



# Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment

**Region 54**  
(Vermilion County)





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## Region 54 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.

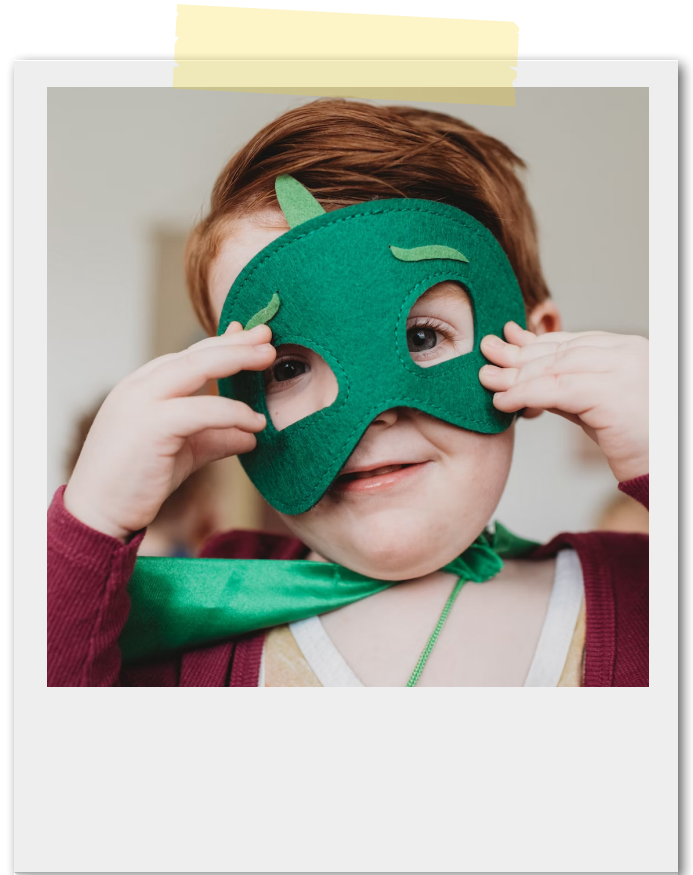
An Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment was created to present publicly available quantitative data and qualitative data from caregivers, ECEC professionals, and other community stakeholders collected through Action Council and Family Council meetings, focus groups, interviews, community meetings, 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 54 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

There are 5,622 children from birth to five years old living in Region 54, yet there are only enough ECEC spots available for 23% of the population. This is a huge gap for children in the Region not being able to access ECEC programs. Families in the community also need more affordable child care options.

While most of the ECEC programs in the Region provide transportation, there are a few publicly funded programs that do not provide this service. Not only does this create an issue for caregivers who rely on transportation for their child to attend, but also for families in rural areas who need transportation to and from publicly funded programs.

The ECEC workforce is not adequately staffed in Region 54. Not only does this limit the number of children able to be served but this also leaves members of the ECEC workforce overworked and underpaid. When burnout occurs among the staff, the quality of care they provide is affected.



## Region 54 Needs

- Program Affordability- More affordable childcare options throughout the region, including in rural communities.
- Program Availability & Accessibility- Greater numbers of programs that offer full-day preschool and Head Start services. More high-quality and accessible child care options throughout Region 54, including programs that offer around-the-clock care. Public transportation options and schedules that correspond to ECEC program locations.
- Program Awareness- A centralized resource and information hub that links families, children, and providers with available programs and services.
- Support for ECEC Workforce- A region-wide effort to boost the number of aspiring ECEC professionals enrolled in preparation and credentialing programs. An ECEC workforce that is prepared, qualified, and fairly compensated.

## Region 54 Recommendations

- Expand ECEC funding and subsidies so more families can access programs and services.
- Increase the number of ECEC providers and slots.
- Improve access to ECEC programs and services.
- Develop an ECEC information hub to build awareness of existing programs and services.
- Grow the ECEC workforce, increase wages, and improve benefits.

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

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# REGION 54 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.



**5,622**

Children Under  
the Age of 6  
in Region 54



**3,489**

Children 0-5  
at 200% Federal  
Poverty Level



**1,647**

Children 0-5  
Without Publicly  
Funded ECEC Slots

**86%**

Percentage of children and families that are eligible for the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) but are not receiving assistance.

“The love for the children by the parent or caregiver will bring the children to the programs, it’s the lack of knowledge about the programs that are stopping the children from getting the opportunity.”

- Community Member

**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 54 NEEDS**

1. More information regarding child care options and easier access to affordable child care
2. More high-quality, full-day, and overnight child care options
3. More ECEC professions with access to increased learning, development opportunities, and higher wages

## **REGION 54 RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Expand ECEC funding and subsidies so more families can access programs and services
2. Increase the number of ECEC providers and slots
3. Improve access to ECEC programs and services
4. Develop an ECEC information hub to build awareness of existing programs and services
5. Increase wages and improve benefits for ECEC professionals



**“If the ultimate goal is to place more children in programs appropriate for them and their families, we need to understand why there is such a large gap between available services and the children who need them.”**

**- 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.

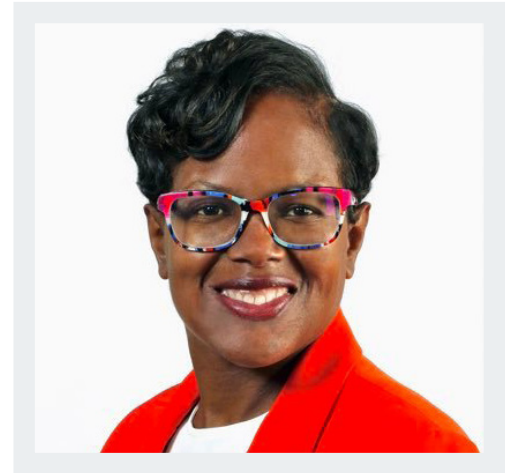
Third, policy makers, elected officials, and state agencies that administer ECEC programs will receive a copy of the report to give them a local view of the ECEC landscape in the areas they serve. The goal is to provide decision-makers with context from a community perspective so they can better understand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

Region 54 would like to thank everyone on our Action and Family Councils for all their hard work and time they committed to completing this Regional Needs Assessment. We want to thank every member who has shared their lived experiences and professional stories with us. Without these wonderful people, this Regional Needs Assessment would not have been possible. Each story has impacted our Regional Team and has provided invaluable information and insight into strengths and needs of the Region from the community's perspective.

Many thanks go out to the people in our community who participated in our focus groups and individual interviews. We have been welcomed to join new groups and organizations of people who want to make our community the best place to raise young children. It has been wonderful to see how much the community supports us in trying to make a difference in our Region.

We appreciate the many organizations in the county that have supported us, including iGrow, Vermilion Advantage, United Way, our CCR&R, local schools and libraries, East Central Community Action Agency, and Vermilion Housing Authorities. We are grateful to the Early Childhood Education and Care providers who shared their knowledge and perspective with us, and to the State Representatives who have contributed to this process. Finally, we thank the Birth to Five State Team for their guidance, sharing of information, and all the positive encouragement in completing this Regional Needs Assessment.

