



# Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment

**Region 48**  
(Peoria County)





## Region 48 Staff

Regional Council Manager: Kari Clark (she/her)  
Family & Community Engagement Specialist: Melissa Green (she/her)  
Administrative Support: Rian Harrison (she/her)

Office Address: 1717 W. Candletree Dr, Suite E, Peoria, IL 61614

Phone Number: (309) 393-2543

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

Web: [www.birthtofiveil.com/region48](http://www.birthtofiveil.com/region48)

## Region 48 Action Council Members

Katy Bauml  
Kimberly Cary  
Katie Cobb  
Laura Costic  
Shannon Dault  
Kelly Gibler  
Angela Green  
Michael Murphy  
Bryna Ryan  
Andrianna Smyrniotis  
Erin Stout  
Lisa Weaver  
Jenna Wiesner

## Region 48 Family Council Members

Gary Craig  
Megan Crookham  
Tia Dye  
Anita Frei  
Shelby Hall  
Laurel Huston  
Folanda James  
Courtney Kilgore  
Maribeth Larson  
Kristin McGraw  
Kerishena Metz  
C'Ante Morris  
Maricela Nieto  
Indirea Slaughter  
Hunter Stahl  
Timothy Whitacre Albertson  
Catina White

# Table of Contents

Region 48 Executive Summary .....	3
Region 48 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 48 .....</b>	<b>15</b>
Regional Community Landscape.....	16
Local Community Collaborations.....	20
Early Childhood Education & Care (ECEC) Programs .....	21
Slot Gap.....	26
Early Childhood Education & Care (ECEC) Workforce.....	28
Parent/Family/Caregiver Voice .....	30
Regional Strengths & Needs.....	32
Recommendations.....	33
Appendices .....	35



## Region 48 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.

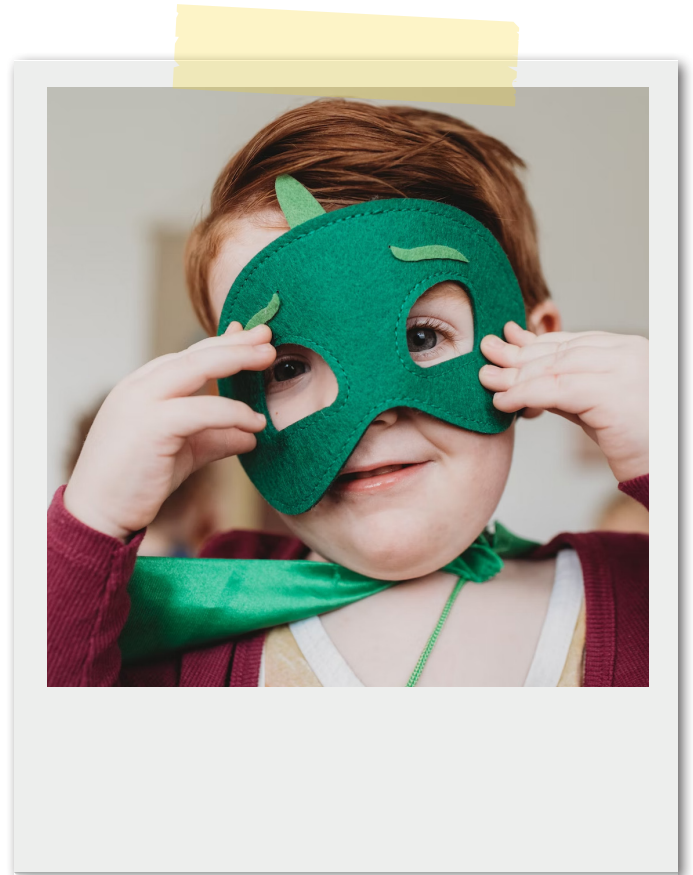
The experiences and knowledge families, caregivers, and early childhood professionals gain while navigating the complexities of the State's ECEC system is valuable, and understanding their lived experience in the local context is vital for decision-makers to ensure communities have access to the programs, 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 48 Needs Assessment, which includes recommendations developed by our Action and Family Councils. Additional findings, analysis, and recommendations can be found in the full report.

### Key Findings

Region 48 is home to just over 15,000 children birth to age five. Because the Region includes the bustling urban setting of Peoria, it offers a multitude of publicly funded and privately funded ECEC program options. While programs are available in the Region, they are more heavily concentrated in Peoria, and much less abundant in the rural areas of the Region.

Caregivers reported a lack of knowledge of the programs available within the Region, and when they found programs, they were faced with waitlists, or the programs did not always meet their family's needs. While quality and location are top priorities in choosing a program for their children, waitlists for desired programs require caregivers to choose programs based on availability instead. Additionally, the lack of transportation available has made some publicly funded programs inaccessible to families.



Affordability is another issue families face when accessing privately funded programs. While some families qualify for and utilize the Child Care Assistance Program, not all programs accept families who are utilizing this assistance, or space is limited. This further reduces the number of options available to families. For families who do not qualify for the Child Care Assistance Program, the cost of care may create a financial burden, forcing caregivers to leave the workforce to care for their young children. Other families opt to utilize family, friend, or neighbor care as a free or lower cost option so they are able to stay in the workforce.

A workforce shortage has further complicated the accessibility of ECEC programs. Compensation levels do not match the importance of the work, making it difficult to find and retain workers. Classrooms are sitting empty or running at reduced capacity because administrators are unable to hire qualified staff.

Region 48 has the capacity to meet the needs of its families with the wide range of programs offered. With some additional work within the ECEC community at the local, regional, and state level, programs can strengthen and grow to ensure they are meeting the needs of all families. This will ensure all children have equitable access to the programs and services they may need.

## **Region 48 Needs**

- Reliable transportation for all programs, whether urban or rural
- Diverse and adequately compensated workforce
- Address the Early Intervention waitlist
- Child care options for children with special needs
- Affordable child care

## **Region 48 Recommendations**

- Transportation funding independent of programmatic funding
- Diversify the ECEC workforce and provide adequate compensation
- Utilize alternative options to ease the Early Intervention waitlist
- Increase the availability of inclusive child care for children with special needs
- Expand eligibility criteria for the Child Care Assistance Program

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

**Kari Clark (she/her)**

Phone Number: (309) 393-2543

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

Web: [www.birthtofiveil.com/region48](http://www.birthtofiveil.com/region48)



# REGION 48 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.



**15,010**

Children Under  
the Age of 6  
in Region 48



**6,063**

Children 0-5  
at 200% Federal  
Poverty Level



**3,557**

Children 0-5  
Without Publicly  
Funded ECEC Slots

**\$861**

Average monthly cost of full-time child care per child in Peoria County, which is 17% of the median household income for a family with a child under 6

“I gave up my career to stay home. I couldn't find affordable care because of waitlists, and my children having special needs. With 2020, the increase in the delay to get services has put my child behind. It's been detrimental to our family.” - Parent

**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 48 NEEDS**

1. Reliable transportation for all programs, whether urban or rural.
2. Diverse and appropriately compensated workforce.
3. Address the Early Intervention waitlist.
4. Child care options for children with special needs.
5. Affordable child care.

## **REGION 48 RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Transportation funding independent of programmatic funding.
2. Diversify the ECEC workforce and provide adequate compensation.
3. Utilize alternative options to ease the Early Intervention waitlist.
4. Increase the availability of inclusive child care options for children with disabilities.
5. Expand eligibility criteria for the Child Care Assistance Program.



“One of us had to stop working when our baby was born, and then we worked alternate shifts to avoid child care costs.”

- Parent

# 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.

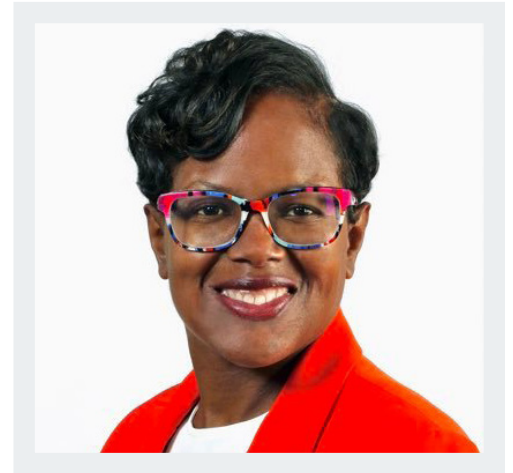
Third, policy makers, elected officials, and state agencies that administer ECEC programs will receive a copy of the report to give them a local view of the ECEC landscape in the areas they serve. The goal is to provide decision-makers with context from a community perspective so they can better understand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

The completion of this Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment for Region 48 would not have been possible without the efforts of many in our community. While numerous community members contributed to this work, we would like to especially thank a few of our partners.

We express our deep and sincere gratitude to our Action Council and Family Council members. They spent many hours away from their jobs or families attending meetings to learn about the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) system, review data, and share feedback and stories. The members' candor regarding the strengths and needs of Region 48 has been invaluable. By participating on the Council and sharing information about Birth to Five Illinois with coworkers, family members, friends, and community stakeholders, they widened our Team's reach across the Region. Their enthusiasm for wanting to make our Region's ECEC system better did not go unnoticed.

