



# Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment

## Region 30

(Alexander, Jackson, Perry, Pulaski & Union Counties)





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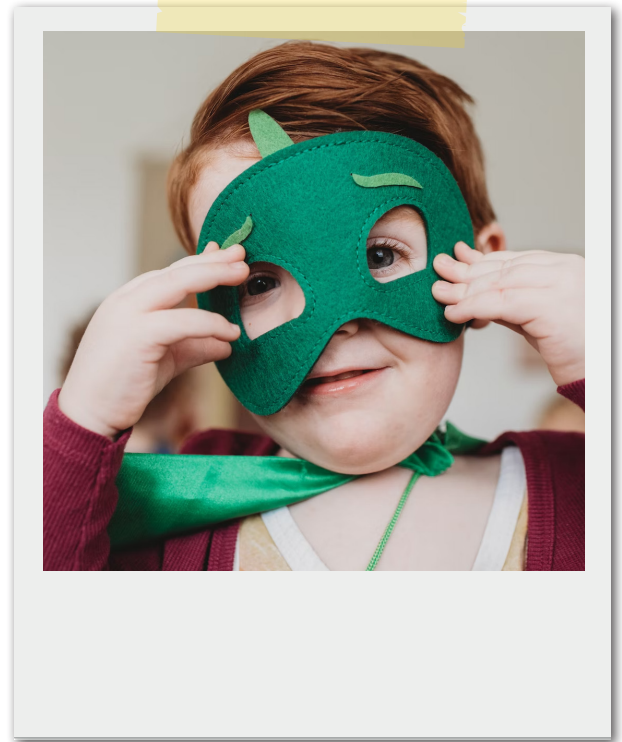
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## Region 30 Executive Summary

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 30 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

Community members and families in Region 30 found that accessibility, affordability, and quality are the main concerns when it comes to Early Childhood Education and Child Care (ECEC) for children 0-5 years old. Through this process, parents found out that they were not suffering alone, and community members were surprised at the slot gaps that exist in our Region. ECEC in our Region lacks an adequate and diverse workforce which is not accessible to many parents due to most only providing half-day programs without the option to offer transportation.

The most astonishing fact is the slot gap for 0–5-year-olds, which leaves approximately 82% of children in this age range without a slot. Transportation is nonexistent outside of the public school system, and many parents simply cannot work because they have no one to care for their children. In addition, single parents often face even more obstacles in finding quality child care and support. This Needs Assessment has opened the eyes of many people and will surely continue to help people understand the struggles of parents with children from birth to 5 years old.

## Region 30 Needs

- Available and affordable child care within the community and better quality of care.
- Target funding to decrease slot gaps in services for children birth to age two.
- Increase funding to help the ECEC workforce to include diversity and sustainability
- Transportation for parents getting children to/from child care facilities
- Resources available for families with a child with a disability

## Region 30 Recommendations

- Elevate the needs of young children and families in regional planning and conversations regarding the Region's transportation infrastructure. Improve leaders' and planners' awareness of the needs of families trying to access Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) and encourage funding for transportation.
- Support regional efforts to create a comprehensive and readily available online resource directory and referral platform. Explore alternative mechanisms to better connect families with resources such as family navigators, mobile resource bus, etc.
- Increase efforts to expand licensed family child care networks that include a diversified workforce and provide funding, technical assistance, and support to get them established in smaller rural communities in order to offer more choices to families.
- Increase staffing, training, and equipment for programs that provide care and education for children with a disability.
- The State should continue to invest in initiatives such as wage supplements, scholarships, and incentives to recruit and retain an abundant early childhood workforce.

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

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# REGION 30 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.



**6,972**

Children Under  
the Age of 6  
in Region 30



**3,922**

Children 0-5  
at 200% Federal  
Poverty Level



**2,136**

Children 0-5  
Without Publicly  
Funded ECEC Slots

**82%**

Percentage of children in the Region who do not have a slot at a licensed or license-exempt child care center or home

“Good, dependable, affordable, child care is pretty much nonexistent around here for us!”  
- Parent, Jackson County

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

## **REGION 30 NEEDS**

1. Increased funding to decrease slot gaps for children ages 0-5
2. Increased funding to help recruit and retain a more racially diverse ECEC workforce
3. Transportation for getting children to/from child care facilities
4. More resources for families with children with disabilities

## **REGION 30 RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Elevate the needs of young children and families in regional planning and conversations
2. Support regional efforts to create a comprehensive and readily available online resource directory and referral platform
3. Increase efforts to expand licensed family child care networks
4. Increase staffing, training, and equipment for programs to provide care and education for children with disabilities



**“I cried when I saw the 14-month waiting list. It seems child care is turning into a business without a focus on quality. If people really cared, there are many ways to improve the child care system.”**  
**- 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.

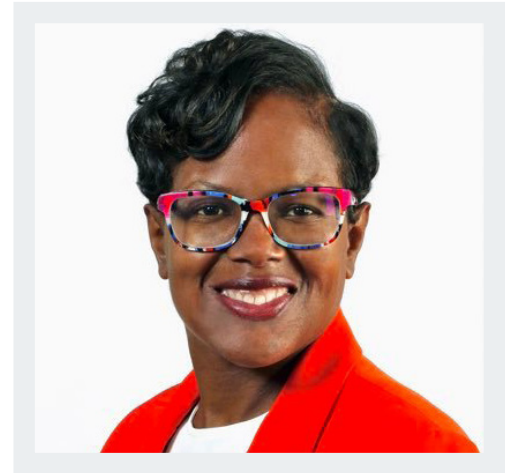
Third, policy makers, elected officials, and state agencies that administer ECEC programs will receive a copy of the report to give them a local view of the ECEC landscape in the areas they serve. The goal is to provide decision-makers with context from a community perspective so they can better understand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

Birth to Five Illinois is working to reimagine the State's Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) system. Through an infrastructure that includes Action Councils and Family Councils, Birth to Five Illinois is providing opportunities to elevate family and community voices in this important process. This work depends on the support, work, and dedication of many individuals and organizations. We would be remiss if we did not acknowledge them for their contributions.

We are extremely grateful to our Action Council and Family Council members who so graciously attended monthly meetings, reviewed/analyzed data, discussed resources and lack of resources, shared their work-based and personal expertise, and helped us make the critical community connections that allowed us to capture the ECEC landscape in Region 30. Their engagement in team building activities helped build a bond that is trusting and genuine, and we are forever grateful. Our Council members' contributions to this work is invaluable. We are looking forward to continuing to build partnerships with local stakeholders and families to create an even stronger sense of community in Region 30.

To everyone who submitted Interest Forms for our Action and Family Councils to participate in this work, we thank you so much. In addition, we are grateful for all the teachers, administrators, faith-based organizations, elected officials, and families who participated in focus groups or interviews and submitted surveys to support our effort to amplify as many voices as possible as we completed this Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment.

The Southern Illinois Coalition of Children and Families, a Local Early Childhood Collaboration in Region 30, was established in 2008 and set the stage for our work. We are forever grateful for the communication, networking, and groundwork laid that blazed a trail for Birth to Five Illinois to effortlessly build relationships and collaborate across ECEC systems. We would also like to thank all local ECEC networks, pre-K programs, Head Start programs, child care centers, and home child care centers for their partnership.