Thank you,

**Tammy Pollitt (she/her)**

Regional Council Manager: Region 54  
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.

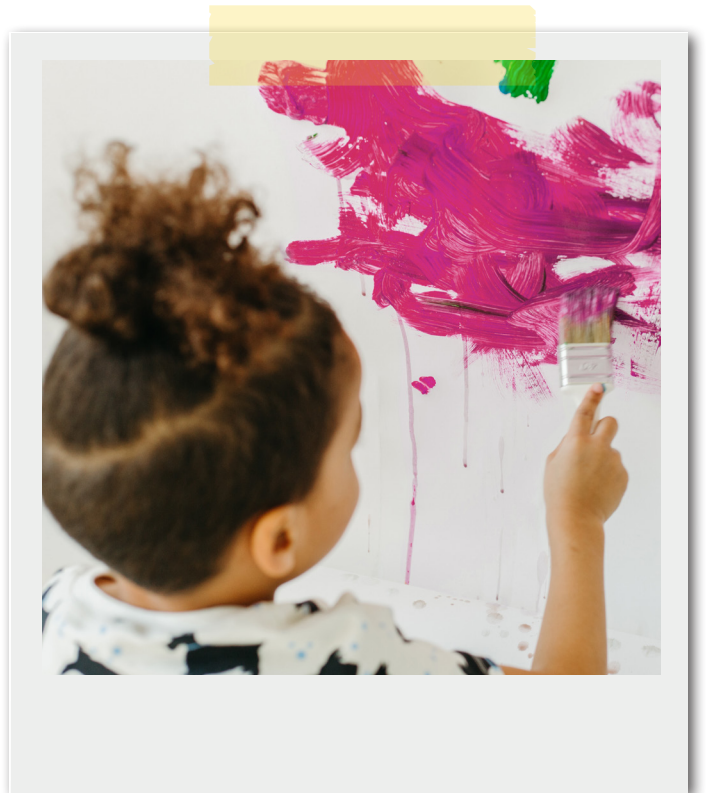
The **mission** of Birth to Five Illinois is to create a statewide regional infrastructure that will amplify input from communities in the development of policies and funding priorities. We support the mobilization of communities to build and sustain equitable access to inclusive, high-quality early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

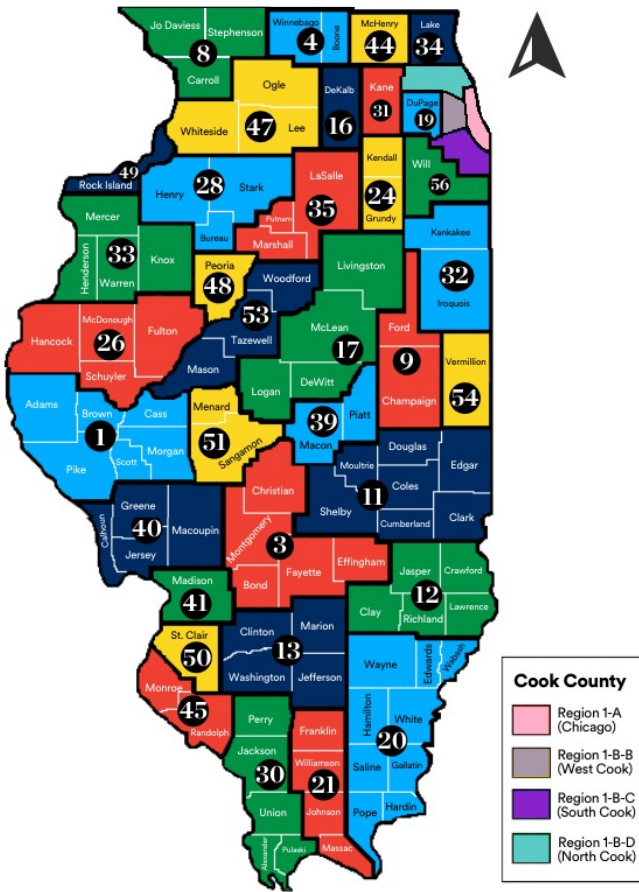


# Timeline

- **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

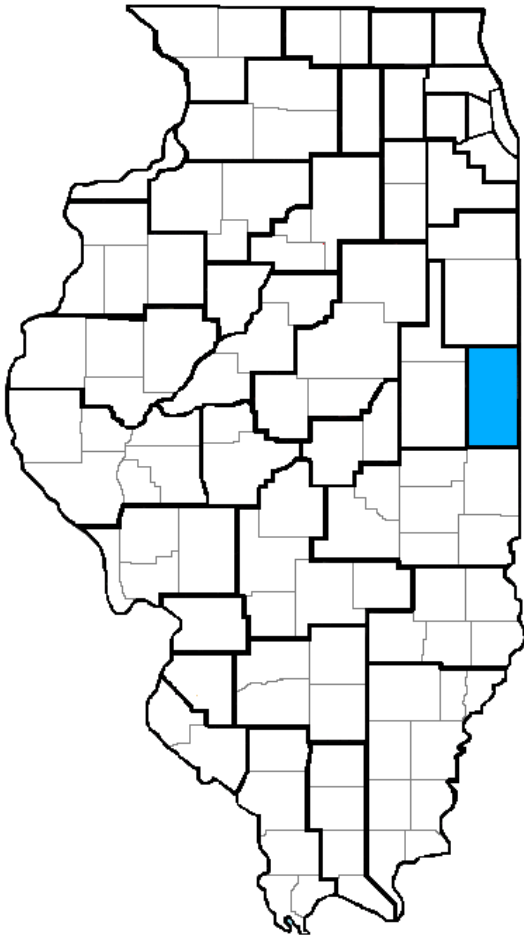
Regionally based demographic, programmatic, and service provider data from IECAM and workforce data from INCCRRA were presented to Action and Family Council members during meetings and is included in the following section. The data comes from both IECAM (2020-2021) and INCCRRA (2021), unless otherwise 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 54



# Regional Community Landscape



## Regional Boundaries

Region 54 is in east central Illinois and covers Vermilion County. It borders to the east of Champaign-Urbana and to the west of the Indiana state line, with its northern border 95 miles south of Chicago.

The main city in Region 54 is Danville with a population of roughly 29,000 people. Danville is surrounded by many smaller rural towns. There is one community college located in the Region, Danville Area Community College (DACC), as well as Lakeview College of Nursing. Danville has the largest school district in the Region and is the grant holder of the Preschool For All (PFA) and Preschool For All Expansion (PFA-E) programs. The main employers within the Region are in Danville, and include factories and warehouses, health facilities (including one hospital), and the Illiana Veterans Affairs (VA).

