qualify for child care subsidy but still can’t afford the rates. The cost of living is very high and that is not taken into consideration based on the FPL requirements for CCAP. ”

- Family Child Care Provider

### Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP)

The Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) is a program that is available to help families pay for child care. To be eligible to apply, a parent or parents must be working or enrolled in an educational program and meet the income eligibility (below 225% of the Federal Poverty Level). While this is a very helpful program to many, families have shared that it is challenging to get approved due to the FPL requirement. The cost of living in Cook North is high and families struggle to qualify for support. The families that participated in the focus groups or interviews shared various barriers: length of application, time needed to get approval, and the fact that some programs do not accept CCAP due to the low rate of reimbursement. At times, families reported that they were asked to pay the difference, or they were turned away because they used CCAP. Stakeholders in the community are elevating the need for a new CCAP process and increased income eligibility.

“ I will get kicked off aide if I take one better paying job, so I am working a few jobs that are low paying to keep my child care subsidy. ”

- Parent

Figure 6: Number of Publicly Funded Programs

Program Name	Funding Source	Number of Sites	Capacity	Ages Served
Head Start (HS)	Federal	6	324	Three to Five
Early Head Start (EHS)	Federal	7	279	Birth to Three
Preschool for All	State	33	2,883	Three to Four
Preschool for All Expansion	State	5	120	Three to Four
Prevention Initiative	State	19	827	Birth to Three

Source: IDHS, ISBE, IECAM  
 Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

## Preschool for All, Preschool for All Expansion & Head Start

Illinois Preschool for All Program (PFA) and Preschool for All Expansion (PFAE) are two program models that focus on providing high-quality ECEC for children ages three to five. PFA and PFAE are funded by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) to serve children that live in households at 400% FPL or below, and those who are determined to need additional academic supports. There are currently 33 sites that offer PFA programming and five sites that offer PFAE. The capacity for enrollment is 2,883 and 120, respectively. Families have shared several strengths of this model, such as developmental screenings, being enrolled in the school district, and specifically for PFAE having full-day programming. A challenge for some working families is that the PFA program meets for two and a half hours per day and there are not enough slots for all the children interested.

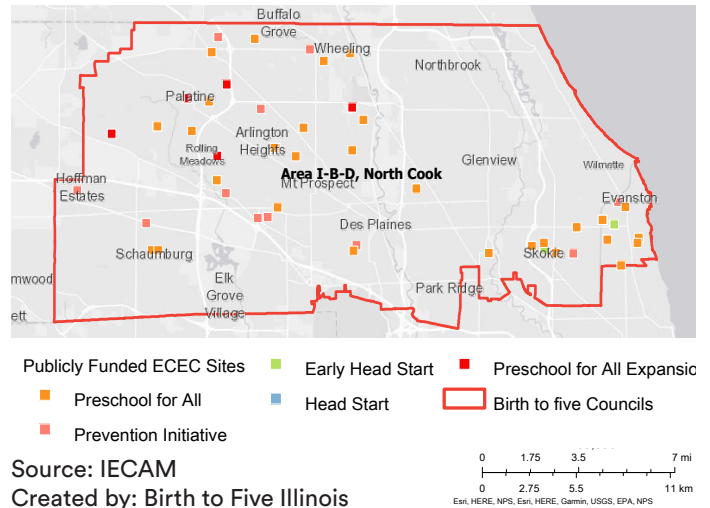
Similarly, Head Start is a program that provides high-quality early childhood education along with health and mental health services to children ages three to five, plus development and support services to their families. Head Start is federally funded by the U.S. Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families. At least 90% of families enrolled need to meet the 100% or below FPL income requirement. Programs may enroll some children from families that meet other factors based on the program’s weighted criteria. At least 10% of enrolled children need to have a delay or disability. Programming can be delivered as home visiting services, which include visits to each family enrolled along with socialization groups, center-based services delivered in a classroom, or family child care services in a provider’s home. In Cook North, there are six sites with a funded enrollment of 324 children.

### Prevention Initiative, Early Head Start & Home Visiting

There are three types of publicly funded programs for children from birth to three years old, including pregnant people. They include ISBE’s Prevention Initiative (PI) which is funded by the state, federally funded Early Head Start (EHS), and the IDHS-funded home visiting program.

Prevention Initiative (PI) programs provide comprehensive child development and family support services for pregnant people and families with children who may need additional academic supports. The service delivery for PI program can be in home visiting or center based. There are 19 sites with a capacity of 827 slots in Region 1-B-D.