We would also like to thank John Nimmo, REMAX Real Estate, for leasing office space for the Region 30 Team and Anna Heights Baptist Church for being so gracious in sharing their chapel for our monthly Council meetings. We give thanks to the local business owners that allowed us to leave flyers and welcomed us in to share information, as well as the Alexander/Pulaski NAACP and the Alexander County Port Authority Board for allowing us to participate in meetings to share information about Birth to Five Illinois.

Finally, Region 30 is grateful to INCCRRA and the Birth to Five Illinois State Team for your support throughout this process.

Thank you,

**Zena Madison (she/her)**

Regional Council Manager: Region 30  
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.

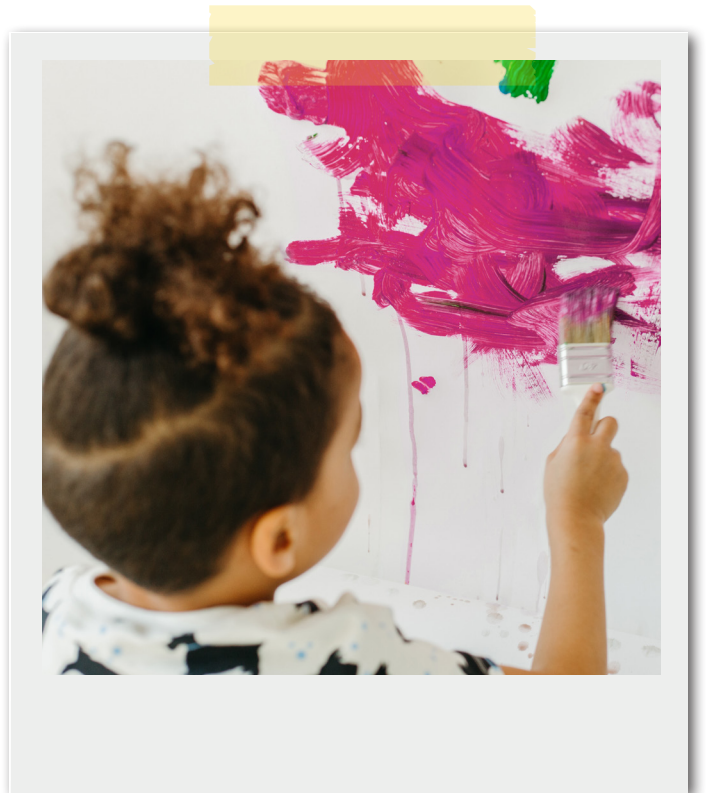
The **mission** of Birth to Five Illinois is to create a statewide regional infrastructure that will amplify input from communities in the development of policies and funding priorities. We support the mobilization of communities to build and sustain equitable access to inclusive, high-quality early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

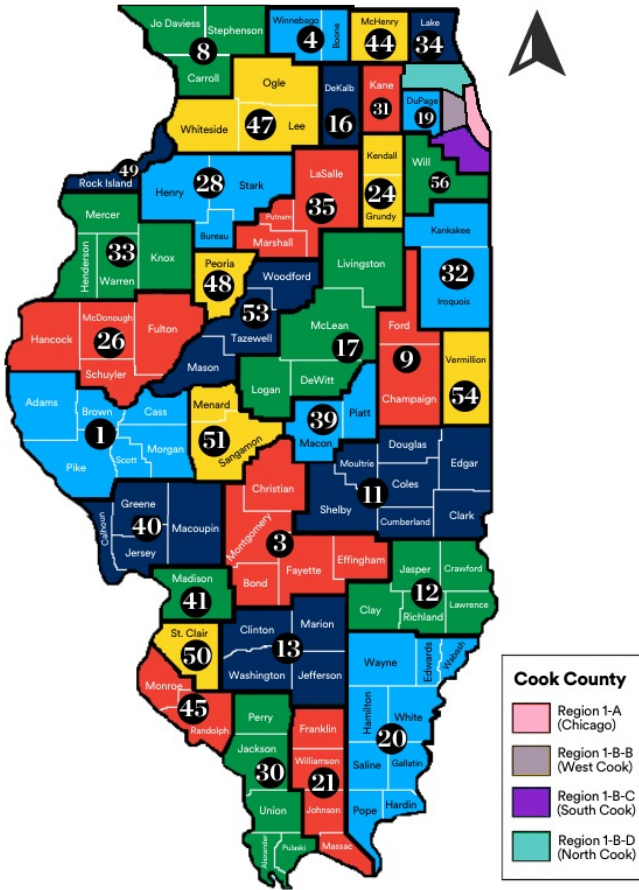


# Timeline

- **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

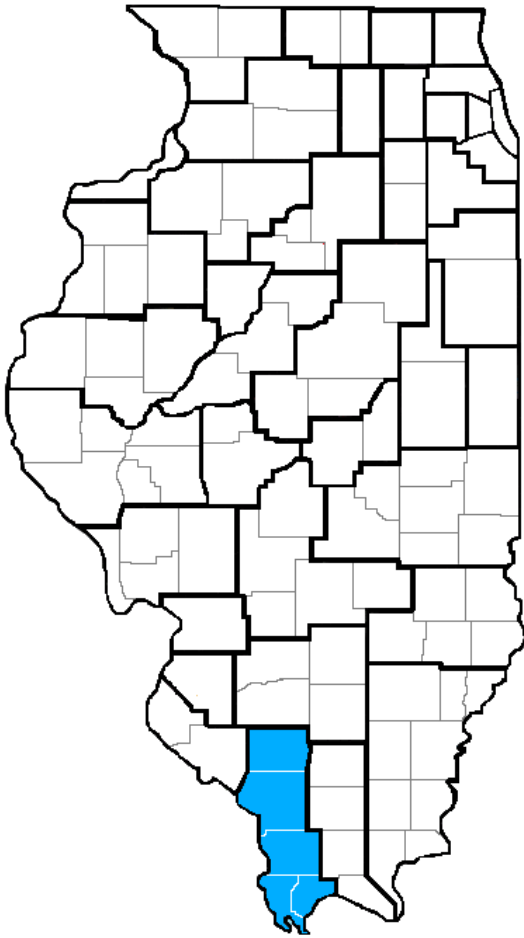
Regionally based demographic, programmatic, and service provider data from IECAM and workforce data from INCCRRA were presented to Action and Family Council members during meetings and is included in the following section. The data comes from both IECAM (2020-2021) and INCCRRA (2021), unless otherwise 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 30



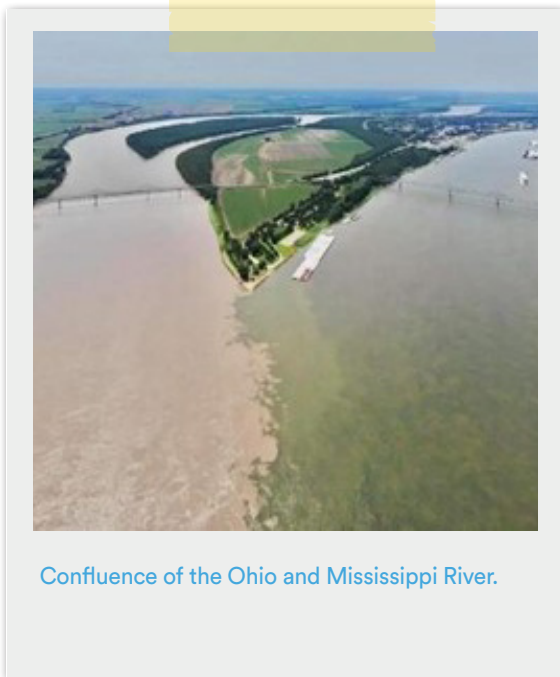
# Regional Community Landscape



## Regional Community Landscape

Region 30 is in the southernmost part of the State at the confluence of the Mississippi and Ohio rivers and borders Missouri and Kentucky. Spanning 1,928 square miles, Region 30 includes Alexander, Pulaski, Union, Jackson, and Perry Counties. The Region is extremely rural with only 11 towns in the five counties. The remainder of the Region includes 26 villages and 62 unincorporated areas. Towns differ from villages because of their size. Unincorporated areas are not part of any town, and although those living in these areas have fewer laws and restrictions to follow, they also have less access to services and support.