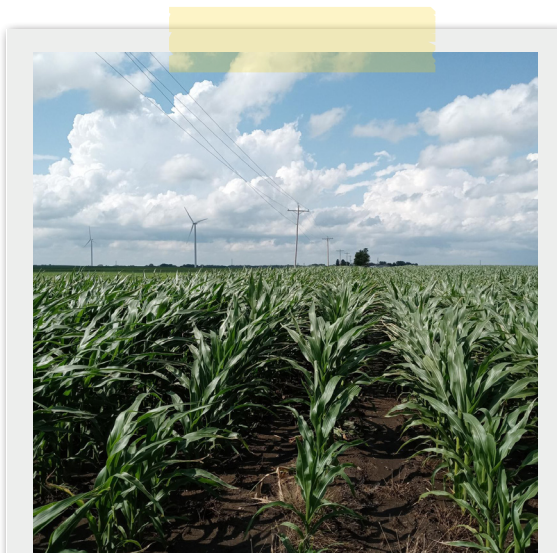
On the north side of the Region is Hoopeston, known as the “sweetcorn capital of the world”. Hoopeston is surrounded by many wind turbines that have been organized into computerized wind farms. Heading south toward Danville is Potomac, which is known for artesian wells from which water flows under natural pressure without pumping.

The City of Danville is the most populated city in the Region with many places for recreation like Kickapoo State Recreation Area and Kennekuk Cove County Park. Each year in July, Danville hosts a National hot air balloon event called Balloons Over Vermilion at the Regional Airport.

Oakwood is a small town west of Danville known for the Possum Trot and the Vermilion County Fair. Catlin is a small tight-knit community with multiple town-wide events. East of Westville is Forest Glen Preserve which has hiking trails for beginners, intermediate, and advanced hikers.

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

Birth to Five Illinois: Region 54 acknowledges the following Tribes whose land we inhabit: The Council of Peoria, Myaamia (Miami), Očhéthi Šakówiŋ (Sioux), Kaskaskia, and Kiikaapoi (Kickapoo) Nations. We acknowledge the historic and ongoing injustices experienced by Indigenous communities and honor the Native Peoples who came before us and continue to contribute to our communities.



Rows of planted corn in a cornfield.

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

## Regional Demographics

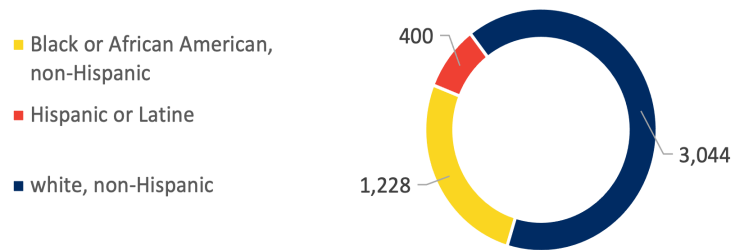
Region 54 has a population of 76,704 people, 5,622 of whom are children birth to age five. While most of the children in the Region self-identify as white, there are increasing numbers of young children from racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds (Figure 1). The Danville area is predominantly Black or African American, with Hispanic or Latine and those who identify as two or more races primarily living the same community (Figure 2). A small number of racially diverse families live in the rural towns around the Region such as Hoopeston, Westville, and Georgetown.

## Children and Families in Priority Populations

The Illinois Early Learning Council has identified several priority populations, defined as underserved and underrepresented populations. Most state-funded Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) programs have systems in place to identify and enroll priority populations; however, barriers to serving children and families persist. In Region 54, the most prevalent priority populations discussed by our Councils are children in families experiencing poverty or deep poverty, children involved in the Department of Children and Families Services (DCFS), and children experiencing homelessness.

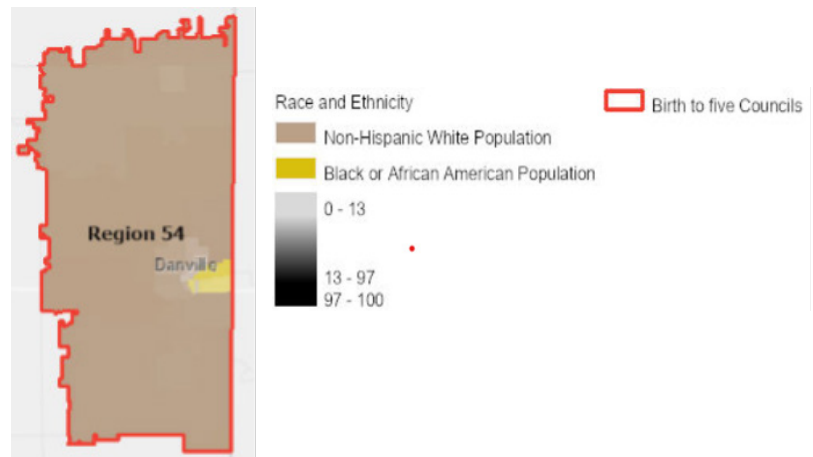
The purpose of the priority populations list is to drive resources and attention toward improving access to high-quality, responsive services for children and families with limited to no access to economic or material resources. While the priority populations list addresses the access issue, Birth to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

Figure 1: Children Under Five by Race and Ethnicity<sup>2</sup>



Source: IECAM  
Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

Figure 2: Location of Children Under Age of Six by Race, Ethnicity



Source: IECAM  
Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

“It’s so hard to keep them (my children) in school when I do not know where we will be staying every night.”

- Mother Experiencing Homelessness

<sup>2</sup> Some race/ethnicity Census categories not included due to small number of respondents: Two or More Races, non-Hispanic (147); Asian, non-Hispanic (35); American Indian or Alaska Native, non-Hispanic (27).

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

## Children in Families Experiencing Poverty or Deep Poverty

Federal Poverty Level (FPL) is a measure of income that the U.S. government uses to determine who is eligible for subsidies, programs, and benefits. The FPL considers how much yearly income a household needs to meet their basic needs, which include housing, utilities, and groceries, among others. Income bands are created based on household size: those living at or below 100% FPL defined as “living at the poverty line” and those living at or below 50% FPL defined as “living in deep poverty” (Figure 3). In Region 54, the median household income is \$49,063. Seventy-two percent of children aged five and under in the Region are living at or below 200% of FPL (Figure 4). Children living under 100% of FPL for Region 54 are primarily located in East and South Danville and Hoopeston.

Children and families that are involved with the Illinois 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. Region 54 has 273 children/families involved with DCFS; 66 of these children stay with a foster family, 204 stay with a relative, one is Independent or in a Group Home (I/GH), and two have some other type of living arrangement (Figure 5).

Children experiencing homelessness defined by McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act are children that lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. This includes but is not limited to children/families living in motels, hotels, cars, homeless shelters, and living with other family members or friends. Data is limited due to multiple factors: families must self-identify to the school to be counted and receive services, which may be difficult for some due to the shame and stigma they feel being labeled as “homeless” may carry. Additionally, some may not realize that their living situation qualifies them for services through McKinney-Vento. Data available from the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) shows that 81 students in Kindergarten in 2020 were experiencing homelessness in Region 54. Most children experiencing homelessness live in Danville.