Figure 7: Location of Publicly Funded Programs



“There are not enough slots for all children in the school district, so there is no lottery list that has your child waiting for services.”  
- Parent

“With my older kids, I wouldn’t have been able to leave the situation with their father. I wasn’t able to see the light at the end of the tunnel. When they were able to go to school at Head Start, I was.”  
- Parent

Early Head Start (EHS), funded by the U.S. Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families, provides family development and engagement services, early education and child development, health and mental health services for pregnant people, prenatal and postpartum education, and support. EHS follows the same program eligibility requirements as the Head Start program. There are various program models: home visiting, center-based, and family child care. There are seven sites with a funded enrollment of 279 slots in Region 1-B-D. Parents/caregivers who are using these services express a high level of satisfaction with the quality of education their children are receiving, in addition to the support they receive as a parent.

As of 2022, IDHS has combined the state and federal funding to provide home visiting services to children and families from birth to age five, including pregnant people. There are various home visiting models that can be used with the goal of providing support to parents/caregivers, promoting language development, teaching positive parenting skills, and providing each child with developmental screening. Currently, there is no specific home visiting data for the Cook North Region.

## Early Intervention

IDHS funds Early Intervention (EI) to support children from birth to age three with developmental delays or a disability. A child identified as having a 30% delay in one or more developmental areas would qualify for EI services and would receive an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP). An IFSP is built around the strengths and supports that would benefit the child and family. In December 2022, Child and Family Connections (CFC) #6 reported 2,156 active Individualized Family Service Plans (IFSPs); speech is identified as the service with the highest need. During focus groups and interviews, service coordinators and therapists shared that many children are qualifying for multiple therapeutic services. Families have shared program strengths, such as: one hour of therapy per discipline, being able to have therapy in the family's home, and being supported to access other resources like needed equipment or a social worker. There are barriers that have also been discussed by stakeholders and families: long wait times for an evaluation, the waitlist to receive services, lack of therapists, lack of multilingual therapists, and struggle with the transition from EI to Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE). In addition, some families shared that telehealth with their young children was a challenge.

“ I had a great EI team and am really sad that we're not with them anymore. I wish EI would go until five. ”  
- Community Member

## Early Childhood Special Education

The Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) team evaluates the child after they turn three years old to see if they qualify for special education services. If a child qualifies for services, an IEP is developed. ECSE is funded by ISBE and provides free, early childhood education that supports a child's development from age three until five years old. ECSE services are provided through local school districts and special education cooperatives by professionals with expertise in special education services to implement the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part B services.

There are various strengths in Region 1-B-D which include communication about the timeline for evaluations and comprehensive explanations of what to expect with the IEP process. Further, there are innovative models to reach students. For example, in Evanston, therapists from the school district have started providing therapy in the child's community-based program. This supports the teachers to learn new strategies and eliminates the need for transportation between programs. Some of the barriers shared by parents included transportation, program hours and the IEP evaluation being overwhelming and/or confusing.

## Summary

In summary, parents and caregivers in Cook North share the following strengths: cultural and linguistic diversity, various program options, and parent and caregiver support services. Affordability, number of spaces available, and lack of transportation were listed as barriers. Additionally, there is a sense of urgency from a variety of ECEC providers to work with DCFS licensing representatives to remove barriers, including licensing regulations and time delays with the process.



A small child sitting on the ground.

# Slot Gap

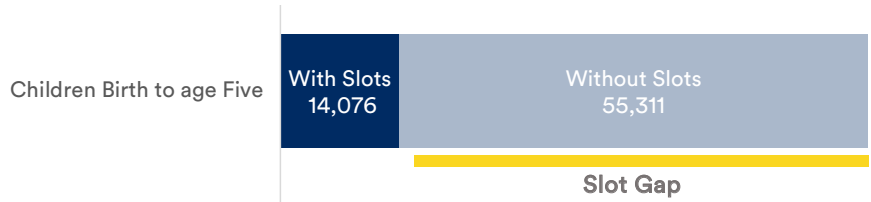
A slot gap is when there are more children eligible for enrollment in ECEC programs than actual enrollment slots/capacity available. In Region 1-B-D (Cook County North) most children who are aged birth to five do not have access to a program slot. There are 69,387 children under the age of six and only 14,076 of those children have ECEC program slots, meaning the slot gap is 79.7%. This potentially leaves 55,311 children from birth to six years without a program slot. Slot gap is a quantitative measure that gives an understanding of the need for expanded care; however, it does not account for families who choose to not engage with ECEC service providers. There is a need for further data to understand parents' thoughts about engaging in ECEC programming.

Slot gap has a multi-layered impact on children and their families living and working in the Cook North Region. The regional community has shared that there are long waitlists, a “loss of learning” due to no place to go, and too much competition for the few spots that exist. Parents state that they are accepting whatever child care or program placement they can get regardless of the barriers imposed on them (e.g., hours of operation, quality). Families are sharing that they “are waiting for the first available” program slot. There is an overarching theme that “a good fit is a luxury, mostly you are hoping to just get a spot so you can work.”