We also thank the many community members outside of our Councils who took the time to share their experiences with us. Participants of focus groups, interviews, and surveys provided additional viewpoints we could not capture during our Council meetings. To families that stopped at our table during community events, thank you for being curious about Birth to Five Illinois and engaging in discussion with our Team.

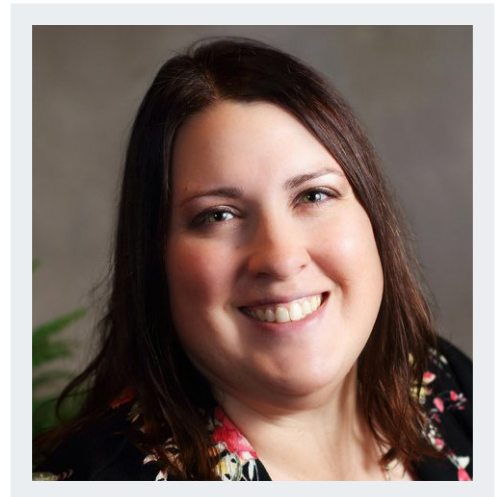
We thank our community partners who listened to us, shared our information, allowed us to set up tables at events, and connected us to other community stakeholders. We were notably able to spread awareness of Birth to Five Illinois because of the Peoria County Regional Office of Education, Peoria County Bright Futures, Child and Family Connections of Central Illinois, Foster Village Peoria, Peoria Public Library, Alpha Park Public Library, and Dunlap Public Library District.

Thank you,

**Kari Clark (she/her)**

Regional Council Manager: Region 48

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.

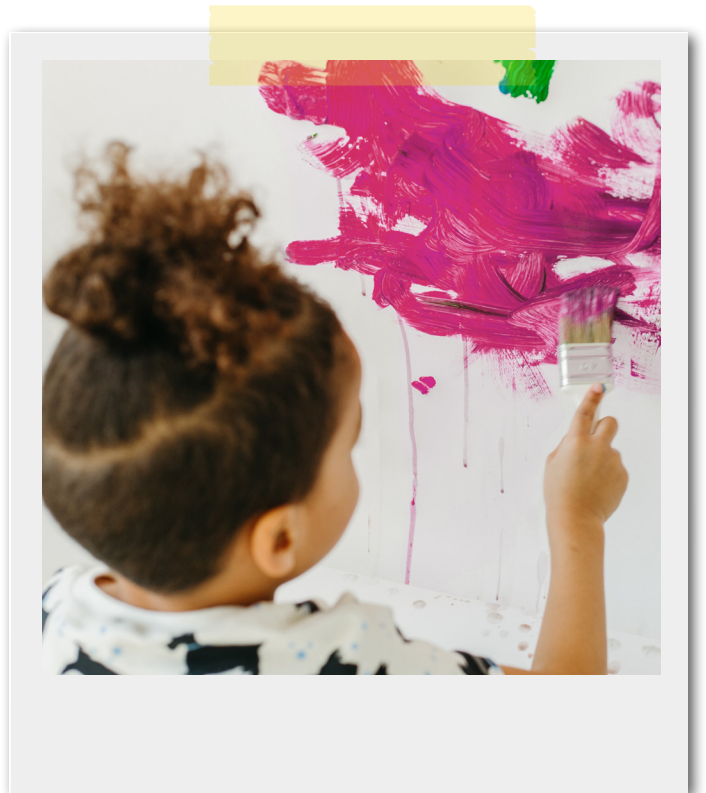
The **mission** of Birth to Five Illinois is to create a statewide regional infrastructure that will amplify input from communities in the development of policies and funding priorities. We support the mobilization of communities to build and sustain equitable access to inclusive, high-quality early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

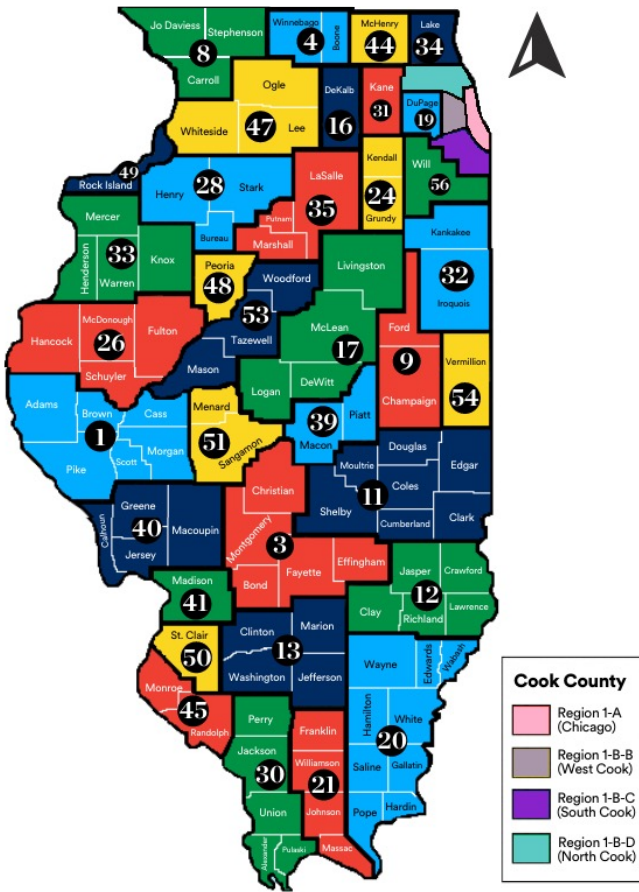


# Timeline

- **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

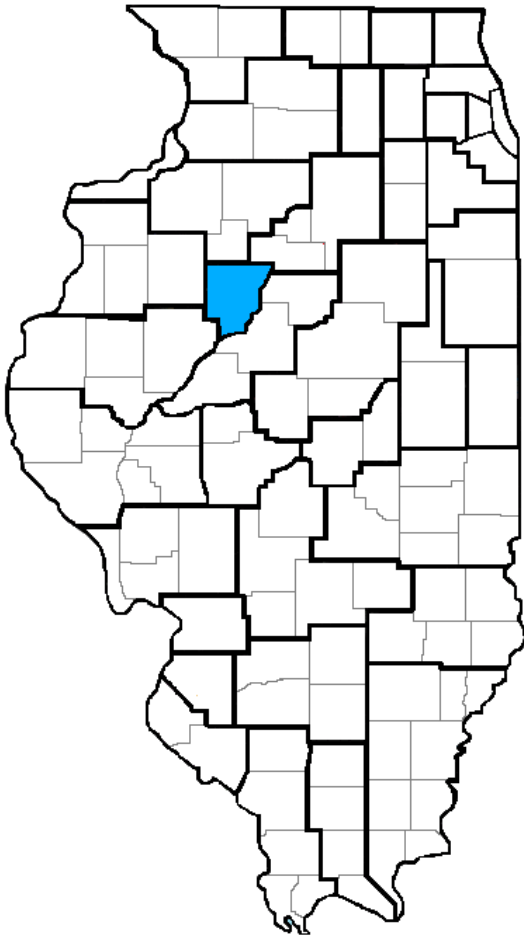
Regionally based demographic, programmatic, and service provider data from IECAM and workforce data from INCCRRA were presented to Action and Family Council members during meetings and is included in the following section. The data comes from both IECAM (2020-2021) and INCCRRA (2021), unless otherwise 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 48



# Regional Community Landscape



## Regional Boundaries

Region 48 encompasses all of Peoria County and is in the northwest central part of Illinois. The Illinois River borders the entire eastern boundary and a portion of the southeastern boundary of the Region. The Region offers river bluff views, flat farm fields, and everything in between. The landscape is comprised of urban, suburban, and rural areas.

Peoria is best known as the former headquarters of Caterpillar, or “Big Yellow”. While the headquarters has moved out of Illinois in recent years, the majority of Caterpillar’s workforce continues to be in Region 48. Peoria is also home to a thriving medical community, offering three major hospitals in the heart of the State. Additionally, Peoria is home to Bradley University, a private, four-year university, and is within reasonable driving distance to multiple two-year, four-year, and trade school institutions.

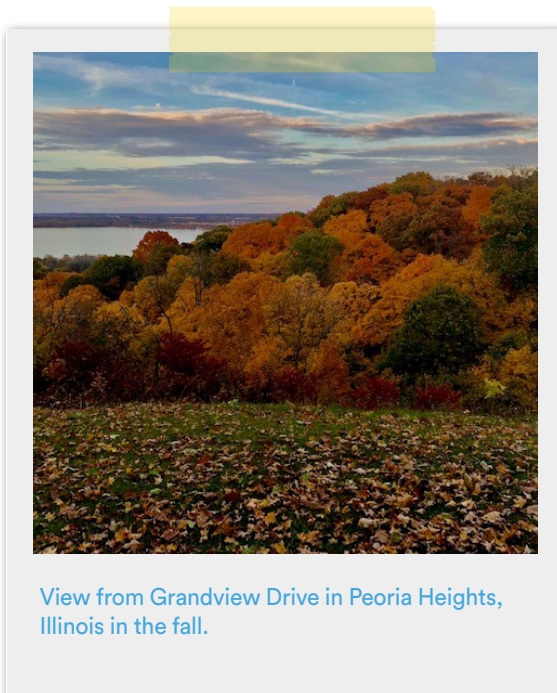
Region 48 offers a multitude of options for recreation, events, and family fun. The Illinois River is a boater’s delight, and hiking trails abound in the area. The Peoria Civic Center draws small and large crowds with concerts, plays, exhibitions, and other events.

