



Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment

Region 9

(Champaign & Ford Counties)





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Region 9 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.

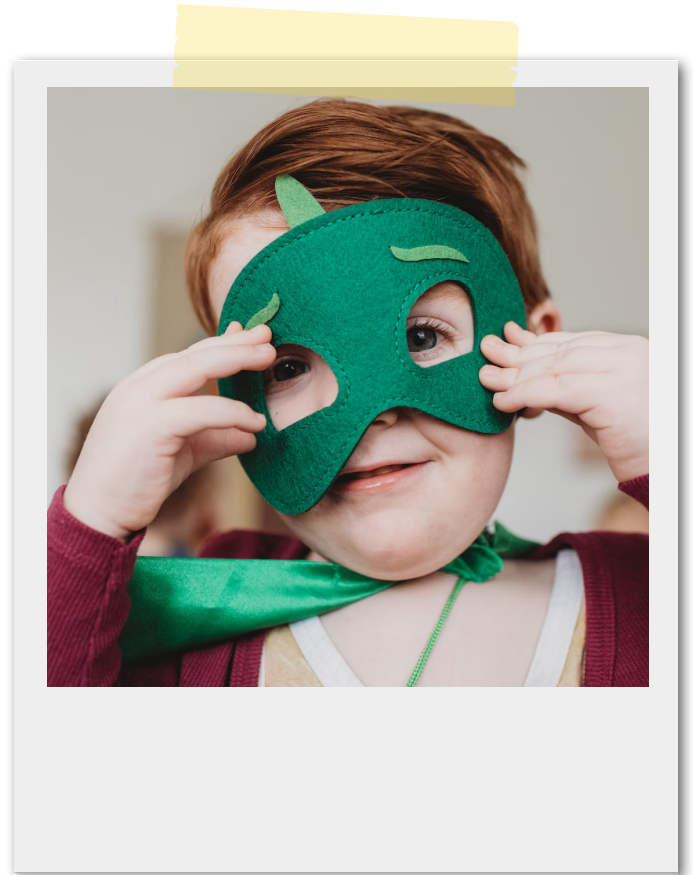
The experiences and knowledge families, caregivers, and early childhood professionals gain while navigating the complexities of the State's ECEC system is valuable, and understanding their lived experience in the local context is vital for decision-makers to ensure communities have access to the programs, 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 9 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

The contrast in population density, family preferences, and accessible information between Champaign and Ford Counties is striking. These differences warrant a deeper dive into how already existing efforts and potential new efforts need to be made to fill the gaps that negatively impact children and families in Region 9.

Community members stressed the need for more accessible information about child care services as well as more affordable and higher quality child care services across the region. Community members and council members felt strongly about the length and duration of waitlists for child care services, the affordability of these services, and how diversity and inclusion are not upheld in the ECEC landscape. Due to the slot gaps in child care services, shortages of ECEC staff, and the increasing cost of living, parents and families in Region 9 struggle to meet their needs in the current landscape. Furthermore, the growing amount of child care services needed to support the Region's linguistically and culturally diverse communities is shrinking due to staffing shortages and other issues.



Other barriers pertaining to the accessibility of child care services include a lack of transportation, non-existing care during evening and weekend hours, and a lack of support for children diagnosed with a disability. These barriers continue to disrupt the ability of parents/caregivers to access child care information and services and effectively plan for their children's future. With direct input from the community members of Region 9, this list of recommendations was created to facilitate positive change in the current ECEC landscape.

Region 9 Needs

There is a need for more ECEC therapists and specialists who speak a language other than English. A growing number of residents in Region 9 are speaking up about the importance of their culture and language being represented in their child's care setting.

There is a need for a larger pool of qualified ECEC workers. Due to the shortage of staff throughout the ECEC landscape, waitlists for child care are increasingly long and many working parents/caregivers struggle to find affordable care for their children. This issue is exacerbated for parents/caregivers who work 2nd and 3rd shifts where there are limited if any options for night or overnight child care.