Not only is there a big gap in all ECEC programming, but there is also a big gap in services for publicly funded programs. Publicly ECEC programs in Illinois provide services to young children and their families who live near, at, or below the poverty level and/or need more academic support. The Cook North

“As a parent, I’ll take whatever for my child to be involved in a program and socialize, so I will deal with the inconvenient and short program hours.”  
- Parent

Figure 8: Child Care Capacity Slot Gap



Source: IECAM  
Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

Region has the following publicly funded ECEC programs: 6 Head Start (HS), 7 Early Head Start (EHS), 19 Prevention Initiative (PI), and 33 Preschool for All (PFA) sites. The Head Start and Early Head Start programs are federally funded and the Prevention Initiative and Preschool for All are state funded.

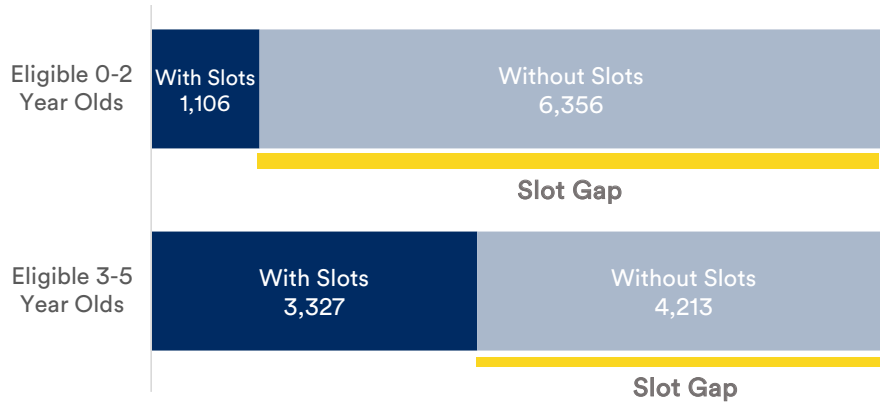
In Region 1-B-D, there are 7,462 birth-two-year-old children and 7,540 children between three to five years old that are eligible (based on family FPL, usually between 100%-185%) for a publicly funded program. Of those 7,462 children who are aged birth to two-year-olds, 6,356 do not have a slot. Of the 7,540 eligible children who are three to five years old, 4,213 do not have a slot (Figure 7). This leaves 85% of eligible children birth to two and 84% of eligible three- to five-year-olds without access to ECEC programs should their parents desire to enroll them or participate.

There are areas within our Region that have very little programming, such as parts of Palatine, the east side of Northbrook, Rolling Meadows, Elk Grove, Skokie, the northeast side of Schaumburg, and Wheeling. It is important to note that the geographical area covered by District 59 demonstrates a high need for more ECEC programs. Currently, there are about three private child care centers

“There are not enough public slots for families. It’s so competitive.”  
- Parent

and 11 family child care homes. Community Consolidated School District (CCSD) 59 provides preschool programs at the Early Learning Center in Mount Prospect. The area covered by CCSD District 59 includes portions of Arlington Heights, Des Plaines, Elk Grove Village, and Mount Prospect. The areas with only a few program options are where the highest concentration of children under the age of six are living at or below 200% FPL.

**Figure 9: Publicly Funded Early Childhood Education and Care Slot Gap**



Source: IECAM  
Created by: Illinois Action for Children CS3

Many community child care centers are struggling and are not able to open enrollment slots for various reasons. If classrooms are closed due to staffing shortages, this further impacts the growing slot gap. It is important to note that the slot gap has been calculated based on a program’s capacity and therefore, a lack of workforce or closure of a classroom leads to less ability for enrollment.

The slot gap is very big in our Region and we have just begun to understand the true needs of families.

## Early Childhood Education & Care (ECEC) Workforce

The field of ECEC consists of professionals working in a variety of sectors and settings. These include but are not limited to licensed child care centers, state-funded preschool classrooms, family child care homes, and the family's home. There are various programs such as Head Start/Early Head Start, Preschool for All, licensed family child care homes and home visiting. The workforce includes teachers, teacher assistants, directors, assistant directors, paraprofessionals, mental health consultants, family advocates, and others.

**Figure 10: Licensed Center Teacher Staff Race and Ethnicity<sup>3</sup>**

Position	Asian	Black or African American	Hispanic or Latine	Native American/Alaskan, Pacific Islander, or Other	Multi-Racial	White
Center Directors	56	34	32	14	5	379
Teaching Staff	512	279	657	136	84	2,340
FCC Providers <sup>4</sup>	21	11	17	5	*	87

Source: INCCRRA

Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

According to the Illinois' Early Childhood Workforce 2020 Report, there is a growing population of multilingual staff in ECEC. This is true for the Cook North Region as 149 (28%) of directors identified as multilingual with the majority having English as their primary language and about 10% having another language as their primary language. Of the teaching staff, 39% are multilingual with the majority having English as their primary language and 17% having Spanish or another primary language. Around 51% of family child care providers identified as multilingual, with 29% having Spanish or another primary language. Both multilingual educators and culturally responsive educators are needed in order to provide support to the children in our Region.