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

Region 48 acknowledges this Region is the traditional homelands of the Peoria, O aakiwaki hina ki (Sauk) and Meškwahki-aša-hina (Fox), Bodwewadmi (Potawatomi), Myaamia (Miami), Očeti Šakówiŋ (Sioux), Kaskaskia, and Kiikaapoi (Kickapoo) Peoples. Acknowledging this history reminds us of our important connection to this land where we live, learn, play, and work. We pay respect to the Nations who were forcibly removed from their homelands, the Indigenous individuals and communities who live here now, and the generations to come. We are committed to being better listeners and learners in amplifying Indigenous voices.

## Regional Demographics

Region 48 is home to 185,431 people (2020 Census) represented by 75,321 households. Between 2018 and 2020 there was a decline in the Region’s population by 3,500 community members. This decline represented almost 2% of the total regional population, twice as much as the population decline across the State.



View from Grandview Drive in Peoria Heights, Illinois in the fall.

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

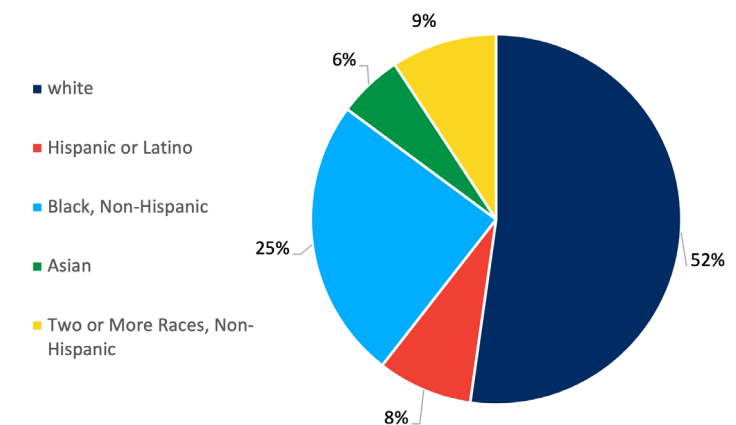
The city of Peoria, the state’s eighth largest city, accounts for 113,150 of the Region’s residents (61% of the Region’s population). There are 15,010 children ages five and under residing in Region 48. This is further characterized by 7,557 children aged birth through age two and 7,453 children aged three to five.

Region 48 represents a racially diverse population. Figure 1 shows Region 48’s racial breakdown for children under the age of five at the time of the 2020 Census. However, the racial diversity within the Region primarily lies within the city of Peoria. Within Peoria, children under the age of five are 37% white, 40% Black or African American, 11% Hispanic or Latine, and small percentages of other races. Alternatively, the racial breakdown of children living within the Region outside the city of Peoria, shows much less racial diversity: 73% white, 11% two or more races, 10% Asian, and small percentages of other races. It’s important to note that Medina Township, the township immediately north of Peoria, has the highest concentration of children under the age of five outside of the city of Peoria. Additionally, about 38% of the children under the age of five in this township are Asian, and almost two-thirds of all Asian children in Region 48 reside here.

Region 48 is home to children that would be identified as being part of a priority population. According to the Illinois Early Learning Council<sup>3</sup>, to be considered a priority population, individuals must meet the criteria of being underserved, measurable, timely, and distinctive.<sup>4</sup> The Early Learning Council identified 12 priority populations. While all are present in Region 48, the Council focused on the following due to time and data constraints:

- Children of underage parents.
- Children experiencing homelessness and unstable housing.
- Children in families living on poverty- or deep poverty-level incomes.
- Children/families with Department of Children and Family Services involvement.
- Children in families that face barriers based on culture, language, and religion.

**Figure 1: Region 48 Racial Breakdown of Children Under Age 5 (2020)<sup>2</sup>**



Source: IECAM  
Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

There is some data on priority populations available, but it is limited or difficult to obtain, leaving an incomplete picture of the most underrepresented and underserved in the Region.

Data on birth rates provide an understanding of the number of children of underage parents. According to the 2020 Peoria County Maternal and Child Health Report, the birth rate in Peoria County for teens aged 15-19 years is higher than the state and national values. The rate is 30.2 births per 1,000 girls, compared to the state rate of 16.7 and the national rate of 15.4.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Some Census categories not included in chart due to small response numbers: Native American, Other

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

<sup>4</sup> <https://oecd.illinois.gov/content/dam/soi/en/web/oecd/documents/priority-populations-recommendation-final-approved.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.pcchd.org/ArchiveCenter/ViewFile/Item/744>

Housing insecurity, as defined by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, is when children lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. Data surrounding children experiencing homelessness and unstable housing is not typically collected in ECEC programs, but data is widely available for children in Kindergarten and beyond. In 2020, the Illinois State Board of Education reported that Region 48 had 47 Kindergartners experiencing homelessness and unstable housing.

The Federal Poverty Level (FPL), also known as the “poverty line”, is a measure of income issued each year by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. These guidelines illustrate a set minimum amount of income that an individual or family needs for food, clothing, transportation, shelter, and other necessities (see Figure 2 for income band examples). FPL is used to determine whether an individual or family qualifies for certain benefits and programs. Of the 15,010 children aged five and under residing in Region 48, over 6,000 are in households living on incomes at or below 200% of the FPL. Furthermore, 58% of those 6,000 children’s families are living on incomes at or below 100% of the FPL. Most families at the deepest level of poverty-rate income in the Region live in Peoria. However, areas of poverty exist across the rural northern, western, and southern areas of the Region.

**Figure 2: Federal Poverty Levels (FPL) for a Family of Four (2020)**

	50% FPL	100% FPL	150% 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

Children and families with Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) involvement are those receiving intact family services or where the child is placed outside the home with kin, in a non-kin foster home, group home, or other types of substitute care. According to the Children and Family Research Center, there were 389 children ages 0-5 that had DCFS involvement at the end of 2021.<sup>6</sup> According to Illinois Early Childhood Asset Map (IECAM) data, 793 children were living in a grandparent-led household that same year. Some children living in a grandparent-led household may have DCFS involvement, leading to some duplication with this data. However, it is highly likely other children living in a grandparent-led household do not have DCFS involvement.

According to IECAM, the Region has 718 households that speak languages besides English, including 160 Spanish-speaking households and 558 households that speak other languages. The number of Spanish-speaking households dropped by almost 50% between 2019 and 2020 without a legitimate explanation, prompting the community to question the cause. It is speculated that this sharp decrease may have been attributed to COVID-related business closures or restrictions. However, seeing the number of households that speak other languages remained steady, or even increase slightly, over the last three years was not surprising, considering many ECEC programs reported they are often providing services to new families from this population.



Three babies playing together.

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.cfric.illinois.edu/data-center-tables.php?met=nos\\_endofyear\\_placement&areatype=geo\\_cty&area=peoria](https://www.cfric.illinois.edu/data-center-tables.php?met=nos_endofyear_placement&areatype=geo_cty&area=peoria)

Access to ECEC programs is essential for parental workforce participation. According to IECAM, over 5,000 children under the age of six have two employed parents/caregivers in the home. Additionally, over 4,700 children reside in a single-income household. However, no data indicates how many two-parent households have one nonworking parent because of the family's choice to keep one parent home with the child(ren), or if it is not financially feasible for both parents to work due to the cost of care.

It is important to understand the demographic landscape of our Region to appropriately respond to the need for services. We must utilize this information to be responsive, sensitive, and unbiased in our recommendations. Exploring demographics allows us to determine where children live within the Region, and their race, family income levels, and language. This information will help shape the recommendations for new or expanded services in the areas of the Region that need them the most.

Additionally, 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.

## Local Community Collaborations

Region 48 has many community groups working together to provide resources and services to people that need them; Local Early Childhood Community Collaborations are no exception. Collaborations bring together local partners and stakeholders who represent people, programs, and services that touch the lives of young children and their families. They work together to address challenges and provide support to families as they prepare their children for entry into the school system and beyond.

Region 48 is home to one independent collaboration, the Early Childhood Forum. This collaboration has been in existence since 1998. In addition to serving Peoria County, it covers neighboring Tazewell and Woodford Counties (Birth to Five Illinois: Region 53). The Collaboration meets monthly and discusses various topics such as funding, professional development, and outreach. The Early Childhood Forum includes members across several sectors, with representatives from child care programs, Preschool for All, Head Start, home visiting, Regional Offices of Education (ROEs), school districts, higher education, the local Child Care Resource and Referral Agency, health departments, social service agencies, park districts, and business representatives.