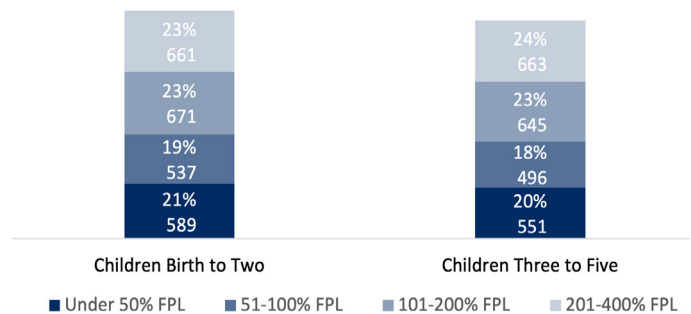
Understanding the demographics in Region 54 will allow Birth to Five Illinois to better serve the priority populations. Knowing where these children and families are located and what their specific needs are will allow for programs to be placed more strategically. Directing resources to exactly where they are needed increases the likelihood that families will utilize them.

**Figure 3: Federal Poverty Levels at 100%, 150%, and 200% at Different Household Sizes**

Household Size	50% FPL	100% FPL	150% FPL	200% FPL
Family of 1	\$6,380	\$12,760	\$19,140	\$25,520
Family of 2	\$8,620	\$17,240	\$25,860	\$34,480
Family of 3	\$10,860	\$21,720	\$32,580	\$43,440
Family of 4	\$13,100	\$26,200	\$39,300	\$52,400
Family of 5	\$15,340	\$30,680	\$46,020	\$61,360

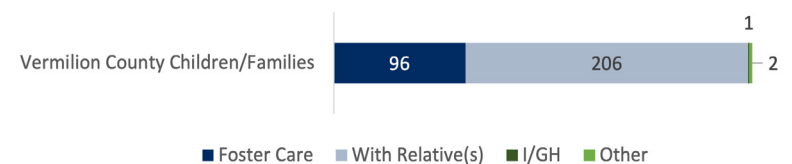
Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

**Figure 4: Number and Percentage of Children Under Six by Federal Poverty Level**



Source: IECAM  
Created by: Illinois Action for Children CS3

**Figure 5: Children/Families with DCFS Involvement**



Source: IECAM  
Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

## Local Community Collaborations

Local Community Collaborations are an important part of the ECEC landscape. They bring together a diverse group of people from different roles and sectors across communities to help improve the lives of young children and families. Having a Community Collaboration develops local partnerships to help enhance the lives of young children and families and to ensure the healthy growth and development of Illinois' youngest learners. Partners and stakeholders represent the full spectrum of people, programs, and services that touch the lives of young children and their families. Together, they align their goals to

address the issues and challenges families face as they prepare their children to enter Kindergarten safe, healthy, eager to learn, and ready to succeed.<sup>4</sup>



Birth to Five Illinois Region 54 Team. Brooke Davis (left), Tammy Pollitt (middle), and Caylynne Dobbles (right).

Region 54 does not have any formal Early Childhood Community Collaborations; however, it has several informal Collaborations including the Local Interagency Council (LIC) of families, community agencies, and providers supporting pregnant people and families with children from birth to five years old. Additionally, the iGrow, home visiting program for children from birth to three years old, which is funded by the Illinois Department of Human Services Division of Early Childhood (IDHS-DEC), helps to coordinate referrals for families who need home visiting services and offers coaching on practical parenting skills, how to improve family health, and how

to create and strengthen bonds between caregivers and children. iGrow also provides development screenings for children and can make referrals to therapy and other programs so families receive the support and care they need.

An established Local Collaboration that serves more families or has a larger reach would help these existing entities tap into additional networking opportunities, school support, and community support all in one location. Additionally, a Collaboration with expanded reach might help ECEC professionals in the Region gather inside perspectives from people experiencing the disconnect in the programming options offered in the Region.

Additionally, with a formal Early Childhood Collaboration, more agencies would be able to provide a wrap-around of services to the families and better connect them to services and resources. Organizations could work together to leverage all available resources, rather than just what their agency has to offer, and provide a streamlined way to direct families to those services. Gathering all the community agencies at one table to expand the reach of services and referrals would benefit all families in the Region.

“ Oftentimes, parents do not know what resources are available, therefore they do not know that their child can get that early start that they deserve. - Council Member ”

<sup>4</sup> [https://higherlogicdownload.s3.amazonaws.com/ACTFORCHILDREN/35e7dc4d-525c-45bc-ba2c-48e6466050e3/UploadedImages/Documents/PPA\\_Directory\\_Final.pdf](https://higherlogicdownload.s3.amazonaws.com/ACTFORCHILDREN/35e7dc4d-525c-45bc-ba2c-48e6466050e3/UploadedImages/Documents/PPA_Directory_Final.pdf)

# Early Childhood Education & Care (ECEC) Programs

“ I want to see a program that has ‘seamless transitions’ for children from their parent’s womb all the way up to the age of five when they begin Kindergarten. - Parent ”

ECEC programs include publicly and privately funded preschool programs, as well as licensed, license-exempt, and family/friend care. Each program has a unique role in ensuring that all families have access to high-quality, enriching care and education for all children. ECEC programs aim to improve outcomes for young children and their families by offering support services such as child health and development assessments, ECEC referral to community resources, and more. Overall, Region 54 has several ECEC programs within the county, primarily in the Danville area (Figure 6).

To be considered a licensed provider, whether a child care center or family child care provider, a licensing representative must inspect the facility/home, and it must meet the minimum licensing requirements set by the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). For a Family child care provider, if there are more than three unrelated children (including children of their own under 12), the provider will need to obtain a child care license from DCFS. While license-exempt providers may not be licensed, they must meet the minimum requirements set by Illinois and comply with the Illinois Department of Public Health, to operate as a child care provider.

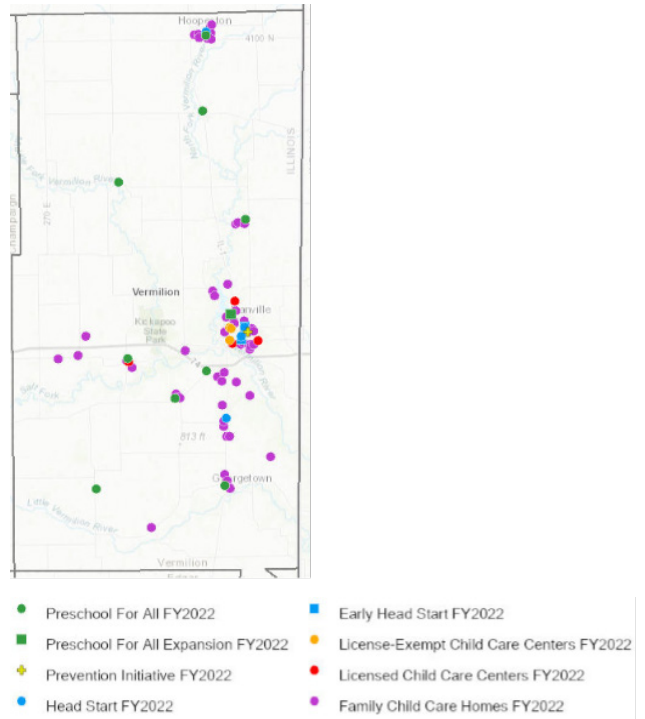
There are 5,622 children aged five and under in Region 54, many of whom need child care or early education. Region 54 had six licensed child care centers, 61 licensed family child care homes, and four license-exempt child care centers. Collectively they hold spots for 1,309 children (Figure 7).