Early Childhood Education and Care providers have varying degrees (Figure 11). Further, some early childhood educators have a Gateways credential. Of the directors in Region 1-B-D, 26% have an Illinois Director's Credential. In addition, 29% of teaching staff have an Early Childhood Education (ECE) credential with the majority having a Level 1 credential and 6% having a Level 4 or higher. For family child care providers about 15% have an ECE credential but very few providers have a Family Child Care Credential.

**Figure 11: ECEC Providers Level of Education<sup>5</sup>**

Position <sup>6</sup>	High School/ GED	Some College	Community College Certificate	Associate Degree	Bachelor's Degree	Graduate Degree
Center Directors	12	14	9	74	246	148
Teaching Staff	1,322	112	218	502	1,356	477
FCC Staff	37	*	11	27	38	13

Source: INCCRRA

Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

<sup>3</sup> Cells with an asterisk \* indicate fewer than five but more than zero respondents

<sup>4</sup> FCC includes family child care providers and assistants, substitute/floaters, and other direct and indirect service providers

<sup>5</sup> Cells with an asterisk \* indicate fewer than five but more than zero respondents

<sup>6</sup> Some respondents did not report highest level of education



In Cook North, there are a variety of initiatives to support the workforce, which include ExceleRate, INCCRRA's Great Start Wage Supplement, and scholarship programs. One of the scholarships is the Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity (ECACE) program. It aims to address the shortage of qualified early childhood educators by removing barriers for those that work or have worked in the early childhood education field and would like to pursue a credential and/or a higher degree. Colleges in Cook North such as Oakton Community College, Harper College, and National Louis University are participating in the ECACE scholarship, providing support to incoming students. In the state of Illinois, there is also the Retention of Illinois Students and Equity (RISE) Act that helps students who are undocumented receive financial aid to attend an Illinois public college.

Locally, there are efforts to support the workforce. Evanston Cradle to Career, Evanston Early Childhood Council, the City of Evanston, Oakton College, Evanston Community Foundation, and Evanston Latinos are partnering to offer a cohort model for community members that speak Spanish and have a GED or high school equivalency who are interested in a career in ECEC. The cohort will have participants enroll in free English as a Second Language (ESL) educator classes and complete the Gateways Level 1 Credential. Additionally, STAR NET Region II is a Support and Technical Assistance Regional Network that provides workshops, training, and resources for those living or working in North and West Suburban Cook, DuPage, Kane, Lake, and McHenry Counties.

Although there are scholarships and support available in the ECEC field, there are systemic issues that must be addressed. In an interview with a college professor in an ECEC department, it was shared that a student who graduated at the top of her class, with a true passion for teaching, decided to work at a local grocery store after graduation because they offered better benefits and wages.

Region 1-B-D conducted interview and focus groups and heard from Council members who further elevated that providers in the ECEC field are underpaid and undervalued. During various community dialogues, it was shared that "What is expected of them [teachers] doesn't match their compensation."

“ People don't even want to study that field – even for free. Some programs offer free college and that still doesn't help people to decide to go that path as they don't see that as an opportunity. ”  
- Child Care Center Director

“ The new generation wants to know what they will receive in return for this hard job. The pay is very low, the benefits are bad or none. Teaching jobs are very hard, and people are quitting for different fields. ”  
- ECEC Professional



Nina Brzezinska-Dybczak (left) and Irene Di Minervino (right) in front of St Andrews Lutheran Church at the Park Ridge Preschool fair.

According to the program directors, there are a lot of requirements such as annual trainings, and credentials, on top of the program compliance requirements, long working hours for staff while being paid low wages. This sentiment is shared by family child care providers as well. This is causing educators, teachers, and providers to leave the field and look for positions offering more benefits, livable wages, and searching for opportunities that have fewer educational requirements. In addition, community-based organization leaders shared they are unable to compete with the benefits packages and salaries offered by school districts.

INCCRRA's Child Care Salary Profiles report for Service Delivery Area (SDA) 6 states that a Kindergarten teacher in Cook County is making nearly double that of a preschool teacher. Further, 67.9% of teachers who have an associate degree or higher have a median annual salary of approximately \$30,160. It is important to highlight that the Illinois Salary and Staffing survey from Fiscal Year 2021 found that the median earning for child care occupations was \$31,200 while the median income for all other occupations was \$39,194 based on the 2019 American Community Survey. In the same report it was stated that "over half (57.9%) of surveyed family child care practitioners net \$15,000 or less annually."

Another important aspect of ECEC shared by many educators is that they are under a lot of stress. Most provider and parent focus group and interview participants shared an increase in students needing social and emotional support for themselves and their families. While most directors and family child care providers shared that they support the idea of inclusive programs, the need for mental health support for the staff, children, and families was very important. Increasing access to mental health support is critical to retaining ECEC staff.