The Early Childhood Forum received an Implementation Grant from Birth to Five Illinois in 2022. With these funds, the Forum has established a new position for an Early Childhood Navigator tasked with establishing a centralized access point for the ECEC programs and services available in our community. Parents and caregivers will be able to connect with the Early Childhood Navigator for developmental screenings and assistance in understanding available ECEC services, helping them identify the program most closely aligned to their family's needs.



A child in a blue ballerina outfit sitting on a wooden table.

In addition to the Early Childhood Forum, Peoria County is included in the Tri-County All Our Kids Early Childhood (AOK) Network, along with Woodford and Tazewell Counties. Unlike other local collaborations, AOK Networks are state funded by the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS). Peoria and Woodford Counties are recent additions to the Tri-County AOK Network, which was formerly known as the Tazewell County AOK Network. AOK Networks are community-based collaborations that engage local agencies and stakeholders who care about the health and well-being of young children and their families. The Tri-County AOK Network is also a site for the Integrated Referral and Intake System (IRIS), a web-based community referral

system that helps organizations connect the families they serve to the right resources in their community. Since its pilot in the area, IRIS has grown to more than 50 partners across multiple sectors to support and connect families to resources.

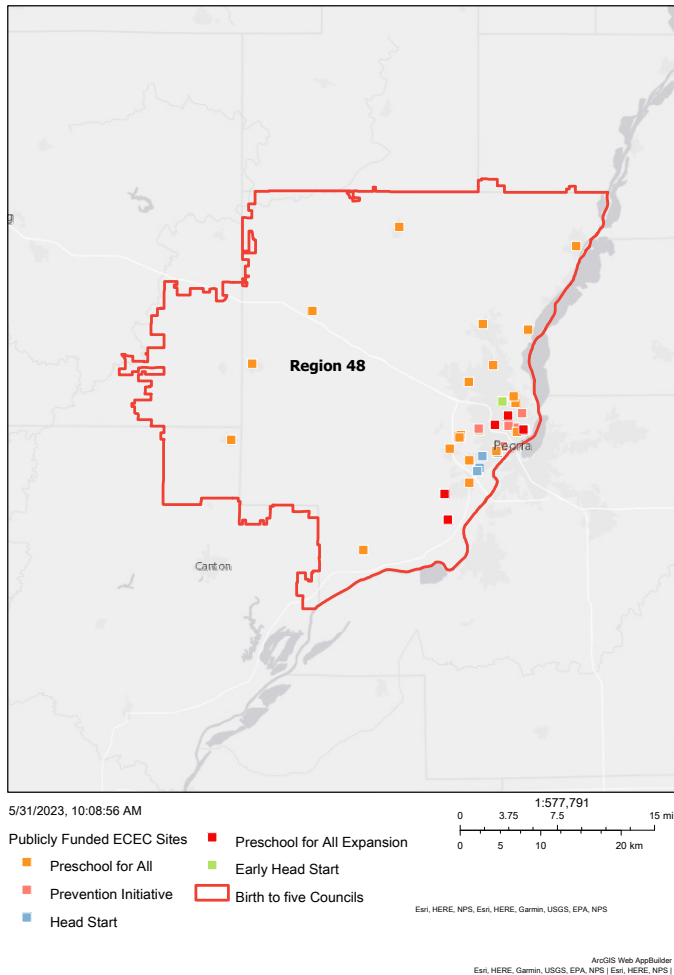
There are many other like-minded groups meeting to share resources across the community. Many of the agencies represented in these groups provide supports that are accessible and responsive to family needs. While they may not be recognized as Early Childhood community collaborations, their work benefits families that have young children.

# Early Childhood Education & Care (ECEC) Programs

Region 48 offers multiple ECEC programs, including Preschool for All (PFA), Preschool for All Expansion (PFA-E), Head Start, Early Head Start, Prevention Initiative (PI), other home visiting programs, and licensed child care centers and homes. While Region 48 has many options, the programs are more abundant within or close to Peoria compared to what is available to rural families (Figure 3).

“ My kids never experienced these programs due to them being on a waitlist. - Parent ”

**Figure 3: Location of Publicly Funded Programs**



Source: IECAM  
Created by: Illinois Action for Children CS3

## Preschool for All (PFA) & Preschool for All Expansion (PFA-E)

PFA and PFA-E are available to children aged three until they enter Kindergarten. There is no single family experience that is a qualifier for enrollment. However, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) seeks to address two priority groups: children who have been identified as facing barriers for academic success and children whose family’s income is less than four times the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). Programs must administer a research-based developmental screening to determine a child’s developmental status. Additionally, children must meet at least two criteria from a program-created weighted list to determine eligibility and priority.

PFA has more sites throughout Region 48 than any other publicly funded program. Within the city of Peoria, the highest concentration of PFA slots is located at one program site, which provides 320 slots for children living in Peoria. Outside of Peoria, every school district in Region 48 has at least one site, with 15 to 40 slots per site. PFA is also offered in some community-based organizations, such as licensed child care centers. These classrooms are predominantly half-day programs in the Region, though a few full-day programs are offered in some locations.

“ Our school based PFA program made the transition to Kindergarten go more smoothly. - Parent ”

While available in Region 48, PFA-E offers a full-day program but is less prevalent than the half-day PFA programs. PFA-E is available through providers within Peoria and a few densely populated suburban areas outside of Peoria city limits.

## Head Start & Early Head Start

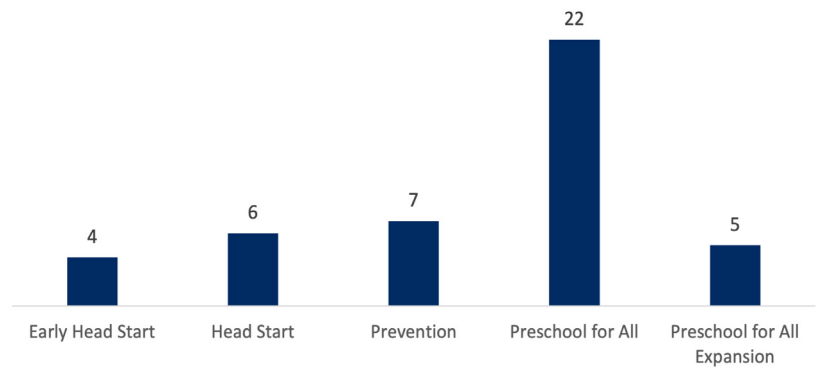
“Head Start did so much for my foster daughter. They provided consistency, friends, social activities, and support. It was a good experience for us.”  
- Foster Parent

Two additional publicly funded programs available within Region 48 are Head Start and Early Head Start. Like PFA and PFA-E, there is no single family experience that is a qualifier for enrollment. However, at least 90% of enrollments in Head Start must be families with income at or below 100% of the FPL. Children experiencing homelessness or families who receive public assistance such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) are automatically eligible. Finally, further priority is determined by a program-created list of weighted criteria.

Head Start is a program option for children from age three to Kindergarten-entry age. Region 48 is home to six Head Start sites (Figure 4) offered in standalone buildings or housed within school district buildings and center-based programs. Four of the sites are located on the southside of Peoria, while the other two are in the central and eastern areas of the city. All Head Start sites in Region 48 offer a full-day program.

Early Head Start is available for pregnant people and children under the age of three. Early Head Start offers comprehensive services, including early education and child development, family development and engagement services, and health and mental health services. Pregnant individuals are offered prenatal and postpartum education and support for physical and emotional well-being. There are four sites located in Region 48 (Figure 4). This program is offered in a center-based setting, family child care setting, or through home visiting services.

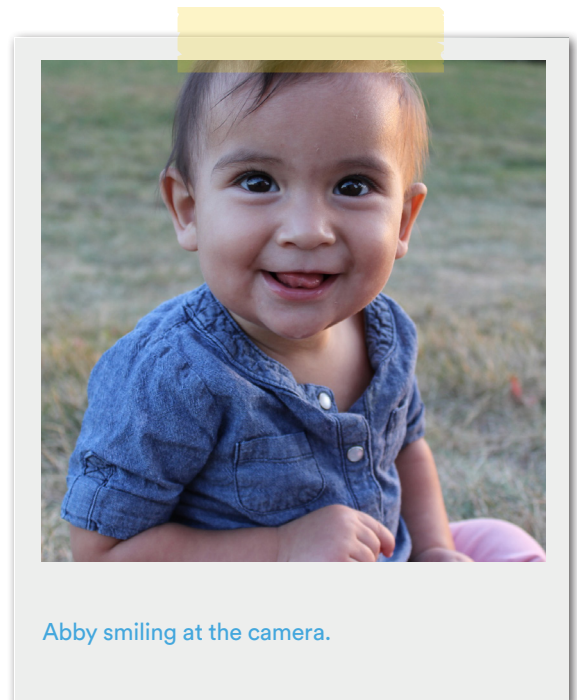
Figure 4: Number of Sites by Publicly Funded Program Type



Source: IECAM  
Created by: Illinois Action for Children CS3

## Prevention Initiative (PI)

Another publicly funded program providing services to the Region’s youngest children is PI. The program provides center-based or home visiting services to pregnant people and families with children birth to age three. Services include child development and education, parent education, and family development and engagement. Much like other publicly funded programs, no single life circumstance qualifies children for enrollment in PI. Programs must administer a research-based developmental screening to determine the developmental status of the child(ren). A program-created list of weighted criteria of family-need indicators and other factors determine eligibility and priority for enrollment. There are seven PI sites in the Region, all based in Peoria (Figure 4). However, home visiting services are provided throughout Peoria County.