Each county in Region 30 has its own history and characteristics. Alexander County is the southernmost county in Illinois. Cairo is the county seat and because of its location, it had a prominent role in the Civil War, being home to a Union Prison Camp and a safehold for the Underground Railroad. Once a thriving community, Cairo was poised to become a major city. Jackson County is the largest of counties in size and population. Southern Illinois University-Carbondale is the only University in the Region located in Carbondale. The county seat is Murphysboro, known for its annual Apple Festival and the location of Illinois’ first coal mine. Perry County is known for the annual Du Quoin State Fair, one of only two state fairs in the State. Pulaski County is locally known as “Little Egypt”. Its county seat is Mound City and the largest town is Mounds. Pulaski County was named in honor of Casimir Pulaski, who was killed at the Siege of Savannah in the Revolutionary War. Union County is known for Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas having a debate there on the topic of racial equality.



Confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi River.

The Region’s geography varies from flat farmland to rolling hills, both important to the Region’s agriculture. The Region’s main crops are soybeans and corn. Due to the milder climate, Region 30 is also a great place to grow apples, peaches, and grapes, leading to the opening of over 10 wineries in recent years, attracting tourists and providing a boost to the Region’s economy. Another tourist attraction of the Region is Shawnee Forest, the only National Forest in the State; it provides tourists and local community members with numerous recreational activities and opportunities to learn about plant species, wildlife, and birds.

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

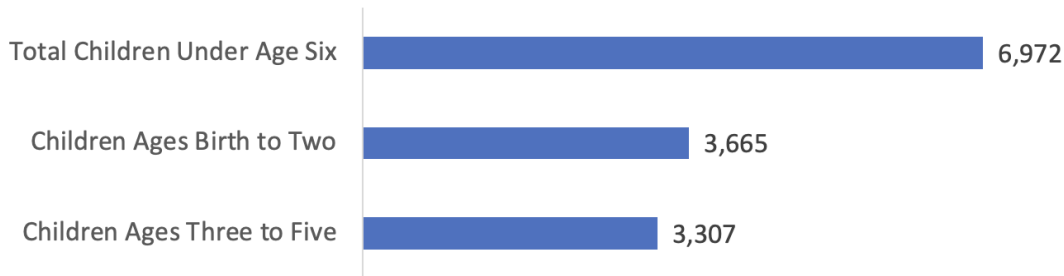
We acknowledge the historic and ongoing injustices experienced by all the Native Peoples who came before us and continue to live here. Region 30 would like to honor that all counties in this Region are the traditional homelands of the Kaskaskia, Chickasaw, O-ga-xpa Ma-zho<sup>n</sup> (Quapaw), Myaamia (Miami), and Kiikaapoi (Kickapoo) Nations.

## Regional Demographics

According to the 2020 Census, Region 30 is home to 100,568 people. Jackson County has the largest population, with 52,565 people representing 52% of the Region's total population. The combined total for the smallest two counties, Alexander County, home to 5,030 people, and Pulaski County, home to 5,065 people, is less than any other county in the Region, and it represents only 10% of the Region's total population. Union County, home to 16,923 people, represents 17% of the total Region's population, and Perry County, home to 20,985 people, represents 21%.

There are 6,972 children under the age of six who reside in Region 30 (Figure 1). They represent approximately 5% of the population in each County.

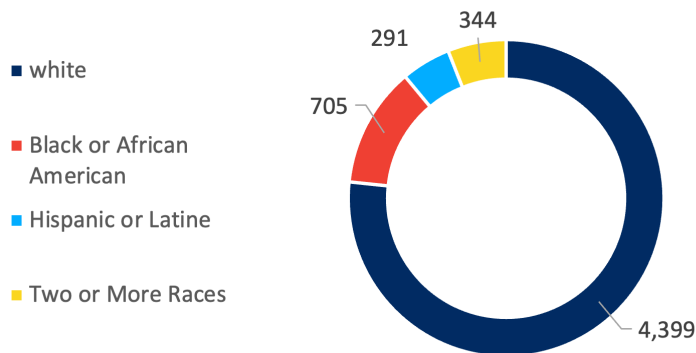
**Figure 1: Total Number of Children**



Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2021  
Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

Most of the children in the Region under the age of five are white (Figure 2).<sup>2</sup> However, there are small pockets in the Region where those who are Black or African American, Hispanic or Latine, or Two or More Races live. Union County is the least racially diverse, with 96% of its population being white; Alexander County is the most racially diverse; 31% of its population is African American.

**Figure 2: Children Under Five by Race & Ethnicity**



Source: IECAM  
Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

The average value of owner-occupied housing units ranges from \$60,000 to \$11,200, and less than 35% of persons age 25+ have earned a bachelor's degree or higher in each county.

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

<sup>2</sup> Some Census categories of children under the age of six not included due to the small numbers: Asian (23), Some Other Race (11), American Indian or Alaska Native (8), Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (0).

## Children in Priority Populations

The Illinois Early Learning Council (ELC) identified groups across the State as belonging to priority populations,<sup>3</sup> defined as a population that is well-defined, faces economic disadvantage and a lack of a support system, does not receive equitable resources compared to other children in the academic pipeline, and who lack adequate access to ECEC programs due to the programs' location, cost, enrollment requirements, or capacity to serve the comprehensive needs of families. The purpose of the priority population recommendation is to drive resources and attention toward efforts to improve access to high-quality, responsive services for children and families with the least access to resources, and to promote coordination and alignment across the various parts of the ECEC landscape (prenatal to age five) in service of that goal. While the priority populations list addresses the access issue, Birth to Five Illinois strives to focus the attention of policymakers and early childhood stakeholders on identifying ways to engage these impacted communities to remove the systemic barriers causing the access issue within each Region.

The Action and Family Councils identified the following priority populations in Region 30: children in families in deep poverty, children experiencing homelessness, children/families with child welfare involvement, and children of teen parents.