In summary, it is crucial to discuss the workforce's needs to be able to elevate the barriers and successes within the ECEC field. By addressing current barriers and celebrating what is working well, Region 1-B-D can ensure that the educators who are taking care of our youngest learners are thriving.

“ There are no benefits in community-based programs to retain staff.  
- Program Director ”

“ It used to be you'd have tenured teachers but now you're spending not years but just months with teachers.  
- Director of ECEC ”

“ The people that we count on to take care of our children can't take care of their own.  
- Parent ”

## Parent/Family/Caregiver Voice



Najma Nishat (left) and two young children (right) at the ECDEC/FIND Week of the Young Child Event.

Region 1-B-D parents, families and caregivers are experiencing great challenges and barriers in knowing about, accessing, and navigating Early Childhood Care and Education (ECEC) programming. Community members, families, and organizations that provide services/supports to families have shared that within the Cook North Region, caregivers/parents are struggling getting their child care and education needs met. Some of the concerns and questions about ECEC programming from community members are:

- “Who do I go to for questions and support about my child’s development?”
- “How can I get child care or supportive services (such as Early Intervention) if there are long waitlists?”
- “Can I afford care and education if I choose to send my child to an early childhood program?”
- “How will my child get to the program if I don’t have a car?”
- “Why are they not meeting my family’s needs?”
- “Where are the ECEC programs?”

### Mental Health and Disability Supports

The well-being and mental health of children ages birth to five has been raised by ECEC providers, focus group participants, and Action and Family Council members as another concern since the pandemic. Based on these dialogues, it has been shared that some children are not as engaged in the community, are more isolated, experiencing more challenging behaviors, and have an increase in developmental delays.

Families are surprised by how children are adapting to their new classrooms in the school district despite the lack of ECEC programs. Although children might adapt decently, parents are frustrated that their children and the entire family are not being supported or guided prior to entering the school district.

Some ECEC providers have shared that parents are working longer hours and are under more stress which has noticeably impacted the parent-child relationship. The providers highlighted that many caregivers are working longer hours and/or have multiple jobs to pay for the increased cost of living and child care expenses.

“Children with special needs are further at a disadvantage in receiving services in a preschool setting with the slot gap because of number of slots, splitting time between schools, and transportation issues.

- Inclusion Director

“I stayed home for three months but had my mom to help, [it was] a whole team effort to raise a child, pick up, drop off.

- Community Parent

“The most financially stable people are strained.

- Community Parent

“ You feel like you’re going to lose your job.  
- Community Parent ”

“ I have to take lunch break to take my daughter to child care. [Operation hours] are not meeting working parents’ schedule.  
- Community Parent ”

“ Luckily my wife found out about programs such as ECDEC/FIND, but in my friend circle they don’t know.  
- Community Parent ”

## Transportation & Staff Shortages

Families have shared that there are not enough spots for all the children, and at times it is a lottery system unless the child has an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) that would grant them priority. This lack of slots has prompted families to enroll their children in multiple types of programs to meet their needs, and there is no transportation provided between programs. If a parent is working and the school district program is 2.5 hours, the child would need to attend a community-based program in the morning and then be transported to the school district for services, or vice versa. This not only adds time for transporting the child but is also a disruption in their daily schedule. Some children do not qualify for bus service, so the parents must pick up and drop off their children to receive services. Staff shortages also impact program availability and space.

## Awareness of Programs

Another barrier families and community members have expressed is not having a central location of information for parents/caregivers to locate program options and compare all the programs in their community. This would allow parents/caregivers to make the best choice that meets their family needs.

Parents and caregivers in Cook North should have the ability to choose what early childhood education and care looks like for their families. Parents overwhelmingly have shared that they learn about early childhood programs by word of mouth or from someone they know. Lack of awareness of what program exists and what families qualify for is one of the many barriers in accessing ECEC programs.

## Cost

For most families, child care is a crucial component in deciding if they will participate in the workforce. Child care is costly and not attainable by many families, such as those who do not qualify for subsidized care, because their income is slightly above the 225% Federal Poverty Level (FPL), and middle-income families that do not make a high enough income to justify or afford child care.

Qualifying families for a child care subsidy based on the FPL does not meet the needs of many families in Cook North. The cost of living is much higher, making ECEC unattainable for many families in the Region. A powerful example of this was shared by an organization that supports families to achieve financial stability in Cook North. A single mother with toddler twins making \$60,000/year was concerned about becoming homeless because the cost of child care and food was taking up most of her income, leaving her with no money for rent. Her income is above the 225% FPL for child care subsidy, Women Infants and Children (WIC), Link, and any other supports offered to families living below this threshold. This is the story of many families that have a seemingly good income but cannot afford basic living expenses.