Abby smiling at the camera.

## Home Visiting Programs

In addition to PI, Region 48 offers additional home visiting programs. The Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) Division of Early Childhood Home Visiting Program is state-funded and supports pregnant people and caregivers with children birth to age five. Providers can implement one of four program models to deliver home-based services that include completing developmental screenings, teaching positive parenting skills, encouraging early language development and early learning, providing support to families as they work toward goals for their future, and connecting families to other resources within the community. Pregnant people receive support for healthy pregnancy practices and care for newborns and young children.

“

Home visiting meets the families where they are. Transportation isn't a barrier. The home visitor can help during a crisis, can help the families learn about resources, and works with the whole family, not just the child.

- Community Member

”

Eligibility for IDHS Home Visiting is based on the requirements of the program model. Eligible families are prioritized based on income; pregnant individuals younger than age 21; a history of child abuse or neglect or involvement with child welfare services; a history of substance use or needing treatment for a substance use disorder; use of tobacco products in the home; parents or children with low student achievement; child(ren) with developmental delay or disability; or families with a member serving or who formerly served in the Armed Forces. Programs can be added to these criteria to further prioritize enrollment.

The final home visiting program found in Region 48 is the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program. This federally funded program was designed to improve the outcomes for pregnant people and families through home-based services. Three of four program models allowed by IDHS Home Visiting are also allowable program models for MIECHV providers. In 2022, Illinois' Division of Early Childhood announced it was consolidating one program model, Healthy Families Illinois, with MIECHV programs, creating one IDHS Home Visiting program supported with both MIECHV and state home visiting funds for Fiscal Year 2023.

## Early Intervention Services

Early Intervention services are available throughout the Region for children who are not meeting standard developmental milestones. Eligibility for Early Intervention starts with an evaluation to determine if a child has a delay or disability, and if confirmed, an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) is developed and services (such as physical, occupational, or speech therapies) are coordinated. Children must be younger than three years old to be evaluated and to qualify for services. For families at or below 185% FPL, services are provided at no cost; families above 185% FPL pay a fee on a sliding scale for services. Services are typically provided in a child's natural environment, such as their home or child care center.

“

Addressing delays before entering school saves money in the long term for school districts.

- Parent

”

“

Service providers with EI were phenomenal. They were highly knowledgeable, kind, understanding, and they were able to provide resources and alternative options.

- Parent

”



## Early Childhood Special Education

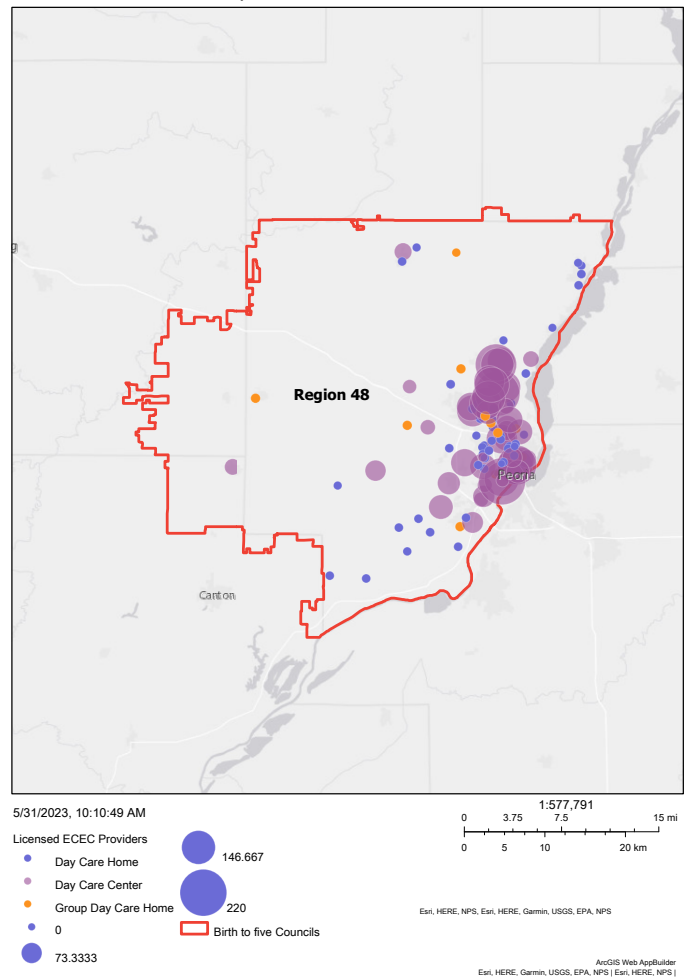
Children aged three to five who qualify for Early Childhood Special Education services receive specialized educational and therapy services through their local school district or a special education cooperative. To qualify, children are assessed and must qualify in one of fourteen categories defined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Early Childhood Special Education services can be delivered in various settings, such as in a special education classroom within the school district or in a community-based program. Not all children who qualify and receive services through Early Intervention need to transition to special education services when they turn three.

## Privately Funded Programs

Region 48 has a variety of options for privately funded programs, which are typically tuition-based. Many privately funded programs also accept families who qualify for the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), an IDHS program that subsidizes the cost of child care. Families whose incomes are at or below 225% FPL are eligible for CCAP.

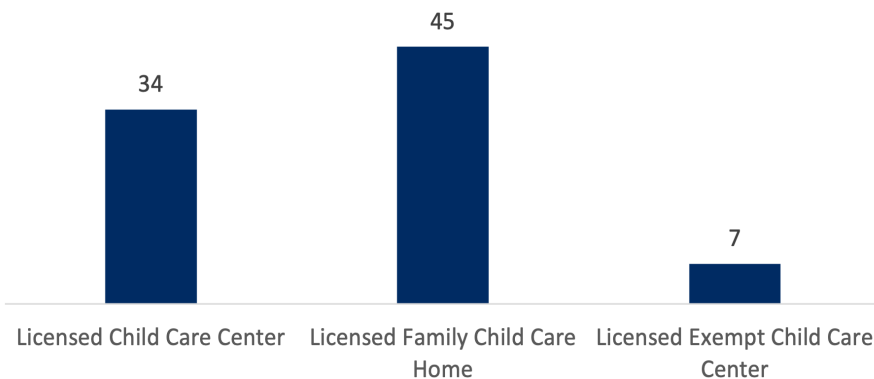
Licensed child care centers offer care for children outside of a home setting. Children are usually grouped by age, and centers must follow staff-to-child ratios and maximum group sizes set forth by DCFS. Region 48 has 34 licensed child care centers (Figure 6). Most centers are in or near Peoria (Figure 5). Currently, no licensed centers offer second shift, third shift, or weekend care. Families have indicated this is desirable and would meet the needs of more families.

Figure 5: Location of Licensed ECEC Providers



Source: IECAM  
Created by: Illinois Action for Children CS3

Figure 6: Child Care Site by License Type



Source: IECAM  
Created by: Illinois Action for Children CS3

“ I worked retail previously and it was difficult to find child care. My work schedule was inconsistent, while child cares had set daytime hours. There were not any options available for evening and weekend care. - Parent ”

Licensed family child care homes and group family child care homes are more prevalent, with 45 sites in Region 48 (Figure 6). While many providers are concentrated in Peoria, more home-based providers are available in rural areas than are centers. This type of care is suitable for families who want their child in a home-like setting or are seeking care outside of traditional work hours. Some providers offer evening and weekend care to accommodate family needs. Licensed family child care homes can typically care for up to eight children of blended ages, or up to 12 children with an assistant. Licensed group family child care home providers can care for up to 16 children with an assistant if square footage allows. Other than the maximum number of children allowed, age, education, and experience of the provider is the only difference between a family child care home and a group family child care home.