### Children in Families in Poverty or Deep Poverty

The Federal Poverty Level (FPL) is a measure of income level created by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that calculates the minimum amount of money needed by a family to cover their basic household needs, such as food, housing, utilities, and other necessities. In many cases, FPL is used to determine eligibility for programs and services. Living at or below 50% FPL is defined as living in “deep poverty” and 100% FPL is living at “the poverty line” (Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Federal Poverty Level Family of Four**

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

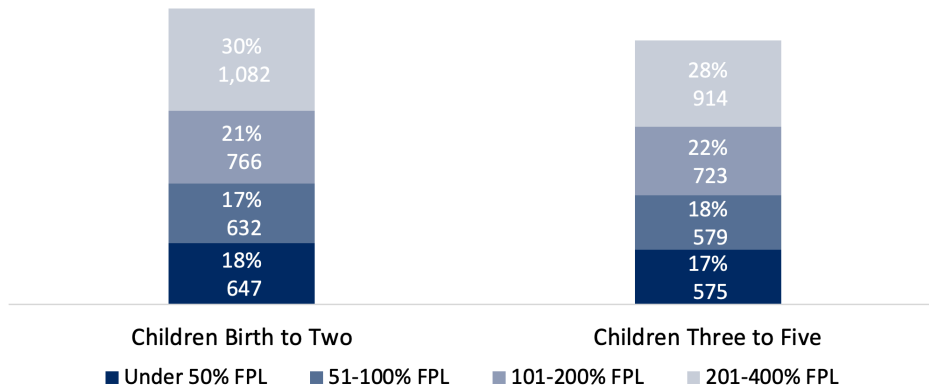
Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

Deep poverty has affected many families in Region 30, with 21% of children birth to age five living at or below 50% FPL. Thirty-four percent of children birth to age five in Perry County live at or below 50% FPL; 30% of children birth to age five in Union County live at or below 50% FPL, and 25% of children birth to age five in Pulaski County live at or below 50% FPL.

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

The largest economic entity in the Region is Southern Illinois University in Carbondale. The Region’s other large employers are school districts, healthcare facilities, and prisons. The Region is highly dependent on government funding because of very little available private employment. However, when COVID-19 hit and many schools and government entities closed, many people lost income and the means to support their families. The lack of transportation hinders families who already lack resources to find employment. Communities are siloed and run independently of one another.

**Figure 4: Children Under 6 by Age by Federal Poverty Level**



Source: IECAM  
 Created by: Illinois Action for Children CS3

## Children Experiencing Homelessness and Unstable Housing

The number of children in families experiencing homelessness and unstable housing is difficult to capture because many families are not informed of the technical definition of homelessness and are ashamed to share that they have unstable housing. There are several women’s shelters in the Region, but few shelters that serve men or families.

## Children/Families with Child Welfare Involvement

Children and families that are involved with the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) are those receiving intact family services, families with a parent who is a youth in care, or children in foster care. There are many children birth to age five in Jackson County who have been removed from their primary caregiver’s home and placed in substitute (foster) care (Figure 5). Jackson County also has the highest number of indicated child abuse and neglect cases. Union County has the highest rate of children experiencing abuse or neglect per 1,000 children ages five and under.

**Figure 5: Number of Children Experiencing Foster Care, Abuse, and Neglect by County**

County	Number of Children in Foster Care System, Ages Birth to Five	Indicated Child Abuse and Neglect Cases, Ages Birth to Five <sup>4</sup>	Rate of Victims of Abuse and Neglect per 1,000, Ages Birth to Five <sup>5</sup>
Alexander	29	15	28.96
Jackson	158	128	54.95
Perry	85	50	57.48
Pulaski	24	12	56.25
Union	69	86	86.49

Source: Erikson Institute, IECAM

Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

## Children of Underage Parents

Children born to underage parents (age 19 and under) is the last priority population discussed by our Action and Family Councils. While the percentages for most of the counties in the Region are low, all but one is above the state average of 4% (Figure 6). Currently, there are no programs available in any County in the Region to serve or support underage parents.

**Figure 6: Number of Births to Teen Mothers in Region 30<sup>6</sup>**

County	Births to Mothers Ages 15 to 18	Births to Mothers Ages 18 and 19	Total Number of Births to Underage Mothers	Percent of Children Born to Underage Mothers
Alexander	4	4	8	13%
Jackson	9	25	34	6%
Perry	4	12	16	9%
Pulaski	1	0	1	2%
Union	4	7	11	7%

Source: IDPH

Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

It should be noted that there are no hospitals in either Alexander and Pulaski Counties, forcing many births into neighboring Jackson County or Missouri, making the number of births difficult to track. Additionally, the lack of hospitals impacts the type of care available to pregnant people in both counties.

It is important to understand the demographic make-up of our Region as we develop recommendations and identify the most pressing ECEC needs of our community. Demographic data is important to ensure we have the proper support and services in place to effectively meet the needs of the families and children in the Region.

<sup>4</sup> <https://riskandreach.erikson.edu/>

<sup>5</sup> [Ibid.](#)

<sup>6</sup> <https://dph.illinois.gov/data-statistics/vital-statistics/birth-statistics.html>

## Local Community Collaborations

Local Early Childhood Community Collaborations bring together local partners and stakeholders who represent the full spectrum of people, programs, and services that touch the lives of young children and their families within a geographic area. Together, they align goals to tackle complex issues and to support families as they prepare their children to enter Kindergarten safe, healthy, eager to learn, and ready to succeed. There are three Local Early Childhood Community Collaborations that serve families and caregivers throughout Region 30.

**The Southern Illinois Coalition for Children and Families (SICCF)** is a structured Collaboration in Region 30 that started in 2008. This Local Collaboration covers 15 counties in southern Illinois and three Birth to Five Illinois Regions (30, 21, and part of 20). SICCF's strategic priorities include

developmental screenings, school readiness, developing and supporting the ECEC workforce, strong families, and acting as an impact accelerator for local partnerships and collective impact efforts. In fall 2020, they received an Implementation Grant from Birth to Five Illinois to increase the Coalition's capacity to coordinate developmental and social-emotional screenings of children in child care programs.

**The Community Cabinet for Children and Youth** encompasses all neighborhoods served by Carbondale High School District #165, including four elementary school districts: Carbondale #95, Unity Point, Giant City, and De Soto. The Cabinet's Early Childhood Impact Table focuses on children from birth to age five. They are currently reviewing existing reports to document baseline measures of early childhood wellbeing and identifying priority populations, neighborhoods, and/or issues that could be improved with better access to resources as part of a data analysis.

**The Southernmost Illinois Early Learning Special Education Collaborative** is newly formed and serves Region 21 (Johnson and Massac Counties) and Region 30 (Alexander and Pulaski Counties). They received a Birth to Five Illinois Planning Grant in winter 2022 to increase collaboration among schools, agencies, and individual providers serving young children in the area. Their Planning Grant specially focuses on increasing collaboration among ECEC agencies and organizations and funds a self-assessment survey that helps to identify training needs so they can offer better support to Special Education providers.

Every community needs to understand the positive impact a Local Collaboration can have by providing resources, forming and strengthening partnerships, and seeking funding to help families, caregivers, and the healthy development of their children.



Linda Poindexter (left), Akemi Walker (middle), and Zena Madison (right) celebrating a fully staffed Region 30 office.

## Early Childhood Education & Care (ECEC) Programs

ECEC programs in Region 30 include Prevention Initiative (PI), Preschool for All (PFA), Preschool for All Expansion (PFA-E), Head Start and Early Head Start programs, licensed and license-exempt child care centers, and licensed and license-exempt family child care homes.