“ I had a young single mom, she was a waitress, applied for CCAP (child care subsidy) – she came and asked if she got approved. I told her she got denied and she burst into tears. ‘I can’t afford to pay for this... I can’t afford to pay for this.’  
- Community Parent ”

ALICE (Asset Limited, Income, Constrained, Employed) is a “huge but hidden segment of our community that is struggling to afford necessities. The success of a community is directly related to the financial stability of its members.” ALICE represents those in such fields as cashiers, waiters, child care providers, and other essential workers. Many of the families in the Cook North Region fall in the ALICE category as displayed in Figure 12. The 11 townships in the Cook North Region represent some parts of northern Cook County while also covering nearby counties.

Figure 12: ALICE Households in Region 1-B-D

Townships	Households	Household at or Below 100% FPL	Number of ALICE Households	Number of Households Above ALICE Threshold
Barrington	5,759	292	748	4,719
Elk Grove	36,755	2,653	8,076	26,026
Evanston	30,256	3,603	5,817	20,836
Hanover	32,851	2,994	5,328	24,529
Maine	53,221	4,231	11,446	37,544
New Trier	20,652	845	1,955	17,852
Niles	40,650	3,738	8,039	28,873
Northfield	34,959	2,226	6,132	26,601
Palatine	44,122	3,059	7,629	33,434
Schaumburg	50,647	3,420	9,426	37,801

Source: United for ALICE  
Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

When child care options are limited and unaffordable, families are left to make difficult choices based on circumstances out of their control, which limits how many hours they can work, or sometimes one parent may decide not to work at all. Caregivers missing from the workforce have a direct impact on the economy. When children and families do not have the programs and services they need, it affects the entire community.

### Existing Program Strengths

Families in Cook North have also shared strengths of the ECEC system where they have found support for themselves as a parent/caregiver and/or for their child(ren). Many families felt that programs such as Early Intervention, Early Head Start, and community organizations have been a tremendous resource for their family.

“Outside of the Link card, everything the community has to offer, I wouldn’t have known about their existence if it wasn’t for them.”  
- Early Head Start Parent

“I had to make sure I had child care, my business had to stop... seasonally I had a very short window. I’m the only one doing it all - marketing, sessions, taxes. If I’m out, my business is out.”  
- Business Owner

“They’ve become a part of the family [EI therapist]. They want the best for my child as I do.”  
- Early Intervention Family

## Regional Strengths & Needs

The Action and Family Council members, along with the community members that participated in interviews, focus groups and/or meetings, shared several noteworthy strengths and needs.

### Strengths

- Region 1-B-D has a variety of publicly funded ECEC programs.
- There are multiple Collaborations that foster partnerships among diverse stakeholders and support ongoing reflection and adaptation to meet the evolving needs of the communities they serve.
- Multiple stakeholders, including some elected officials, actively participate in Collaborations, initiatives, and meetings within the ECEC sector.
- Communities have access to free family events, including those planned by the park districts, libraries, and other community organizations.
- There are accessible and inclusive parks and play spaces for families with young children.
- Community libraries and ECEC programs partner and work collaboratively.
- There are early childhood educational opportunities and scholarships for the workforce.
- The Region boasts rich linguistic and cultural diversity, with a wide array of languages spoken (e.g., Skokie has 90+ languages).
- Supportive community members and organizations provide valuable assistance and resources throughout the Region.

### Needs

- Affordable child care for all families with children under the age of six.
- Increase funding and slots for ECEC programs, particularly for the birth to three population and for all publicly funded programs.
- Improve workforce recruitment and retention of ECEC staff, particularly the recruitment of multilingual educators to meet the needs of English Language Learners (ELL) and therapeutic staff.
- Increase support, resources, and networking opportunities for Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) care.
- Mental health support/services for parents/caregivers and the workforce.
- Better access to developmental screenings for children not connected to ECEC programs.
- Dedicated therapist teams to serve children at each school.
- Expanded service delivery for children and families with developmental delays and disabilities.
- Increased transparency in policy and decision-making with families.
- Increased transparency for DCFS licensing requirements, policies, and procedures.
- Revision of licensing requirements to consider ECEC programs in non-traditional settings (e.g., nature-based preschools).
- Streamlined process for providers and families with applications, including but not limited to user-friendly, shorter, CCAP applications, and less paperwork for the Gateways credentials.
- Stronger data systems to better understand ECEC enrollment and capacity, ECEC participation of priority populations, and data specific to Region 1-B-D.
- Input from parents/caregivers to better understand their family ECEC needs.
- Additional Collaborations in more areas of the Region.
- Improved access to subsidized and affordable housing, and transportation to access ECEC programming.

## Recommendations

The Region 1-B-D Councils discussed dozens of recommendations for systemic changes that could improve the lives of the families and children in the local communities. They understood, however, the necessity to prioritize those recommendations that would have the most profound impact on the greatest number of community members throughout the Region.