**Figure 7: Number of Sites and Capacity by Child Care Type**

Program Type	Number of sites	Total capacity
Licensed Child Care Center	6	437
Licensed Family Child Care Home	61	645
License-Exempt Child Care Center	4	227

Source: IECAM  
Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

**Figure 6: Location of Licensed and Publicly Funded Programs**



Source: IECAM  
Created by: Illinois Action for Children CS3

“ I have trust issues about who will take care of my child. - Parent ”

Head Start and Early Head Start are federally funded programs that provide comprehensive child development and family support services to promote the school readiness of qualifying children by enhancing their cognitive, social, and emotional development. Head Start serves three to five-year-old children, while Early Head Start serves pregnant people and children from birth to three years old. The majority of Head Start and Early Head Start programs are in or around Danville, with additional sites south of Danville in Westville and at the very northern end of the Region in Hoopeston. Families in the western and southern parts of the Region do not have a Head Start or Early Head Start program nearby (Figure 8).

The Preschool For All program is publicly funded program that provides at least 12.5 hours weekly of high-quality preschool, including a comprehensive developmental screening. Preschool For All Expansion is an expansion grant that is intended to enhance the State’s infrastructure to provide high-quality preschool programs and to expand high-quality full-day preschool programs for four-year-olds in high-need communities. Preschool For All and Preschool For All Expansion programs use a research-based curriculum to provide children with a foundation of knowledge and skills that will allow them to be successful throughout their school experience. Preschool For All programs are mainly clustered in or around Danville, but there are additional programs scattered throughout the rest of the Region.

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

Program	Number of sites	Total capacity
Early Head Start	2	48
Head Start	6	271
Preschool For All	9	732
Preschool For All Expansion	1	55
IDHS and MIECHV Home Visiting	--	59
Prevention Initiative	2	102

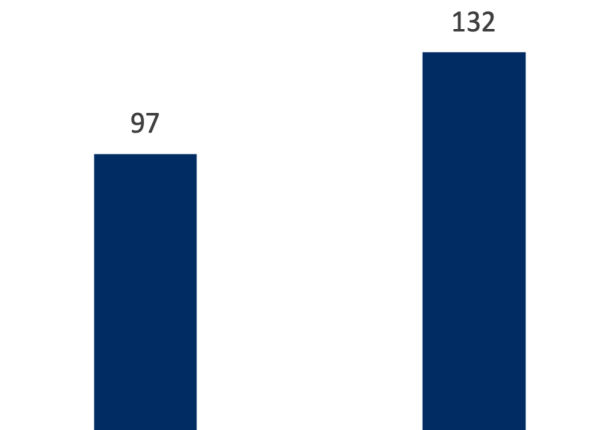
Source: IECAM  
Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

The Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting program (MIECHV) is administered by iGrow and Children Home and Aid in Danville. iGrow and Brightpoint (formerly Children’s Home and Aid) provides specially trained home visitors who work with parents and caregivers to build their skills and promote their children’s healthy development. The Brightpoint home visiting program is funded by IDHS and Start Early. While there are other IDHS-funded home visiting programs in other Regions, such as Healthy Families Illinois and Parents too Soon, there is no enrollment in Region 54.

Prevention Initiative programs are funded by ISBE and provide intense, research-based, and comprehensive child development support. These programs also offer family support services for expectant people and families with children from birth to three to help them build a strong foundation for learning and school success. There are two Prevention Initiative programs in the Region, located in the Danville area.

Early Intervention (EI) is operated by Child and Family Connections (CFC) of Central Illinois. It is the regional intake agency for children birth to three and their families to enter the Illinois Early Intervention System. EI services include but are not limited to, developmental evaluations and assessments, and physical, occupational, developmental, and speech/language therapies. EI credentialed Service Coordinators work with families and EI providers to develop an Individualized Family Service Plan to meet the individualized needs of the child. In Region 54, 97 children were receiving EI Services, and 132 children in preschool had an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) (Figure 9).

**Figure 9: Number of Children Receiving Early Intervention and in Preschool For All with Individualized Education Plans**



Source: IECAM  
Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

“ I think that the children that need an IEP should be able to get the assistance they need in the schools. Overall, for the children that do have IEPs in place, there is not enough staff, so they are not getting the help they need.

- Grandparent  
Raising Grandchildren ”

Over the past two years in Region 54, two Head Start programs, one Preschool For All, one licensed child care center, one license-exempt child care center, one Prevention Initiative program, and five family child care homes have closed. There are multiple reasons why these programs have closed: not enough staff/teachers, not enough funding, and COVID-19. It has recently been noted that the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) administered by iGrow has recently opened two new jobs for home visitors which will serve 30 more families.

The publicly funded ECEC programs are primarily in the Danville area, with some scattered throughout the Region. Most of these programs are part-day programs and do not accommodate families that work. Licensed child care centers and family child care providers are extremely limited in the Region. Parents and caregivers also need second and third-shift child care. There are many setbacks in Region 54’s ECEC facilities. Owners and managers struggle to fill staff positions, which causes the closing of facilities and classrooms.

“ We have encountered many single moms with children under the age of 5 years who have lost their jobs. Some stated that emergency child care closings were a factor.

- Local Business Employee ”

# Slot Gap

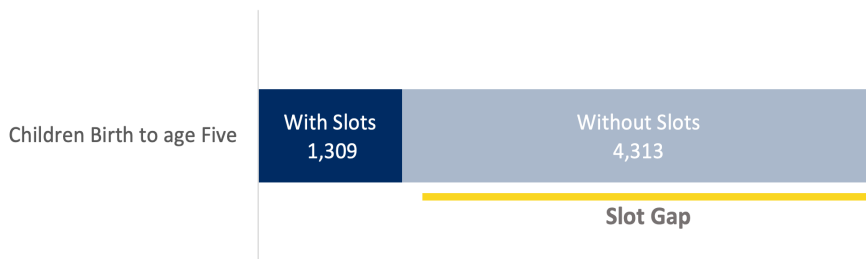
The ECEC slot gap is defined as the number of children eligible for enrollment in ECEC programs and services, compared to the number of available slots. In most communities there are more children in need of or eligible for an ECEC program than available slots, resulting in waiting lists and some children having no access to ECEC programs and services. Slot gap can be measured overall by comparing the capacity of all licensed child care homes and centers, and license-exempt child care centers to the number of children in the Region; comparing the number of publicly funded slots in ECEC programs against the number of children who live at or below 200% FPL; comparing the number of children receiving CCAP against the number of children who live at or below 200% FPL.

Overall, there are not enough licensed or license-exempt child care slots for most children five years old and under in the Region (Figure 10). There are limited child care facilities, and in some facilities, the number of staff does not allow enrollment at full capacity. Families have said the lack of child care has impacted their ability to find and retain work.



Families doing a Christmas craft at Region 54's Winter Open House.