There are only seven license-exempt child care centers in the Region, all which are housed within a school or church and serve children ages three to five. These programs are not regulated by DCFS for health and safety standards, staff-to-child ratios, or maximum group sizes. However, they must go through a certification process. These types of programs include, but are not limited to:

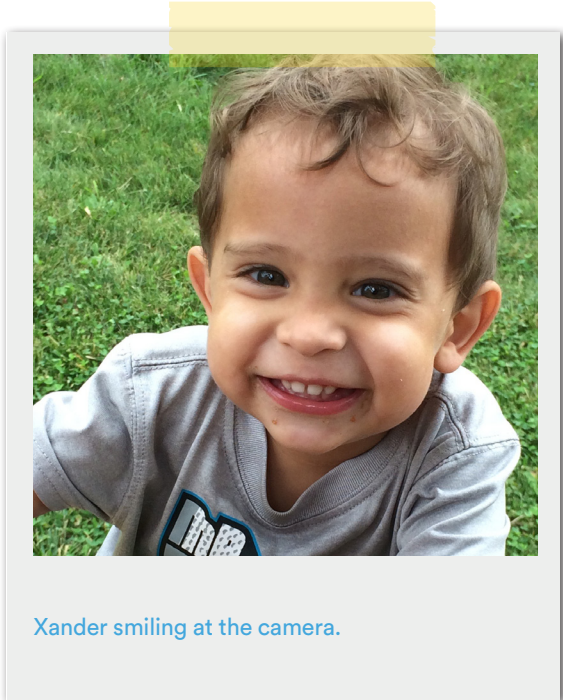
- Programs that serve children three years and older and are operated by public or private elementary or secondary schools, institutions of higher education, or other accredited schools registered with ISBE.
- Programs conducted on federal government premises.
- Programs caring for no individual child more than 10 hours in a seven-day week and are operated by a church or social service agency.
- Programs offering short-term, special activities and are operated by civic, charitable, and governmental organizations.
- Programs temporarily caring for children whose caregivers are on the premises.

License-exempt family child care is also known as Family, Friend, and Neighbor Care and is not regulated by DCFS. Providers may only care for three or fewer children, including their own children, unless all children are from the same family. License-exempt family child care is a common choice for families seeking care outside of traditional work hours, families looking for a less expensive (or free) option, or families who wish to place their children with caregivers their children already know. Data is not available to indicate how many families utilize this type of care in Region 48.

“The programs that were most meaningful and impactful were the ones that developed deep relationships with our kids.”  
- Foster Parent

# Slot Gap

Slot gap is a term used in ECEC to describe the number of children eligible for enrollment in care programs and services, compared to the number of slots available, dependent on the program type. For publicly funded ECEC programs such as Preschool for All and Head Start, slots can be determined by several factors, including funding awarded and space. Alternatively, for privately funded programs such as licensed center-based child cares and licensed family child care homes, slots are determined by the licensing capacities set forth by DCFS. Exploring slot gaps helps determine the need for new or expanded ECEC programs within Region 48.

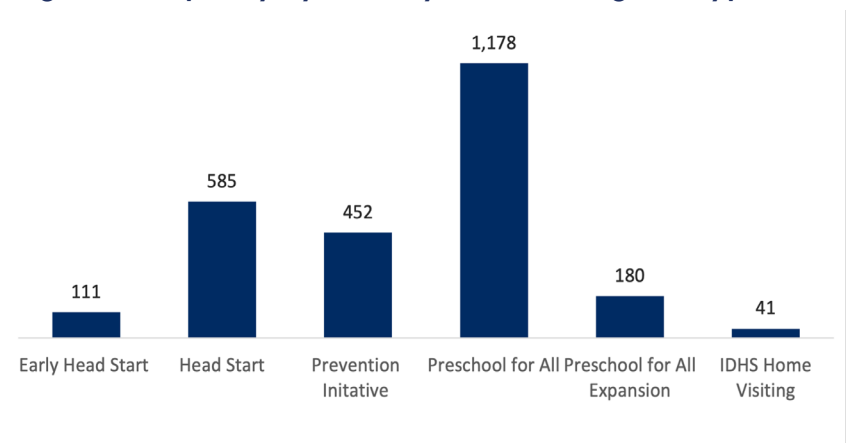


Region 48 is home to 15,010 children under the age of six. If families in the Region needed to rely solely on licensed center-based child care centers, licensed family child care homes, and license-exempt child care centers, there are only slots available for 4,322 children among 86 providers. This leaves 10,688 children without an option for this type of care. There is not comprehensive data to determine the number of slots for children birth to age two and the number of slots for children aged three to five, as this varies from program to program.

Working families who are at or below 225% FPL are eligible for the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), an IDHS program that subsidizes the cost of child care. While Region 48 is home to 86 child care centers and family child care home providers, only 67 will accept families who utilize CCAP. Additionally, it is understood that some of the programs that accept CCAP will only enroll a limited number or percentage of families utilizing CCAP. Although there is not comprehensive data to determine how many programs have this policy and what each program's threshold is, limitations in CCAP slots make it difficult for families with limited resources to access subsidized care.

Other ECEC options in Region 48 include Early Head Start, Head Start, Prevention Initiative, Preschool for All, Preschool for All Expansion, and IDHS Home Visiting. The Early Head Start and Prevention Initiative programs provide services to children birth through age two. There are 3,197 children in this age range that are eligible to receive services and only 563 slots available (Figure 7), leaving 2,634 eligible children without a spot to enroll in one of these two publicly funded programs. Furthermore, all Prevention Initiative programs and some Early Head Start services are home-based services provided through home visiting. While home visiting is an important service for families who need the support, it is not a care option for working families. Families with children under the age of three needing care must depend on child care centers, family child care homes, or family, friend, or neighbor care.

**Figure 7: Capacity by Publicly Funded Program Type**



Source: IECAM  
Created by: Illinois Action for Children CS3

Head Start, Preschool for All, and Preschool for All Expansion offer preschool to children ages three to five. There are 2,866 children in this age range that are eligible to receive services from these programs. There are only 1,943 slots available, leaving 923 eligible children without the ability to enroll in a publicly funded program.

IDHS Home Visiting is another publicly funded program that serves children from birth to five. Region 48 has a capacity of 41 children for this program. However, community stakeholders who provide this service have indicated they are able to offer their program to more than 41 children by utilizing funds from additional sources.

There are many reasons why the slot gap exists in Region 48. Licensed child care centers and family child care homes have service capacities based on their license. Licensed child care centers are costly to operate when taking staffing, building, and insurance costs into consideration, among other expenses. There may not be a desire or sufficient resources to add on to existing buildings or open additional locations, which would increase the number of slots available. Family child care homes are limited to eight or fewer children, depending on the ages of the children enrolled, and hiring an aide will only increase the capacity by a maximum of four children. Many family child care home providers may also find hiring an aide cost prohibitive.

“When my oldest was little, they were put on a waitlist for one year at [the program], so my wife stopped working to stay home and I had to take on a second job in order to survive financially. Think of the domino effect of one parent not working, the other parent taking on a second job, and the quality of life.”

- Community Member

Taking into consideration the overall number of slots available in child care and publicly funded programs combined, 8,141 children in Region 48 do not have access to any kind of ECEC program. There is a lack of data that indicates how many children are staying home with a parent because of parent choice or out of necessity due to, for example, the inability to find a program that has openings, the inability to find a program that meets the family’s needs, or because the family cannot afford enrollment.

There are many barriers families are facing in accessing services in Region 48, even if spots were available. The limited availability of transportation has been a consistent reason families give for not utilizing publicly funded programs. Our Region’s Head Start stopped offering transportation when

their program transitioned from a half-day program to a full-day program for all children enrolled, unless required by a child’s Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or if the child is unhoused. In the rural areas of Region 48, the lack of programs or location of existing programs have also been a barrier. Rural Preschool for All slots are limited to only one or two classrooms housed within the school districts. Not all districts make transportation available to their youngest learners. Early Head Start and Head Start are nonexistent, and licensed child care centers are scarce outside of the city of Peoria. Many rural families seeking licensed care close to home must utilize a family child care home provider.

Finally, staffing shortages have further reduced the number of slots available in the Region. Administrators have reported that they are unable to fill some funded slots or open empty classrooms because they have been unable to find qualified staff, a sentiment that was prevalent among both privately funded and publicly funded programs.

“Families don’t need care in the future, they need care now. They don’t have a year to wait.”