### Local Recommendations

- Support family child care homes and increase access for all families.
- Implement initiatives that will help recruit new educators and therapists by:
  - Actively encouraging high school students to pursue careers in the ECEC field.
  - Developing mentoring programs designed to support new teachers.
  - Intentionally recruiting potential multilingual educators.
  - Creating a networking system to post jobs or resumes to connect workers and employers.
- Create path for information sharing with families, such as:
  - A comprehensive list of educational options for families.
  - A family and primary care friendly resource list of referrals that includes Early Intervention opportunities and locations.
  - Family and educator information events to build community, trust, and value of ECEC as well as parent/caregiver input.
- Help families make connections to community resources by linking:
  - Child care homes, centers, and families with intervention services in the community.
  - Families with educational videos and resources on developmental activities
- Support groups for new caregivers and parents.
- Build partnerships with health care providers such as developmental/mental health providers and local pediatricians. Increase access to early screening and resource sharing.
- Encourage conversations between ECEC providers and DCFS to establish channels of communication between ECEC programs in non-traditional settings to discuss licensing requirements that present a barrier to serving children in innovative ways and clarify regulations with providers to ensure that they can communicate clearly with families about policy change.

### Systems Recommendations

- Raise the CCAP income eligibility to reflect the cost of living in the Region.
- Increase investment in ECEC programs and services from prenatal to eight years old.
- Increase funding and remove some of the hurdles for teachers to access Great Start funds.
- Increase wage supplements; provide compensation and benefits, including an educational forgiveness program for all working in the ECEC system; and provide mini grants to support classroom needs.
- Create a system for teachers to receive college credit for in-service hours/experience.

- Create pathways for certification of Early Childhood teachers for multilingual/early childhood special education.
- Expand the workforce who are qualified to complete medical diagnostics for referred children and advocate for nurse practitioners to be allowed on Medical Diagnostic Clinic teams.
- Increase the number of therapists to support Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education.
- Engage diverse voices in discussions and decision-making processes (families, community, organizations, legislators).
- Communicate and standardize expectations for Early Childhood Special Education, Preschool for All, and child care.
- Develop a user-friendly CCAP application.
- Revamp the Gateways credentials system to create a more streamlined and accessible process.

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 1-B-D, please find our contact information on the front inside cover of this Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment.