## Figure 10: Child Care Capacity Slot Gap



Source: IECAM  
Created by: Illinois Action for Children CS3

There is also a slot gap in publicly funded programs for children ages birth to five. Publicly funded programs include Head Start, Early Head Start, Preschool For All, Preschool For All Expansion, and Prevention Initiative. While each program has its own set of enrollment requirements, slots are prioritized for children in families with limited access to economic resources which is why the publicly funded slot gap measure only includes children living at or below 200% FPL. Since publicly funded programs serve different ages, the publicly funded slot gap is split into children ages birth to two and three to five.

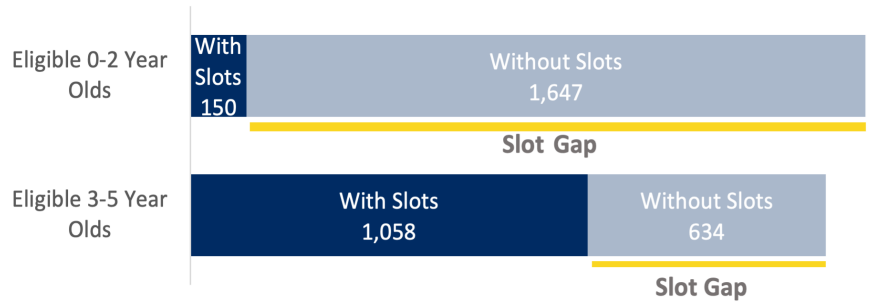
“ I had to quit my job because I could not find child care. ”  
- Single Parent

“ I used to teach for child care, and I had to find a new job because I was not making enough to support my daughter and I. ”  
- Single Parent



The total number of children living at 200% FPL is 3,489; 1,797 children birth to age two, 1,692 children aged three to five. The largest slot gap is among children ages birth to two (Figure 11). It's important to note that most of the publicly funded slots for children in this age range are for Prevention Initiative and not Early Head Start. While there are more publicly funded child care slots for children ages three to five, there are still a significant number of children without access to programming.

**Figure 11: Publicly Funded ECEC Program Slots**



Source: IECAM  
Created by: Illinois Action for Children CS3

There are teacher shortages for publicly funded programs; while not clear why there is a teacher shortage, feedback from community members suggest that teachers feel there are many demands placed on them that create a work environment that's difficult to navigate. Additionally, some community members cited being unable to address behaviors of the children have made some teachers leave the field.

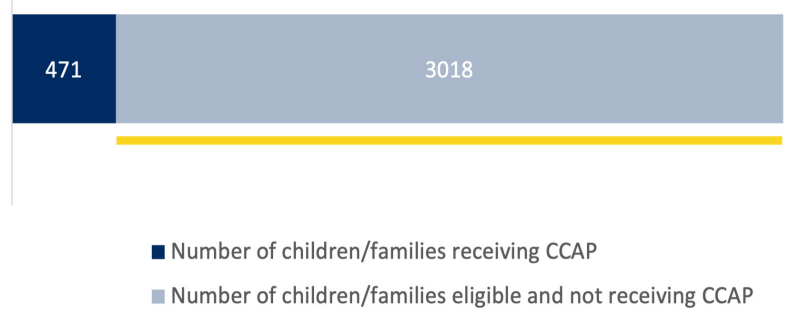
“ It someday feels like you have to decide between being a parent or an employee.  
- Preschool Teacher ”

Other reasons community members cited that there is not enough grant funding to meet the needs of the children and families that need publicly funded slots, leaving waitlists for these slots very high. As a result, families feel like they cannot get the quality of education in other child care centers or homes that the publicly funded programs have to offer.

“ Waitlists are IMPOSSIBLE.  
- Parent ”

Region 54 has 3,489 children eligible for the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP). However, only 471 families are receiving assistance to help pay for child care (Figure 12). Families and providers have stated that the reason this number is so low is that families may not know about the program. Many family child care providers and privately funded child care centers reported that they will not accept CCAP because they are not paid in a timely manner, leaving parents and caregivers struggling to find affordable care.

**Figure 12: CCAP from 2022**



Source: IECAM  
Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

“ It's a non-stop witch hunt to find programs for their child.  
- Family Council Member ”

This information is important and helpful because it provides insight into understanding the gaps in ECEC services that exist in the Region. After the data was shared, the Councils found

there is a need for more ECEC programs in Region 54. Understanding how many slots there are in the Region versus how many children are under five years old will help the Region to understand what is needed here. We do not have data regarding how many children are homeschooled and are not going to publicly funded schools or preschools. The data only shows how many spots are available for children currently in family child cares.

# Early Childhood Education & Care (ECEC) Workforce

The ECEC workforce includes a diverse field of professionals that support young children’s development. In the education field, this includes teachers, substitutes, home visitors, principals, paraprofessionals, site directors, teaching assistants, program directors, Early Intervention specialists, speech pathologists, office staff, and other early childhood professionals that are a part of the larger network of support for families with young children.

## Race/Ethnicity & Gender

Region 54’s ECEC workforce is predominantly white females, and 73% of all licensed center teaching staff are white. This is representative of the demographics in many of the smaller rural communities, which are also predominantly white with little racial diversity. However, Danville and the areas around it are more racially diverse, so in these areas, most of the children being served do not have teachers that look like them.

**Figure 13: Race and Ethnicity of Licensed Center Directors, Teaching Staff, FCC Staff<sup>5</sup>**

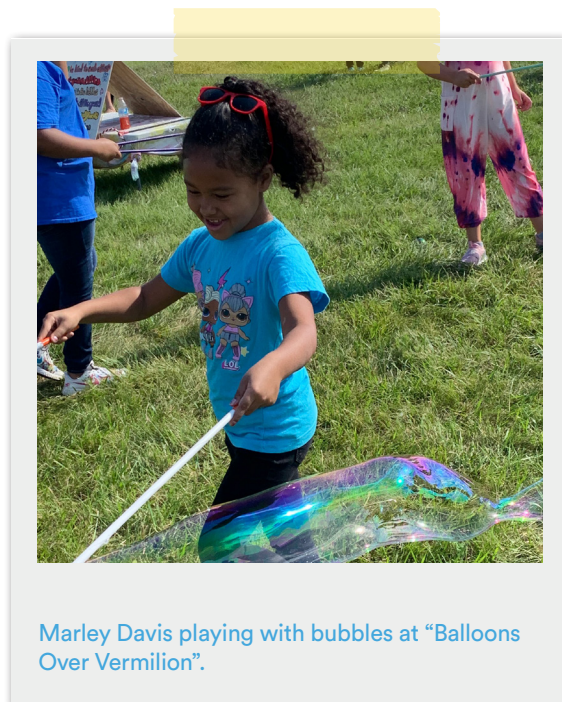
Position Type	Asian	Black or African American	Hispanic or Latine	Native American/ Alaskan, Pacific Islander, or Other	Multi-Racial	white
Center Directors	0%	7%	7%	0%	7%	79%
Teaching Staff	0%	24%	*	*	*	73%
FCC Staff	0%	13%	1%	*	0%	85%

Source: INCCRRA  
Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

There also is a higher percentage of women (95%) working in this field compared to men (5%).