PFA and PFA-E programs are administered by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) with funds from the Early Childhood Block Grant (ECBG). They provide services to children ages three to five years old and are designed to support early learning and development, health, and family well-being. ISBE's PI program is also funded by the ECBG and provides early, continuous, intensive, and comprehensive child development and family support services to help families build a strong foundation to prepare children for success in school. PI is for children from birth to age three. Many of these programs only offer half-day services and do not supply transportation; without a way to transport their children to and from school, families cannot access these programs.

“ It is overwhelming when you have family watching kids when the parent is not able to afford to pay the family member and no one else is available to care for those kids.

– Caregiver (Jackson County)

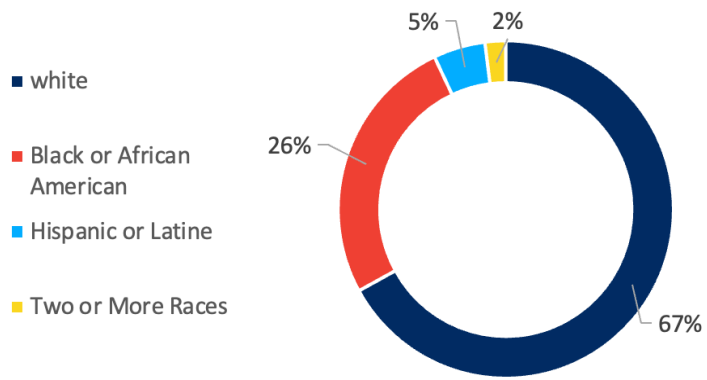
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Early Head Start and Head Start are federally funded programs administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. They both provide programming that promotes healthy child development and services that support the whole child and addresses family needs. Early Head Start serves expectant parents and children up to three years of age. Head Start provides programs and services to children aged three to five years.

Licensed and license-exempt child care centers and licensed and license-exempt child family child care homes have different organizational structures (profit and non-profit) and receive most of their funding through payments for services, which may include payments from the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP). In addition, eligible programs may supplement their income through grants and community donations.

When speaking with families in Region 30 about ECEC programs, the greatest concerns expressed were regarding the quality of care, affordability, and access to resources. Other concerns included the lack of gender and ethnic diversity among staff, and often having staff at all. There is a need for high-quality child care, affordable child care, full-time slots, and transportation. Half-day services do not benefit parents much since most caregivers need full-time care.

**Figure 7: Licensed Center Teaching Staff by Race/Ethnicity<sup>7</sup>**



Source: INCCRRA  
 Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

**Figure 8: Number of Sites and Capacity by Publicly Funded Program Type**

Program Name	Number of Sites	Total Capacity
Early Head Start	4	90
Head Start	12	502
Prevention Initiative	10	333
Preschool for All	17	786
Preschool for All Expansion	1	75
IDHS Home Visiting	0	0

Source: Erikson Institute, IECAM  
 Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

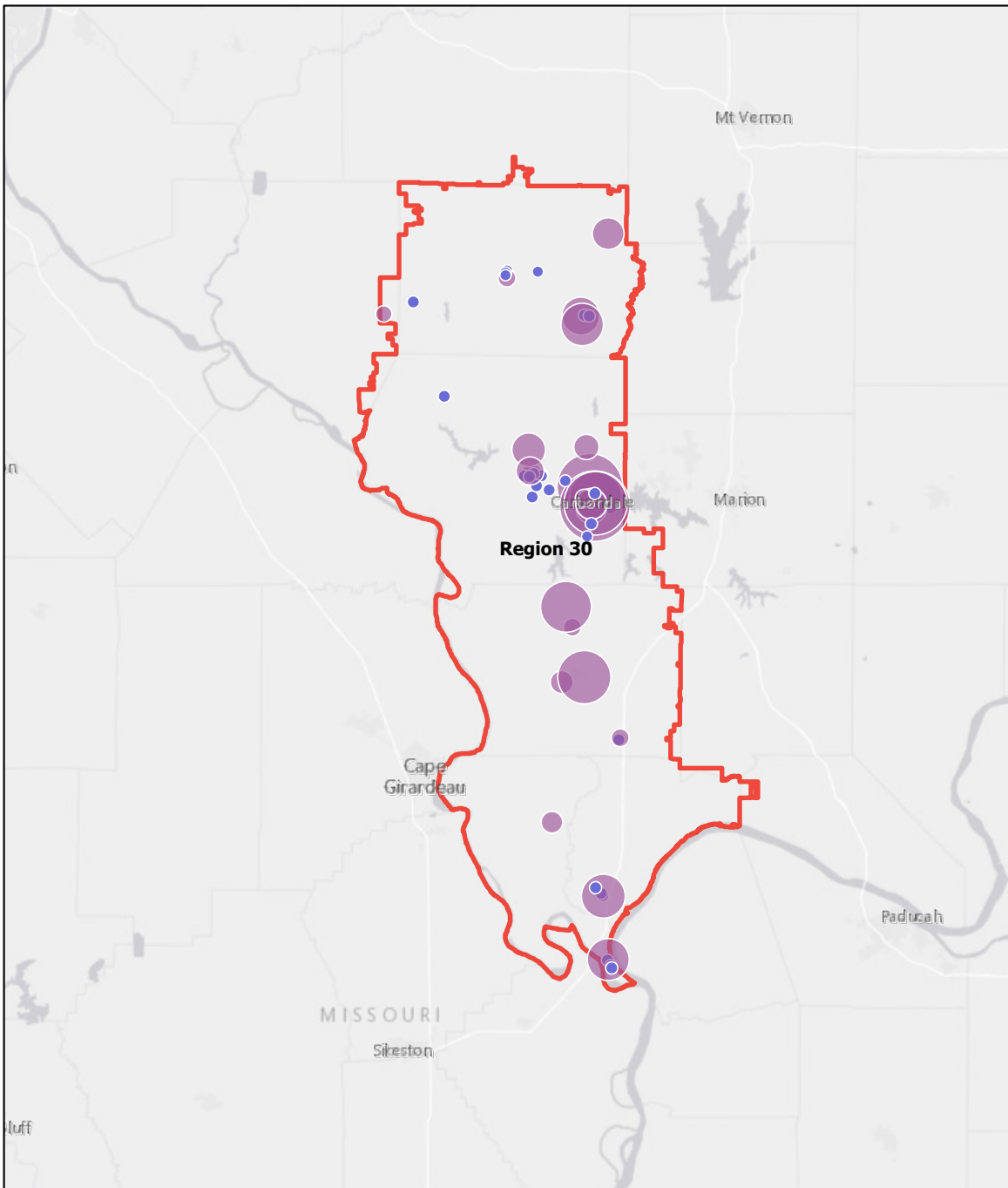
There are programs spread throughout Region 30, with Jackson County providing a larger variety including PI, several child care homes and centers, SIU Head Start programs, and PFA-E. Alexander and Pulaski Counties have very limited options for families, with only one operating a licensed child care home in Pulaski County and two in Alexander County. Alexander and Pulaski both have a Head Start center. Union County has an Early Learning Center and Migrant Learning Center, as well as several child care centers. Perry County has two Head Start programs and several child care homes.