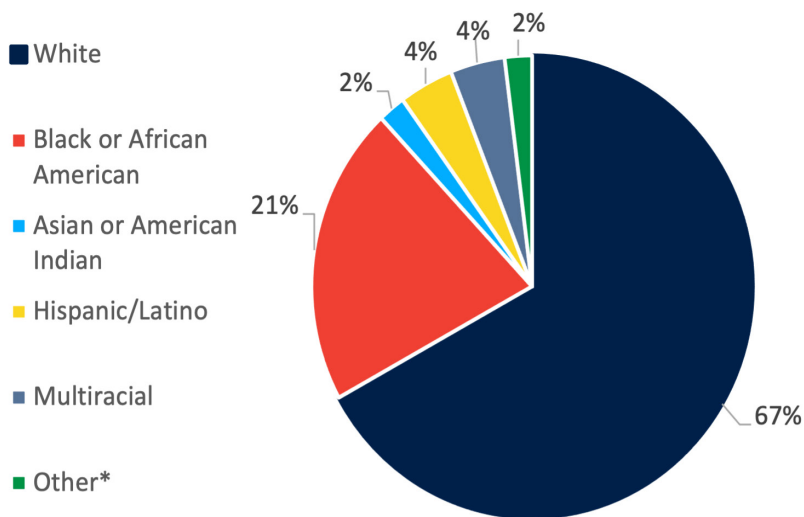
- Community Member

## Early Childhood Education & Care (ECEC) Workforce

The ECEC workforce is comprised of a diverse field of professionals working to support young children’s development. Roles within the ECEC workforce include directors, teachers, aides, assistants, principals, paraprofessionals, substitutes, home visitors, and more. The workforce may work in schools, community-based centers, or in homes. The Governor’s Office of Early Childhood Development states, “A qualified, valued, supported, and well-compensated workforce forms the foundation of high-quality early childhood education and care.”<sup>7</sup>

Region 48 had 1,149 professionals working in licensed child care centers and 75 professionals working in licensed family child care homes at the time data was captured (2021). ECEC has traditionally been a women-dominated field; Region 48 is no exception, with women representing nearly 97% of the licensed center and family child care home workforce. Additionally, the teaching staff in licensed centers are racially diverse and mostly representative of the racial diversity of the children within the Region (Figure 8). In comparison, licensed family child care home providers are 66% white, 33% Black or African American, and 1% two or more races. There is limited data available regarding the workforce demographics for publicly funded programs, license-exempt child care centers, and family, friend, and neighbor care because it is difficult to obtain, leaving an incomplete picture of the entire ECEC workforce in the Region.

**Figure 8: Race/Ethnicity of Licensed Center Teaching Staff<sup>8</sup>**



Source: IECAM  
Created by: Illinois Action for Children CS3

The ECEC workforce should be qualified and well-trained to teach the Region’s youngest learners. According to Gateways to Opportunity, a statewide professional development support system administered through the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (INCCRRA), nearly 49% of directors of licensed centers in the Region hold a bachelor’s degree or higher. Additionally, the highest level of education for about 40% of the teaching staff in licensed centers is an associate degree or higher, while 42% hold a high school diploma or GED. Just over half of licensed family child care providers have a high school diploma or GED for their highest level of education.

ECEC providers reported low wages and lack of benefits have been a barrier for attracting and retaining workers in licensed child care programs. Wages do not typically correspond to the level of education held and are often at or just above the minimum wage. According to the 2021 Illinois Salary and Staffing Survey, the median yearly wage for a child care occupation in Peoria County was \$26,000.<sup>9</sup> While director-level staff likely earn more, assistant teachers likely earn much less. The median household income in Peoria County in 2021 was \$58,426, more than twice the median wage for child care workers.

<sup>7</sup> <https://oecd.illinois.gov/workforce.html>

<sup>8</sup> Other\* includes those who self-identify as Native American, Pacific Islander or Alaska Native, or Other

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=143721>

Families in the Region have reported many strengths regarding the workforce in the programs they have utilized. They describe staff as experienced, attentive, good communicators, invested, able to meet children where they are, and helpful in connecting families with resources. However, families are aware of how critically the workforce shortage is affecting ECEC programs. Families believe staff are leaving the ECEC field due to lack of pay, lack of support, burnout, and more responsibilities without additional pay. Qualitative data collected by the workforce parallels this belief.

“ There isn’t enough help. It doesn’t matter how qualified you are if there aren’t enough staff. Staff are experiencing burnout.  
- Parent ”

Many statewide resources exist to help members of the ECEC workforce further their education. The newest program is the Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity (ECACE), which is an agreement between all public universities and community colleges, as well as private institutions that choose to participate, to cooperate to improve access to associates, bachelor’s, and master’s degrees and certificates, Gateways credentials, and other licensure endorsements. The goal is to advance racial equity and upskill the ECEC workforce, which is further supported by offering a scholarship program for undergraduate and graduate

study at ECACE member institutions, covering the total cost of attendance for an academic year if attending a community college or public university. A portion of the cost is awarded if attending a participating non-profit private institution. Recipients are expected to continue or return to teaching or direct service in the ECEC field in Illinois once they complete their program. Local higher education institutions have not reported a significant increase in enrollments for ECEC classes since ECACE became available.

The Gateways Scholarship Program available through INCCRRA is another option for eligible professionals working in licensed child care programs or family child care homes. This scholarship will pay a portion of tuition to earn college credit, credentials, or degrees in Early Childhood Education or Child Development. After completion, recipients are expected to commit to working another six months to a year, dependent on the scholarship type, in a licensed program or a Preschool for All program.

Great START (Strategy to Attract and Retain Teachers) is a wage supplement program that provides a supplemental check every six months to eligible ECEC professionals. It acknowledges licensed child care program staff and family child care home providers who have completed education coursework beyond DCFS licensing standards, and for remaining at their current place of employment. Amounts vary depending on education levels, and recipients must apply every six months to remain eligible.

“ The intrinsic value is wonderful, but you can’t pay the rent with good feelings. We need to put money into workers’ pockets.  
- Community Member ”

“ Poor pay, poor benefits: there’s a lack of investment in such an important field.  
- Parent ”

## Parent/Family/Caregiver Voice

Families have reported difficulties in accessing ECEC for a myriad of reasons. As defined by the Illinois Commission on Equitable Early Childhood Education and Care Funding, “Equitable access means high-quality ECEC is affordable, accessible, available, accommodating, and accepting of all who need it.”<sup>10</sup> While not every family desires to utilize ECEC programs and services, there are many families who want or need them but face barriers to access.

Lack of awareness of programs available in Region 48 was the most common reason shared by families who reported access barriers, especially in the rural areas of Region 48 where both publicly and privately funded programs are sparse. This challenge is also prevalent among foster parents who did not have experience navigating the ECEC system in the Region. Families who utilized the internet to research options had difficulty deciding where to start and then understanding what each program had to offer and how to access it. The program that families most often reported they were unaware existed within the Region was home visiting. In 2019, Erikson Institute reported that only 10% of eligible children ages five and under were enrolled in a home visiting program.<sup>11</sup>

Families indicated they were often met with long waitlists or availability for only one child when they needed care for more children, which led to difficult decisions. Many families were unable to enroll their children in their first or second choice program and had to choose a program based on availability, even though quality was of higher importance to them. Furthermore, the distance traveled to get to their provider was greater than preferred because programs closer to home or work had waitlists. Some families chose to keep one caregiver at home or work opposite shifts, so they did not have to depend on care elsewhere. When families do not have options for care but must work, they may make the difficult decision to leave their children with less qualified caretakers or leave children at home alone despite their age.

Early Intervention waitlists were another significant struggle for families whose children qualify for those services. Families are reporting a wait of six to eighteen months, depending on the therapy needed, and many have had children age out of Early Intervention before services began. One caregiver stated, “There’s important development happening at this age, and it is a problem for children to be on a waitlist.” However, a shortage of Early Intervention providers in the Region has made the waitlist unavoidable.

Transportation has been a barrier for accessing care for some families. While a public bus service is available within the city of Peoria, it is not available in the rural areas of the Region. Furthermore, families reported that the bus times often do not fit their work schedule and the hours of operation for child care programs.



Two toddlers embracing while looking away from the camera.

<sup>10</sup> <https://oecd.illinois.gov/content/dam/soi/en/web/oecd/documents/early-childhood-funding-commission-full-report.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.erikson.edu/applied-research/policy-leadership/early-childhood-data-reports/risk-reach-reports/>

“The bus was my biggest issue. I had to catch the bus and then pay a fee [at the child care center] if I was late to pick up my kids.”  
-Caregiver

Transportation offered by programs varies within the Region. Head Start no longer offers transportation. A caregiver shared that they wish they could utilize Head Start for their child but since their work schedule does not coincide with the hours of the program and no transportation is provided, it is easier for them to have a family member provide care. While their family members try to teach the child what they can, they understand it is not everything the child would learn in an ECEC program. For the Region’s Preschool for All and Preschool for All Expansion programs, some provide transportation, while others do not.

For families who work traditional workday hours, utilizing publicly funded programs may not be an option that meets their needs. Since these programs are only half day programs or full day programs that follow a school schedule, and do not continue through the summer, it is not always feasible for families who are not able to establish wraparound care for the remainder of the day or year. Many families with two incomes reported it was easier to use privately funded care to meet their needs if they could afford to.

Affordability was another reported barrier to accessing ECEC programs, mostly for families who did not qualify for publicly funded programs. According to Child Care Aware of America, the average monthly price of full-time child care for one child in Peoria County is \$861<sup>12</sup> which accounts for 17% of the median household income for a family with a child under the age of six in the Region and is 2% higher than the state average of 15%. Some two-caregiver families reported they had a desire for both caregivers to be able to work, but with the cost of private child care, it was not feasible. A few caregivers reported they were utilizing the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), but a small raise put them over the income cap, and they lost eligibility. Unfortunately, caregivers reported they turned down raises to keep CCAP eligibility, as losing the assistance would have been cost-prohibitive.