## Language(s) Spoken

English is the primary language in Region 54 according to Gateways; most licensed center directors, licensed teaching staff, and licensed family child care providers are English-speaking and less than five percent are bilingual. Three percent of the Region’s population are households that predominantly speak Spanish and are limited English-speaking, while two percent of the Region’s population is households that primarily speak other languages besides English. Spanish is taught to children in some schools throughout the Region. The local school districts are required to do a home language form and teach the children in their primary language. If there is a child who speaks Spanish, the school will provide accommodations. From the 2009/2010 school year to the 2019-2020 school year, the state of Illinois had a 42% increase in English Language Learner (ELL) students.



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

## Education Level

The data also shows that teachers, directors, and family providers in the Region have at least a high school diploma or GED. Very few family child care providers went on to get a higher education, whereas more teachers and directors obtained the required associate degree needed for employment in a center. Only a few teachers and even fewer directors have proceeded to a degree higher than an associate degree (Figure 14).

Figure 14: Licensed Provider Highest Level of Education<sup>6</sup>

Position Type	High School/ GED	Some College	Community College Certificate	Associate Degree	Bachelor's Degree	Graduate Degree
Center Direct	0	*	0	8	5	*
Center Teaching S	73	6	5	23	8	*
Family Child Ce Providers	53	0	*	6	*	*

Source: INCCRRA

Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

## Barriers

One of the big challenges in the ECEC workforce is the low paying salary. The median annual wage for child care occupations in Region 54 is \$28,080, as compared to the median annual wage for all occupations, which is \$31,401. In 2021, the difference in pay between a teacher and an Administrative Director is a two-dollar-an-hour difference (Figure 15). To be a part of the ECEC workforce means that there will be a lot of time and dedication put into not only the education to get the job but doing the job. Once in an ECEC position, employers may lose staff because they sacrifice their passion to make better money in a career that might not be so demanding.

Another barrier to the ECEC workforce is not being adequately staffed. ECEC staff may be required to do more tasks than normal just to cover staff missing vacant positions. It is especially challenging for the teachers in classrooms that have children that may require more one-on-one interactions because of behavioral challenges or the need for learning accommodations. When there is not enough staff to help with the extra needed hands-on, the teacher in the room must take away time from the lesson to assist in the situation, thus taking away from the other children's learning experience. These increased needs also lead to staff burnout as there are not enough staff to meet the individualized needs of the children in care.

Figure 15: Median Child Care Hourly Wages by Position in Vermilion County

Position Type	Median
Administrative Director	\$15.00
Director/Teacher	\$15.00
Teacher	\$13.00
Assistant Teacher	\$10.00

Source: INCCRRA

Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

“ We have the spots in the center. I do not have the staff. Staff is leaving for better paying positions. - Council Member ”

<sup>6</sup> Cells with an asterisk \* indicate fewer than five but more than zero respondents

## Supports/Professional Development

The Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R), also known as CCRS in Region 54, is helping to encourage the ECEC Workforce to continue to grow. CCRS provides training opportunities for providers that want to continue their education and provides funds for child care providers to pursue their professional development. CCRS also provides improvement grants for current providers. Employees are ready to help those that want to start or finish their ECEC-related degree.

Several high schools in the Region, including Georgetown Ridge Farm, Saltfork, and Armstrong Township Highschool have family and consumer science programs that encourage young people to get involved with the ECEC systems. Danville Area Community College (DACC) has ECEC programs where students obtaining their associate degree can take non-traditional classes in order to receive their degree. This program allows students to save money by attending community college for a portion of the degree and also offers a job-shadowing component.

“

Students go out and accrue all this college debt and leave for jobs when we have places here in our County that will pay for schooling, and you would have a job in the field when you got done.

- Community Business Owner

”

The ECEC workforce directly affects the children in the community in multiple ways, from inspiring children to have a dream career to teaching them the basic skills they need to live a valuable day-to-day life. Having a qualified and well-paid workforce forms the foundation for quality ECEC.

## Parent/Family/Caregiver Voice

Family engagement often refers to the systematic inclusion of families in activities and programs that promote children’s development, learning, and well-being. For family engagement to be integrated throughout the early childhood system and programs, providers and schools must engage families as essential partners while providing services that encourage children’s learning and development, nurture positive relationships between families and staff, and support all families.

“ I would not have been able to support my baby without the Bridges Program at the Women’s Care Clinic.  
- Single Mother ”



Caylynne and her daughter Stella at the Georgetown Fair.

Action and Family Councils shared their experiences with ECEC programs and other resources in the Region. Families have shared positive experiences with support from community agencies from the time they became parents through when their children entered school. The Region also has multiple resources including, but not limited to, utilities, food, and medical assistance to aid families experiencing barriers.

Some of the main barriers/challenges that community members reported were lack of awareness about ECEC program options and the CCAP process, issues accessing ECEC programs that are a good fit for their needs and available transportation options, and the need for mental health programming and supports.

### Awareness of ECEC Program Options & CCAP

Parents and caregivers want child care, staffed by qualified individuals, in a safe environment with the staff they trust with their children. Many families do not know about the programs and resources currently offered in Region 54. Many families are not aware that they may be eligible for

the Child Care Assistant Program (CCAP). Action Council members said they feel the Region could do better by getting the information out and sharing what resources are available. The information about all the ECEC programs in Region 54 is not easily accessible and a commonly used search tool does not yet exist. The Family Council members suggested using social media, television, flyers, or local radio stations to advertise the available resources to families that need them. This would be a way to reach everyone, including those in rural communities.

## ECEC Program Access and Transportation

The Region does have some publicly funded programs for preschool children; however, families sometimes may not be able to enroll their child due to these programs not having transportation or only being part-time. The publicly funded free ECEC spots are usually full with a waitlist. Parents have mentioned that only the “lucky ones” get to go to preschool. Parents, families, and caregivers have stated that the Region is lacking in child care due to the limited number of providers, or the lack of providers and child care centers in the area affects their employment status. Children living with one or two working parents is high in Region 54, therefore families must have full-day child care (Figure 16).

Figure 16: Children Five and Under with Working Parents



Source: IECAM  
Created by: Illinois Action for Children CS3

Parents, families, and caregivers have shared stories of basing decisions on where they work or where they can find child care. Child care options are limited in rural areas, leaving many families with only the option to travel to Danville to find a provider. Because of this, caregivers may look for work farther from home. Working parents and caregivers also mentioned needing second and third-shift child care and how that affects what careers they can accept. Currently, there are limited ECEC providers that have third-shift hours in the Region, leaving parents and caregivers to rely on other family members, friends, or even neighbors to care for their children during these hours.

Additionally, Region 54 does not have labor and delivery in town, which means that people who are pregnant must drive up to an hour to receive these services.

## Mental Health and Specialized Services

While Region 54 does have mental health therapists, there is no facility where children under five years old can go for services. Families in the area would like to have a local therapist that takes their health care insurance, as most families must drive to neighboring cities to receive mental health services.