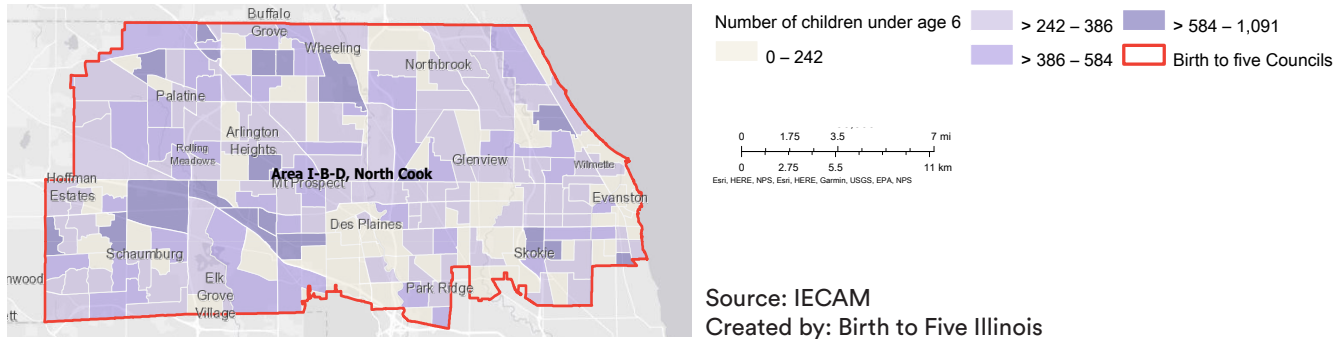
# Appendices

## Appendix A: References

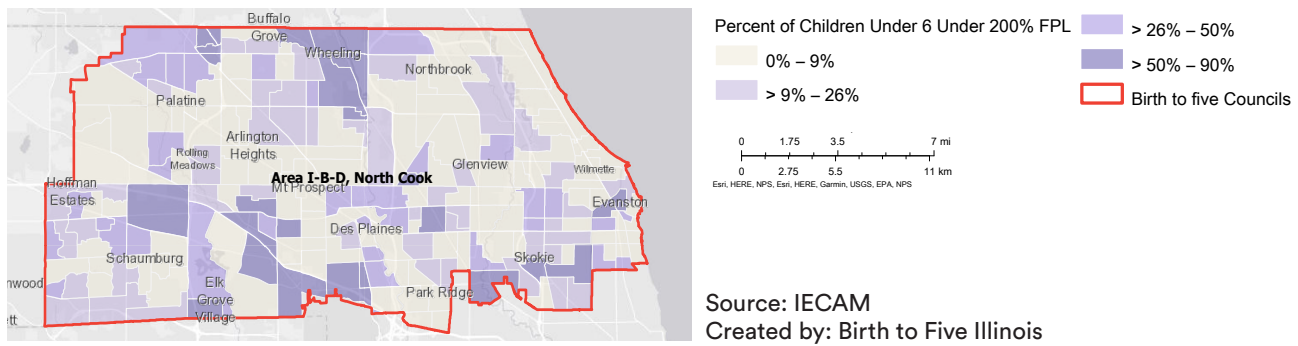
1. American Community Survey (2023). About Us. Site name: <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs>
2. Civic Federation (2023). North Cook County Region Townships. Site name: <https://www.civicfed.org/content/north-cook-county-region-townships>
3. Cook County Government (2023). About Cook County. Site name: <https://www.cookcountyil.gov/about-cook-county>
4. Illinois Commission on Equitable Early Childhood Education and Care Funding (2021). Commission Report of Findings and Recommendations: Spring 2021. Retrieved from <https://oecd.illinois.gov/content/dam/soi/en/web/oecd/documents/early-childhood-funding-commission-full-report.pdf>
5. Illinois Department of Children and Family Services. (2023). License Exempt Application Document. Site name: <https://dcfs.illinois.gov/content/dam/soi/en/web/dcfs/documents/about-us/policy-rules-and-forms/documents/cfs-2000/cfs-2003-on-site-visit-license-exempt-and-unlicensed-dc-provider.pdf>
6. Illinois Early Childhood Asset Map (2023). Report Creation Page. Retrieved from <https://iecamregionalreports.education.illinois.edu/dash-snapshot-report/landing>
7. Illinois Office of Early Childhood Development (2023). Illinois Hard to Reach Families Project Evaluation. Site name: <https://oecd.illinois.gov/content/dam/soi/en/web/oecd/documents/early-learning-council/council/htr-final-report.pdf>
8. National Institute for Early Education Research (2023). Including Family Child Care (FCC) Programs in Publicly-Funded Pre-K: Conditions for success. Site name: <https://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/HomeGrown-NIEER-FCC-Report-final.3.31.pdf>
9. Native Land Digital (2023). Report Creation Page. Site Name: <http://native-land.ca>
10. United for ALICE. (2023). Overview. Site name: <https://www.unitedforalice.org/overview>
11. United States Census Data (2023). Explore Census Data. Site name: <https://data.census.gov>
12. 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)
13. Whitehead, J. (2021). Illinois' Early Childhood Workforce 2020 Report. Bloomington, IL: INCCRRA. 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: Additional Figures

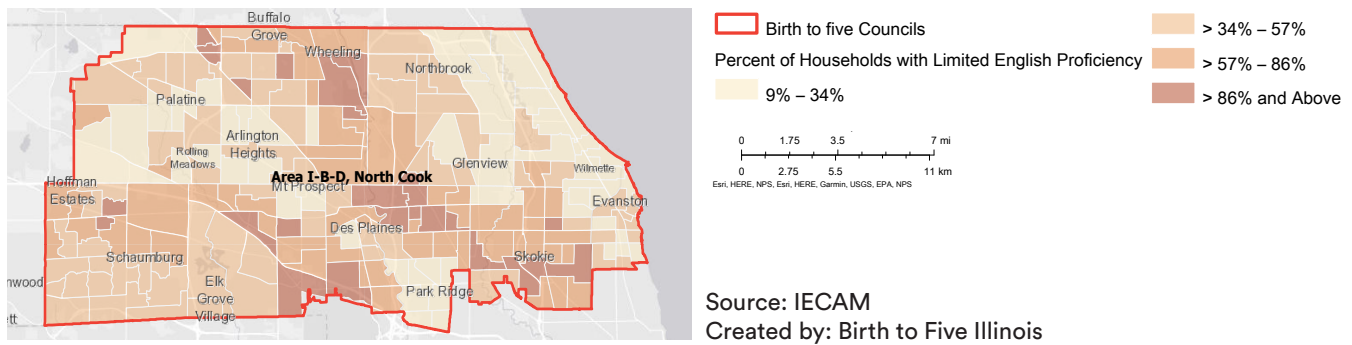
## Figure 1: Location of Children Ages Six and Under



## Figure 2: Location of Children Ages Six and Under, Living at or Below 200% FPL



## Figure 3: Location of Households with Limited English Proficiency, All Languages



## Appendix C: 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, 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 1-B-D Team; page 21, Ekaterina Bolovtsova on Pexels; page 28, Denafi Sy on Pexels; page 32, Birth to Five Illinois Region 1-B-D Team; page 34, Birth to Five Illinois Region 1-B-D Team.



Illinois  
State Board of  
Education