Many community members expressed a need for more public transportation services for rural areas. Currently, there are limited options for public transportation outside of the municipalities of Region 9. This serves as an accessibility issue for parents/caregivers who live or work in rural areas.

Affordable and accessible infant and toddler care was a major concern for community members. Further, specialized services such as speech, occupational, and mental health services are less accessible due to the lack of service providers and capacity slots.

Region 9 Recommendations

Community members made the following recommendations to help eliminate the barriers faced by parents and caregivers in Region 9:

- Increase the capacity of family child care homes to provide 2nd and 3rd shift care.
- Increase accessibility and affordability of mental health services for families.
- Develop incentives to encourage individuals to obtain education or credentials in ECEC to fill staffing shortages.
- Implement a region-focused public transportation system.

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

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REGION 9 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.



14,238

Children Under
the Age of 6
in Region 9



5,623

Children 0-5
at 200% Federal
Poverty Level



3,221

Children 0-5
Without Publicly
Funded ECEC Slots

75%

Percentage of focus group participants who said their child or family experienced extreme staff shortages in child care centers as part of their ECEC journey.

“I was told I had to pay to put my child on a waitlist because waitlists are so long parents are putting their children on multiple waitlists and when their spot is ready, they have already committed to somewhere else. What if I do not have the money at the time to place my child on the waitlist?”

- 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 9 NEEDS

1. More bilingual ECEC therapists and specialists.
2. A larger pool of qualified ECEC workers.
3. More public transportation services for rural areas.
4. Affordable and accessible infant and toddler care.

REGION 9 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Increase the capacity of family child care homes to provide second or third shift care.
2. Increase accessibility and affordability of mental health services for families.
3. Develop incentives to encourage individuals to obtain education or credentials in ECEC to fill staffing shortages.
4. Expand the public transportation system to reach areas other than municipalities in Region 9.



**"We desperately need more diversity in the ECEC field. As an African American male, I am often looked at as the disciplinarian of the school. That is not the narrative I want to be a part of, especially in today's world."
- Community Member**

Overview & Acknowledgements

Introduction

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

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

This report will be used in a variety of ways.

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

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

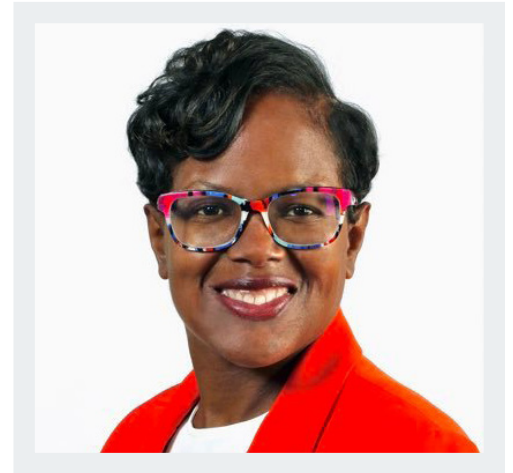
Third, policy makers, elected officials, and state agencies that administer ECEC programs will receive a copy of the report to give them a local view of the ECEC landscape in the areas they serve. The goal is to provide decision-makers with context from a community perspective so they can better understand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

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



Letter from State Leadership

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

Letter from Regional Leadership

This report is a symbol of the joy, frustration, exhaustion, and hope that community members in Region 9 feel about the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) system. This was no small feat in the making. Only through the immense dedication of the people working in, living in, and surviving in this system can we strive for necessary change. Thank you cannot express the depth of gratitude for the stories and shared experiences we have heard and documented throughout this Regional Needs Assessment process. The complexity of the ECEC landscape and the diverse needs of each family create a spider web of intricate and delicate issues that require understanding, compassion, and innovation to solve. The shared goal among many of the community members across the Region we have connected with is to link intent with impact and co-create a better future for young children regardless of their situation or resources.