Despite the number of different programs in the Region, there is not enough supply to meet families’ needs. With limited choices, caregivers often must look outside their Region to find the quality of service they want for their child. ISBE funded Early Childhood Special Education and IDHS Early Intervention services are offered in the Region with very limited availability.

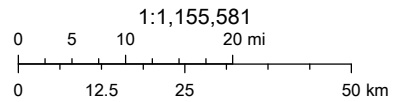
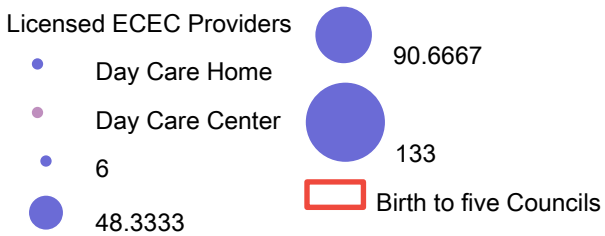
<sup>7</sup> Other racial/ethnic categories not included in chart due to small number of respondents totaling less than 1% each: Asian, Native American/Alaskan, Pacific Islander, or Other



**Figure 9: Location of Licensed ECEC Programs**



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Esri, HERE, NPS, Esri, HERE, Garmin, USGS, EPA, NPS

ArcGIS Web AppBuilder  
Esri, HERE, Garmin, USGS, EPA, NPS | Esri, HERE, NPS |

Source: IECAM  
Created by: Illinois Action for Children CS3

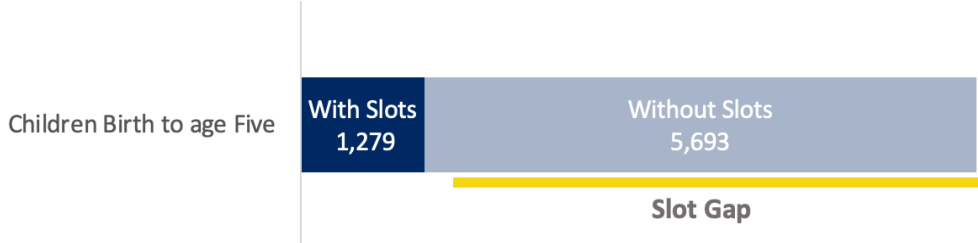
# Slot Gap

The slot gap is the difference between the number of funded spots available for children in available programs versus the number of eligible children in that community. There are two main slot gaps to consider: (1) the overall slot gap, which measures the total number of children ages birth to five in the Region against the capacity of all licensed child care centers, licensed family child care homes, and license-exempt child care centers; and (2) the publicly funded slot gap, which includes Prevention Initiative, Preschool for All, Head Start, and Early Head Start Programs. There are number of ways children can qualify for enrollment in publicly funded programs, but annual income at or below 200% FPL is one of the main factors. While a good quantitative measure to understand the need for ECEC program expansion, slot gap does not account for families who do not enroll their children into ECEC programs that have open slots.

“Single parents will have to quit and stay home, which would cause kids to not be prepared for Kindergarten, like what happened through and after COVID.”  
– Community Member (Jackson County)

Overall, there are not enough slots for children to attend a licensed child care center, licensed family child care home, or license-exempt child care centers, leaving families struggling to find a safe, affordable place for their children to learn and grow (Figure 10). Due to limited availability, families are placed on waiting lists for child care. One parent pointed out that they were on a waitlist for over 14 months. The most challenging slots to find are for children birth to two years old.

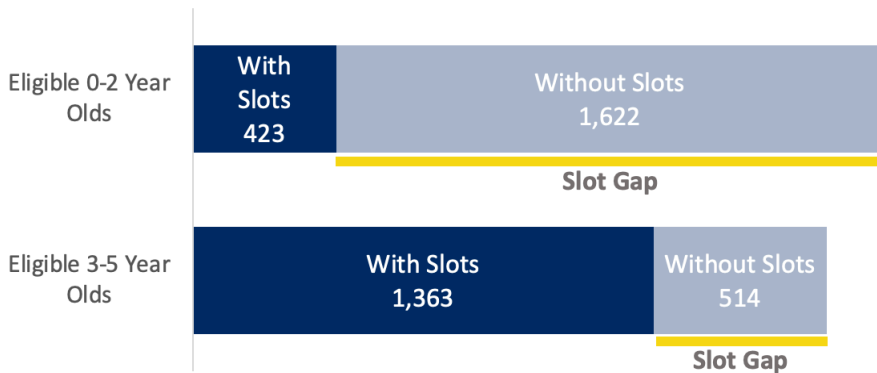
**Figure 10: Total Publicly Funded ECEC Slot Gap for Children Birth to Age Five**



Source: IECAM  
Created by: Illinois Action for Children CS3

In publicly funded programs, there are only 1,786 slots to serve 3,922 children aged birth to five who qualify for enrollment based on their family’s yearly income, an overwhelming gap for families in this Region (Figure 11). Children that are birth to two years old have the largest slot gap, with 79% of children without a slot. Preventative Initiative has slots for 16% of children birth through age two, and Early Head Start only has 90 publicly funded slots in the Region. While Prevention Initiative programs provide valuable services to families, it is offered as both center-based care and home visiting, which is not necessarily what families need. Additionally, post-COVID, there are no slots for home visiting in Region 30.

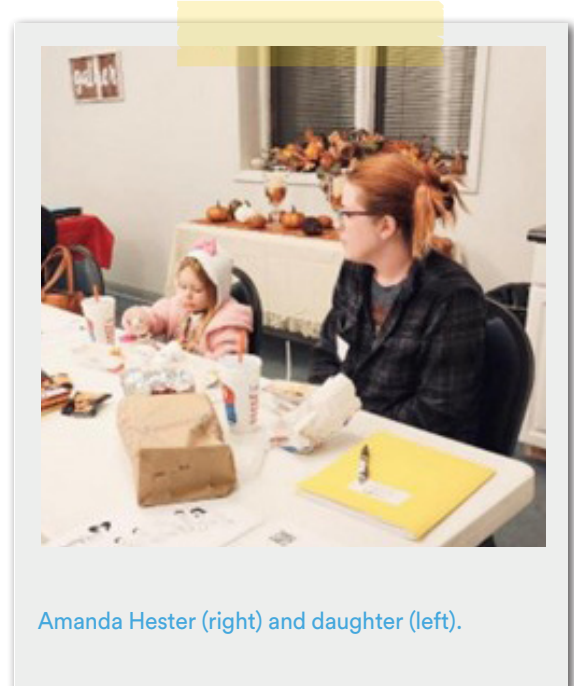
**Figure 11: Publicly Funded Early Childhood Education and Care Slot Gap**



Source: IECAM  
Created by: Illinois Action for Children CS3

Most publicly funded slots are for Preschool for All, Preschool for All Expansion, and Head Start programs which cover children three to five years old. In Region 30, according to Figure 11, 82% of children birth to age five are without a publicly funded slot. There are slots to cover 70% of children three to five years old via these programs, which leaves a 30% slot gap: over 500 children in that age group are not receiving services.

“When slots are not available, younger kids suffer educational disadvantages, which adds more pressure on elementary schools and teachers to help those kids get caught up with standards.”  
– Parent (Jackson County)



Amanda Hester (right) and daughter (left).