“There’s no grace period and [families] can’t transition. A raise doesn’t mean they no longer need assistance. There’s no way for a family to prepare for that change in expenses.”  
-ECEC Provider

Finally, families who have children entitled to learning accommodations indicated there is a lack of available options for private child care for their children. When inquiring about enrollment, they were often told the center did not have the additional staffing necessary to meet the diverse needs of the child. One caregiver reported they found care, but then had to change programs because the first program was not equipped to address their child’s needs. Families with children needing accommodations desire to find options that fit their needs as much as any other family. A foster parent said, “We don’t need to make parenting any more difficult than it already is.”

“I gave up my career to stay home because I couldn’t find affordable care, waitlists, and my children having special needs. With 2020, the increase in the delay to get services has put my child behind. It’s been detrimental to our family.”  
-Parent

<sup>12</sup><https://www.childcareaware.org/catalyzing-growth-using-data-to-change-child-care/>



## Regional Strengths & Needs

Assessing what our community does well and where there are areas for improvement is essential for building on existing strengths, while providing opportunities for growth.

### Strengths

- Public transportation is available in the Peoria area.
- Publicly funded programs are available in our Region.
- The Family Connects program is available in Peoria County.
- The Region has highly knowledgeable Early Intervention service providers.
- Early Childhood Collaborations are present and strong in the Region.
- The Early Childhood Navigator, a newly created position within an independent Collaboration, will be a central source of information and can connect families with developmental screenings, programs, and services.
- Developmental screening kits will be provided to child care providers in the Region.

### Needs

- Reliable transportation for all programs, whether urban or rural.
- Diverse and appropriately compensated workforce.
- Address the Early Intervention waitlist.
- Child care options for children with special needs.
- Affordable child care.
- A central data management system for all programs/providers serving children birth through age five.
- Adequate funding for programs and services.
- Progressive ECEC funding to keep up with increasing expenses.
- Increased awareness of ECEC services and programs among healthcare professionals and child care providers.

## Recommendations

It is evident that our current system and approaches must adapt to meet the evolving needs of families. While Region 48's Action Council and Family Council considered many recommendations, they prioritized what they felt are the most urgent in providing equitable access to high quality ECEC programs and services.

- Provide transportation funding independent of programmatic funding to ensure programs do not need to choose between funding transportation and funding services to children and families.
- Diversify the ECEC workforce and provide adequate compensation.
  - Add ECEC certificate/degree to the Workforce Equity Initiative (WEI) program at the local community college.
  - Implement paid apprenticeships for ECEC programs of study in lieu of a bachelor's degree for non-licensure tracks.
  - Encourage local high schools to provide a career or technical education program leading into a variety of ECEC careers.
  - Support Raising Illinois' initiatives around appropriate compensation for ECEC fields.
- Utilize alternative options to ease the Early Intervention (EI) waitlist.
  - EI should refer families through IRIS to Coordinated Intake to be connected to home visiting services so they can receive support while on the waitlist.
  - While a child is on the waitlist, suggested activities and resources should be provided to the family and child care provider based on the developmental needs requiring EI services.
  - Implement apprenticeship programs for EI providers. Apprentices would provide therapies under the supervision of a provider with an advanced degree.
  - Expand the use of therapy assistants to provide therapy to children birth to age three under the supervision of a provider with an advanced degree.
- Increase the availability of inclusive child care for children with special needs.
  - Raise awareness of child care programs that provide an inclusive environment for children with special education needs.
  - Coordinate specialized training opportunities for child care staff based on the population served.
  - Provide incentives to child care programs that provide an inclusive environment for children with special education needs.
  - Provide incentives to staff who take Early Childhood Special Education courses.
  - Require Early Childhood Special Education courses at the associate level.
- Expand eligibility criteria for the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) to increase access to affordable child care.
  - CCAP should provide a sliding scale for program tuition based on household income and family size with no cap.
  - CCAP should provide a graduated increase in tuition costs over an extended period when household income increases or family structure changes.
  - Incentivize CCAP participation for licensed child care centers and family child care homes.

- Provide a comprehensive centralized data management system to aggregate data collected at the program level.
  - Expand the use of IRIS beyond the referral process to track family access and utilization of services.
  - Use Help Me Grow as a centralized access point for families to request developmental screenings and services; track access and utilization of services.
  - Connect ISBE’s Student Information System (SIS) platform for K-12 schools to other statewide systems.
- Examine the funding needs of existing programs and services before directing funds to new programs and initiatives.
- ISBE should provide progressive funding for multi-year grants.
  - A minimum of 3% increased funding to cover compensation increases, staff benefit cost increases, cost of living adjustments, and increased operational expenses.
- Provide updated information about services available in the Region to healthcare professionals and child care providers to improve their ability to serve as a resource for families and engage them in the referral process.
  - Train healthcare professionals and child care providers on IRIS so they can make referrals to other available services.
  - Strengthen our Region’s collaborative reach to healthcare professionals and child care providers.
  - Utilize Help Me Grow as a comprehensive source of up-to-date information and connection to services for families with young children.

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

# Appendices

## Appendix A: Citations

1. Child Care Aware of America. (2020). Illinois CCDC. Site name: <https://www.childcareaware.org/our-issues/research/ccdc/state/il/>
2. Children and Family Research Center. (2021). End of the year placement types. University of Illinois School of Social Work Children and Family Research Center. Site name: [https://www.cfric.illinois.edu/data-center-tables.php?met=nos\\_endofyear\\_placement&areatype=geo\\_cty&area=peoria](https://www.cfric.illinois.edu/data-center-tables.php?met=nos_endofyear_placement&areatype=geo_cty&area=peoria)
3. Erikson Institute. (2019). Risk and reach 2019 data: Peoria County. Illinois Risk and Reach Report. Site name: <https://riskandreach.erikson.edu/county-profiles/#county>
4. Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development. (2023). Illinois' early childhood education and care (ECEC) workforce. Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development. Site name: <https://oecd.illinois.gov/workforce.html>
5. Illinois Commission on Equitable Early Childhood Education and Care Funding. (2021). Commission report of findings and recommendations: Spring 2021. Site name: <https://oecd.illinois.gov/content/dam/soi/en/web/oecd/documents/early-childhood-funding-commission-full-report.pdf>
6. Illinois Early Childhood Asset Map. (2023). Report creation page. Site name: <https://iecamregionalreports.education.illinois.edu/dash-snapshot-report/landing>
7. Illinois Early Learning Council Access Committee. (2019). Approved priority populations recommendation. Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development. Site name: <https://oecd.illinois.gov/content/dam/soi/en/web/oecd/documents/priority-populations-recommendation-final-approved.pdf>
8. Illinois Network of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies. (2022). Child care salary profiles. Site name: [https://www.inccrra.org/images/SDA\\_Profiles/DR4522-SDA-8.pdf](https://www.inccrra.org/images/SDA_Profiles/DR4522-SDA-8.pdf)
9. Native Land Digital (2023). Report creation page. Site Name: <http://native-land.ca>
10. Peoria City/County Health Department. (2020). Peoria County maternal and child health report. Peoria City/County Health Department. Site name: <https://www.pcchd.org/ArchiveCenter/ViewFile/Item/744>
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: Focus Group and Interview Questions

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

### Parents, Families, and Caregivers

1. There are many Early Childhood services available in our Region. What Early Childhood services does your family use/has your family used?
2. What does quality or good care look like to you?
3. How have you found out about Early Childhood programs or services, or found care for your child(ren)?
4. 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.
5. What, if anything, has been particularly helpful in making Early Childhood Education and Care work for your family?
6. What barriers or challenges has your family had with using Early Childhood services in your community?
7. Have any of the children in your care been referred to services? What was that process like?
8. What services don't currently exist in your community that you think would help families, in general? What services would help parent/caregivers, specifically?
9. 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 does your current program do well?
2. What are some challenges your program currently faces?
3. Have you considered leaving Early Childhood Education?
4. What challenges do you think families have in accessing Early Childhood Education and Care programs and services?
5. What programs do you know of in the Region that serve children birth through age five and their families?
6. 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?
7. 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?
8. Is childcare readily available and close to employers in your community?
9. What accommodations has your business or company made for professionals with young children? How have these accommodations impacted your business or company?
10. 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?

## Appendix C: Additional Resources

Below are additional data resources that community members may find valuable.

1. Partner Plan Act, Illinois Program Inventory Quick Reference Guide: [https://higherlogicdownload.s3.amazonaws.com/ACTFORCHILDREN/35e7dc4d-525c-45bc-ba2c-48e6466050e3/UploadedImages/Documents/0-5\\_Illinois\\_Program\\_Inventory\\_Quick\\_Reference\\_Guide\\_9\\_7\\_22.pdf](https://higherlogicdownload.s3.amazonaws.com/ACTFORCHILDREN/35e7dc4d-525c-45bc-ba2c-48e6466050e3/UploadedImages/Documents/0-5_Illinois_Program_Inventory_Quick_Reference_Guide_9_7_22.pdf)

## 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, Debi Legaspi; page 18, photo from iStock; page 20, Andrea Piacquadio on Pexels; page 22, Birth to Five Illinois Region 48 Team; page 26, Birth to Five Illinois Region 48 Team; page 30, Nina Hill on Unsplash.



Illinois  
State Board of  
Education