Children enrolled in publicly funded programs in the Region can be screened for special education, occupational, and physical therapy. If screened and Early Intervention services are needed, that child is eligible to receive services either in-home or in a provider care setting.

“ We need affordable child care in Vermilion County for working parents and we need child care for parents who work after normal business hours and during school breaks.  
- Single Mom ”

“ Third-shift parents had child care issues because of operation hours.  
- Parent ”

“ I have had to drive over 30 minutes to another city to take my child for therapy.  
- Council Member ”

“ After having my child screened, he was able to receive the services he needed to succeed.  
- Parent ”

Overall, parents, families, and caregivers need more quality, full-day child care options, and transportation in rural areas for their children to attend the part-day preschool option in public school. Working caregivers must have full-day child care so they do not have to rely on other family members, or neighbors to watch their children. The community feels that Region 54 could benefit from offering more health services for families such as mental health care and family planning providers/services.

# Regional Strengths & Needs

Action and Family Council members reviewed available data, attended Council meetings, held conversations with community stakeholders, and identified strengths and needs. In addition, the Region 54 Team hosted focus groups, held individual interviews, and spoke with numerous community members. Region 54 will remain a great place to raise young children. However, there are still opportunities for growth within the Region and for more equitable access to ECEC programs for all children birth to five.

## Strengths

### ECEC Programs

- Multiple publicly funded ECEC programs throughout the Region.
- Numerous family child care locations throughout the Region.
- A handful of licensed and license-exempt child care centers, primarily located within Danville.
- Early Invention (EI) programs throughout the Region for children birth to three years old.

### Community Resources

- Many available resources for families, including food banks, free clothing facilities, and after-school programs.
- Established relationships between key stakeholders, not-for-profit organizations, businesses, and government agencies.

### ECEC Workforce

- Educational and professional development opportunities offered to current ECEC professionals through the local CCR&R.
- Financial incentives to pursue credentials offered to aspiring ECEC professionals through INCCRRA.
- ECEC teacher preparation coursework is available locally at Danville Area Community College (DACC).

### Collaborations

- ECEC professionals across multiple programs and agencies willingly collaborate to serve children and families.
- A variety of birth to three home visiting programs that connect families to existing resources and services.

## Needs

### Program Affordability

- More affordable child care options throughout the Region, including in rural communities.
- Eligibility criteria that consider household income and expenses to allow more families to qualify for publicly funded programs and services.
- Shortened payment timelines to incentivize more ECEC providers to accept CCAP.

### Program Availability & Accessibility

- An ECEC system that promotes equitable access and outcomes for all children, including children from historically marginalized groups such as children of color, children from Indigenous communities, and children in families living on poverty-level incomes.
- A greater number of programs that offer full-day preschool and Head Start services.



- More high-quality and accessible child care options throughout the Region, including programs that offer around-the-clock care.
  - Lengthy waitlists for publicly funded preschool programs limit families' options, causing them to use less convenient and/or lower quality programs.
  - Too few providers offer second or third shift child care.
- Expanded ECEC programs and providers in rural areas so families can more easily participate in the workforce and ensure their children's learning needs are met.
  - Rural areas offer limited child care options, requiring parents, families, and caregivers to travel to neighboring communities.
- Increased funding to expand home visiting programs.
- Seamless transitions from Early Intervention (EI) to Preschool and/or Head Start for all enrolled children.
  - While EI services exist in Region 54, the transition to preschool classrooms is cumbersome due to waitlists and limited slot availability.
- Intentional and smooth transitions for young children and families experiencing homelessness, specifically to ease the transfer process from one school district to another.
- Responsive ECEC programs that serve children with individualized learning needs, specifically multilingual children, and children with physical, mental, or emotional challenges.
- Public transportation options and schedules that correspond to ECEC program locations throughout Region 54.
  - Some rural schools do not provide transportation to and from ECEC programs, forcing families to choose more easily accessible options that may not be best suited to the developmental needs of their child.
- Improved access to medical and mental health care for young children throughout Region 54.
  - Many families must travel outside the Region to meet their medical and mental health needs.
  - Staffing shortages prevent medical providers from efficiently issuing referrals, which ultimately delays children's enrollment in essential ECEC programs and services.
  - Without a labor and delivery facility, expectant parents and caregivers must travel 30 to 45 minutes to a neighboring county to deliver their baby.

### **Program Awareness**

- A Community Collaboration that strategically and intentionally brings together key stakeholders, as well as coordinated ECEC resources to ensure all children and families have what they need to thrive.
- A public awareness campaign to promote ECEC programs and services and their corresponding positive impact on children's social, emotional, and academic development.
- A centralized resources and information hub that serves to make families and providers aware of the available programs and services, as well as how to access them.
- Build awareness among the medical community to increase the number of eligible children receiving Early Intervention services and reaching age-appropriate development milestones.

### **ECEC Workforce**

- A Region-wide effort to boost the number of aspiring ECEC professionals enrolled in preparation and credentialing programs.
- An ECEC workforce that is prepared, qualified, and fairly compensated.
- An ECEC workforce that has access to medical and dental benefits.
- A comprehensive infrastructure that improves the qualifications of the ECEC workforce and supports their ongoing professional growth and development.

# Recommendations

After gathering Family and Action Council member input and having conversations with local stakeholders in the community, Region 54 has several recommendations to improve the current ECEC system.

## Affordability

- Provide stable, non-competitive, grant funding for public and private ECEC programs based on community needs.
- Subsidize child care for families to ensure no family pays more than a set percentage of their household income on child care.

## Availability

- Increase the number of ECEC providers throughout the Region, especially in rural areas.
- Develop and implement a comprehensive system to support the whole child's development, spanning from in-utero to Kindergarten.

## Accessibility

- Design and implement a system to facilitate smooth and seamless transitions for children moving from Early Intervention to Preschool/Head Start programs.
- Eliminate waitlists by increasing the number of publicly funded ECEC slots.
- Ensure an adequate number of slots for children transitioning from EI to Preschool/Head Start to prevent breaks in services.
- Expand part-day publicly funded programs into full-day programs.
- Increase funding to assist families with the cost associated with transporting children to and from ECEC programs and services.
- Develop and implement a comprehensive system to support children transferring from one school district to another, specifically young and families children experiencing homelessness.

## Awareness

- Develop effective methods to communicate with families and build awareness of existing ECEC programs and services, as well as how to access them.
- Develop a resource and information hub where families can learn about and explore various ECEC options.

## ECEC Workforce

- Support the higher education system, such as DACC, to expand the ECEC teacher training infrastructure, address the current workforce shortage, and build a talent pipeline to meet future ECEC workforce needs.
- Prepare, recruit, and support a high-quality ECEC workforce.
- Increase and improve ECEC teacher compensations, benefits, and incentives to retain greater numbers of high-quality ECEC professionals.

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 54, 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: Focus Group and Interview Questions

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

### Parents, Families, and Caregivers

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

### 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?

## Appendix C: Additional Resources

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

1. Vermilion County Community Services Directory: <https://vchelp.org/>

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