“ I used vacation and sick time to be able to care for my kids. The waiting lists are long, and I have to juggle transportation and rely on my family. I’ve had to accept low-quality child care and have turned down job offers because of not having family near to help with children.

– Parent (Jackson County)

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Conversations with community members, parents/caregivers, and Council members, identified several reasons why the slot gap is so large and why families may not be utilizing existing services. First, many programs are only half-day, making it difficult for working families to utilize them for child care. Since transportation to and from programs is either limited or non-existent, caregivers must leave work to transport their child from a half-day program to another care provider or must find someone to transport their child on their

behalf. Additionally, many programs only provide care during “traditional” work hours, and few offer overnight or weekend care.

Waiting lists are also long and force families to either try and find care long before they need it or make it impossible to place their child in a high-quality program. Lastly, even if a slot is open, it may not be affordable for a family. Many reported that they were ineligible for publicly funded slots or CCAP because they made just over the income cap.

It is important to understand slot gap and how access to programs is limited and can be out of reach for many families in the Region. There will be some help coming to the Region soon. According to the Policy Council for Southern Illinois University (SIU), the University will be opening some classrooms for children birth to age three in August 2023. While this will help to alleviate the burden of finding child care for some families, it is only a small step in helping to solve the issue for all families in the Region.

“ The Southern Region Early Childhood Center at SIU offers a half-day program. It was difficult to transport my child, but we dealt with it for 2 years because of the quality of care they provided.

– Parent (Jackson County)

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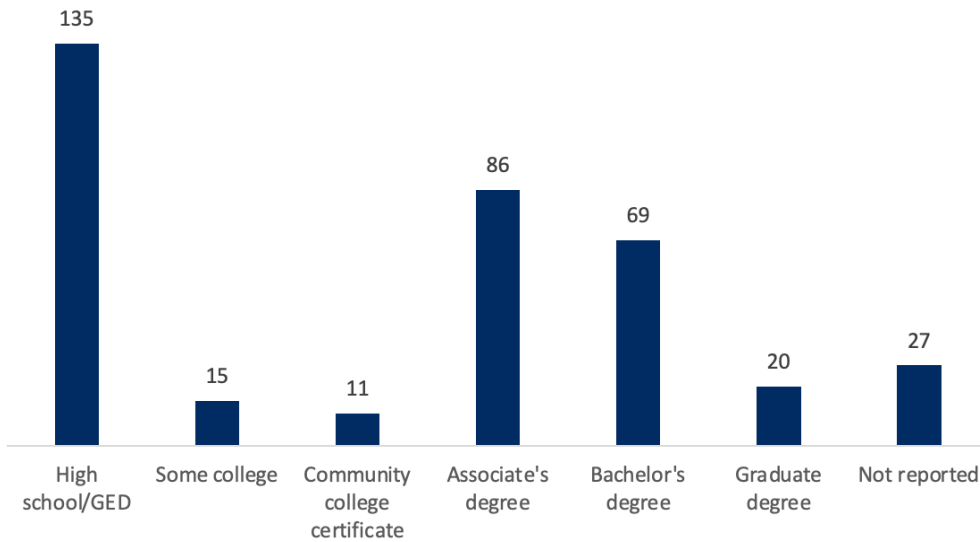
# Early Childhood Education & Care (ECEC) Workforce

The ECEC workforce includes many kinds of professionals that support the health and well-being of children prior to Kindergarten, including healthcare, early childhood education, mental health, child welfare, and early intervention. In Region 30, the workforce is experiencing several barriers, especially low compensation, staff shortage, and high staff turnover. The existing workforce in Region 30 consists of 39 licensed directors, 363 teachers, and 180 teacher assistants to cover over 6,792 children.

## Education

ECEC workforce qualifications vary by setting and role. Teachers must meet higher qualifications than aides or assistants. According to INCCRRA’s workforce data, most of the teachers’ highest level of education is some college and an associate or bachelor’s degree; over 50% of directors have obtained a bachelor’s or graduate degree.

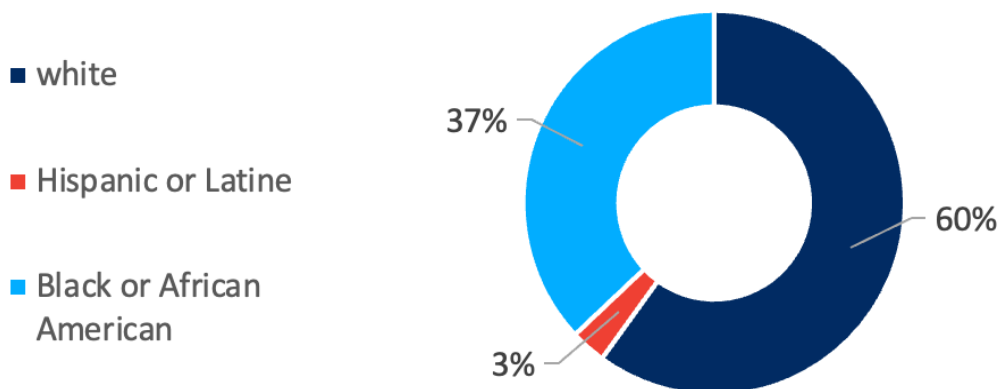
Figure 12: Highest Level of Education for Licensed Center Teaching Staff



Source: INCCRRA  
Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

## Race and Ethnicity

Figure 13: Race and Ethnicity of Licensed ECC Providers



Source: INCCRRA  
Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

According to INCCRRA’s workforce data, 71% of directors self-identify as white, 24% self-identify as African American, and 3% self-identify as Hispanic/Latine. Approximately 67% of teachers self-identify as white, 26% self-identify as self-identify as African American, and 5% are Hispanic/Latine in Region 30. There needs to be more of a balance in the representation of staff that looks like the students they serve.

“ Our Region needs to be more diverse in ethnicity and gender roles in the ECEC workforce.  
– Jackson County Community Member

## Gender and Language

In Region 30, all licensed center directors are women, and among the teaching staff there are 11 men out of 363 teachers. The primary language spoken is English with only nine Spanish-speaking staff. According to IECAM, there are approximately 159 limited English-speaking households with children birth to five years old; the Region lacks representation for children whose first language is not English.

## Compensation

Once hired, it is difficult to retain teachers and assistants due to low wages and workload stress. The median hourly wage for a full-time administrative director is \$19.00 per hour with an annual wage of approximately \$39,520; an early childhood teacher in a child care center earns \$14.29 per hour with an annual wage of \$29,732; and an early childhood assistant teacher hourly wage is \$12.00 per hour with an annual wage of \$24,960. Licensed family child care providers reported an average annual net income of \$15,431 per year. The low wages that early childhood workers receive indicate that they are not as valued as they should be. Low wages and lack of benefits are two of the main reasons that have been reported as causes for workforce shortages.

“ Some employees don’t receive benefits. You are lucky if you receive healthcare. However, some don’t qualify for health care assistance either.

– Parent (Alexander County)

## Staff Shortage & High Turnover

The ECEC workforce is struggling to keep highly qualified employees, which has implications for programs. Program administrators report that there is an overall shortage of qualified teachers to support and there is no evidence of an increased supply in the pipeline. Some programs, such as Head Start in Pulaski County, had to shut down classrooms in a community where poverty rates are high, resources are scarce, and there are limited options for families. Some programs have been forced to close their doors altogether. Because of this, parents/caregivers report they are struggling to find child care and cannot remain employed because of it.

According to the Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) Agency at John A. Logan College, the number of licensed family child care homes has decreased by almost 40% in recent years. Region 30 currently has 35 licensed family child care homes. Two Region 30 counties, Alexander and Pulaski, currently only have three combined operating licensed family child care homes.

“ We lost many providers during the pandemic, which made an already scarce space worse.

– Community Member (Jackson County)

Children have also been affected by the reduced access to programs. Teachers participating in a focus group in Jackson County identified that more and more children are coming to school with limited social skills and need screenings and/or assessments.

“ I wish people cared more about early child care.

– Parent (Jackson County)

## Professional Development & Advancement Opportunities

The good news is there are several initiatives available in Region 30 to increase an economically distressed workforce. Several high schools have future teachers' clubs to promote the ECEC field. The Grow your Own program through Southern Illinois University (SIU) and the Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity (ECACE) Scholarship both provide tuition assistance to individuals pursuing their teaching degrees as well as other costs, such as books and fees. A Higher Education Navigator working out of the CCR&R at John A. Logan College helps current and future teachers plan their college classes and access the available scholarships and resources. The Southern Illinois Future Teacher's Coalition also assists with the Region's teacher recruitment efforts.

The state of Illinois implements ExceleRate Illinois, a program designed to keep providers focused on developing the whole child and providing children with the best start possible. The ExceleRate system aims to ensure children have the resources they need in every area of development including physical, social-emotional, and cognitive. The program emphasizes accelerating excellence in early learning and development programs in Illinois by including benefits that make quality an ongoing priority, providing a consistent set of standards, enabling providers to focus on individual quality issues that are most relevant to their practices, and connecting providers with expert consultants and assessment professionals.

Illinois is continuing to look for ways to supplement the wage for the ECEC workforce. Until a more permanent, systemic solution can be found, families will continue to be forced to navigate an ever-changing ECEC system to meet their needs.



Candice Smith (left) and Linda Poindexter (right) during the Meridian Parent-Teacher Conference and Fall Festival.



## Parent/Family/Caregiver Voice

Parents, families, and caregivers in Region 30 have expressed many challenges with our ECEC programs and services. There is a lack of resources, lack of programs, lack of transportation, and child care is too expensive for some families with children birth to five years old.



Gabriela Morales (in the back) and her son (in the front) during Night of the Living Health Fair (Union County).

Parents/caregivers are frustrated with the lack of resources and not having anyone to assist them in searching for options. They are often turned away, redirected, or simply told, “We can’t help you.” Per IECAM, 42% of children live in a single-parent household in Region 30.

Access to child care in the Region is limited, with a capacity slot gap of 82% for children birth to five according to IECAM, which clearly shows the need for more programming. Alexander and Pulaski Counties do not have any child care facilities. Families depend on Head Start programs that are at capacity with a waitlist or lack the staff required to fully operate.

According to IECAM, 56% of children are living below the 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). Many families interviewed in our Region stressed that working is sometimes not worth it because you make just enough money to be eliminated from receiving assistance with child care.

“We don’t choose to be single mothers, life happens. My children’s father was killed and I’m raising five children by myself.”  
– Parent (Jackson County)

“Many pre-Ks only offer half-day programs, which is inconvenient for working parents.”  
– Parent (Pulaski County)



Chelsi Wright holding her two daughters during Family Night at Tamaroa Grade School (Perry County).

“The lack of mental health consultants, screenings for children, shortage of providers, limited access to a full-day program, and lack of transportation are just a few of many obstacles families face day to day in our Region.”  
– Community Member (Jackson County)

“

I make just above the income guidelines to qualify for CCAP and that's been a struggle for me.

– Parent (Alexander County)

”

“

I can't afford to work because child care is too expensive, and I won't be able to pay my rent.

– Parent (Perry County)

”

“

I couldn't find child care for my child who has a disability and therefore, I've had to skip social events and take time off work to get other basic tasks done like going to the bank.

– Parent (Jackson County)

”

This information not only allows families to be heard but is also important for stakeholders to understand the struggles families face when seeking safe, quality environments for their children. One parent from Jackson County who was fortunate enough to find a spot says, “Child care takes my entire paycheck.” Stories like these demonstrate that parents/caregivers in our Region face many challenges.

## Regional Strengths & Needs

Family and community members in Region 30 see the same needs in the ECEC system, which revolve around affordability, accessibility, and quality of care. Child care is expensive, and many working families are just above the eligibility guidelines. Child care is hard to find and lacks quality in many instances.

The local needs families are facing based on our collective impact efforts are listed below:

### Needs

- More resources for families with a child with a disability.
- Assistance navigating different ECEC resources.
- Available and affordable child care options within the community with a high quality of care.
- Transportation assistance for parents/caregivers getting to and from child care facilities.
- Consider changing the independent contractor work status of ECEC providers (e.g., speech, hearing/vision, occupational therapists) as well as looking for ways to incentivize them to provide care in rural areas.
- Target funding to decrease slot gaps in service for children birth to age two.
- Increase funding to help support the ECEC workforce.
- Support programs for single parents/caregivers and streamline the application process for various programs.

### Strengths

- The Policy Council for Southern Illinois University (SIU) will be opening various classrooms for children birth to age three in August 2023.
- Our community members are willing to work together to improve ECEC services in the Region via our Action and Family Councils.
- Diverse population across the Region.
- Educational institutions with established working relationships.
- Legislators are accessible to their constituents.
- Passionate ECEC professionals.
- Existing Early Childhood Collaborations.
- The Southern Illinois Coalition for Children and Families is actively working on regional issues.

## Recommendations

The following are prioritized recommendations from the Action Council, Family Council, and community members for how to address the identified needs of Region 30.

- Elevate the needs of young children and families in regional planning and conversations regarding the Region's transportation infrastructure. Improve leaders' and planners' awareness of the ECEC access needs of families and encourage the inclusion of funding for transportation.
- Support regional efforts to create a comprehensive and readily available online resource directory and referral platform. Explore alternative mechanisms to better connect families with resources, such as family navigators or a mobile resource bus.
- Increase efforts to expand licensed family child care networks that include a diversified workforce and supply funding, technical assistance, and support to get them established in smaller rural communities offering more choices to families.
- Increase staffing, training, and equipment for programs to provide care and education for children with diagnosed or suspected disabilities.
- The State should continue to invest in initiatives such as wage supplements, scholarships, and incentives to recruit and retain an abundant early childhood workforce.

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 30, please find our contact information on the front inside cover of this Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment.

# Appendices

## Appendix A: References

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## Appendix B: Additional Figures

Figure 1: Population and Number of Children 0 to 5 from Alexander, Jackson, Perry, Pulaski, and Union Counties

County	Population	Number of Children Ages Birth to Five
Alexander	5,030	397
Jackson	52,565	3,657
Perry	20,985	1,318
Pulaski	5,065	338
Union	16,923	1,107

## 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.

### Family, Parents, and Caregivers

1. There are many Early Childhood services available in our Region. What Early Childhood services does your family use/has your family used?
2. How have you found out about Early Childhood programs or services, or found care for your child(ren)?
3. Do the childcare 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?

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