It is through the diligent work of our Action Council and Family Council members who dedicated their time and expertise to this cause that we were able to complete this Needs Assessment; we could not have accomplished any of this without you. The Council members have been key in re-imagining a better future for children and families throughout the process of creating this Regional Needs Assessment. These individuals have rejoiced in the strengths of community collaboration and demonstrated their passion for positive change. They have also shared their challenges and recommendations to put actionable effort into meeting the local needs of families in Region 9. In addition, numerous focus groups, interviews, survey responses, as well as hundreds of other connections made via phone calls, email, and in-person meetings have added their piece of the puzzle so that we may present to you the bigger picture.

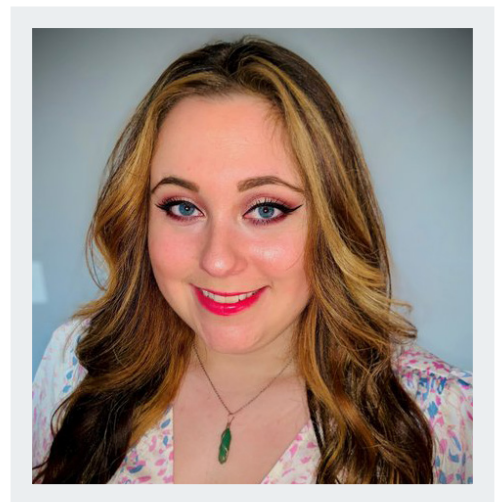
Our effort in compiling these stories into one cohesive report is the first step in striving for a better future. For the ECEC landscape to evolve we must first express our appreciation for the vulnerability and bravery that it takes to share personal testimonies, some for the first time, and others for the hundredth time, hoping that this time will be the last. We appreciate the parents, caregivers, school staff, center directors, program and business leaders, legislators, social workers, child care employees, early intervention providers, health care workers, and home visitors for trusting us with their stories. We will continue to hope for the future, amplifying the voices of community members, and never forgetting the challenge of raising or caring for young learners in Region 9.

Thank you,

Caitlyn Scarbro (she/her)

Regional Council Manager: Region 9

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.

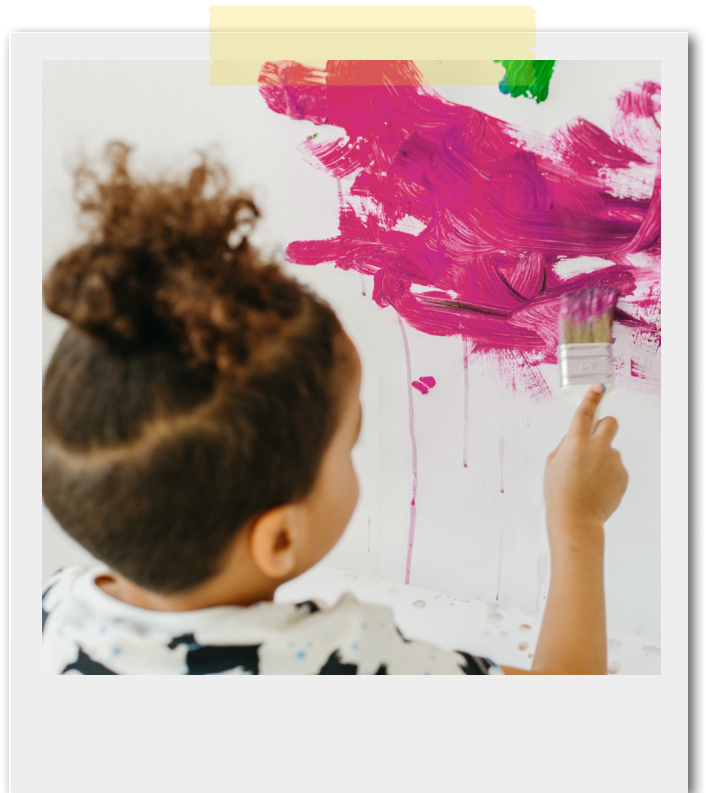
The **mission** of Birth to Five Illinois is to create a statewide regional infrastructure that will amplify input from communities in the development of policies and funding priorities. We support the mobilization of communities to build and sustain equitable access to inclusive, high-quality early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

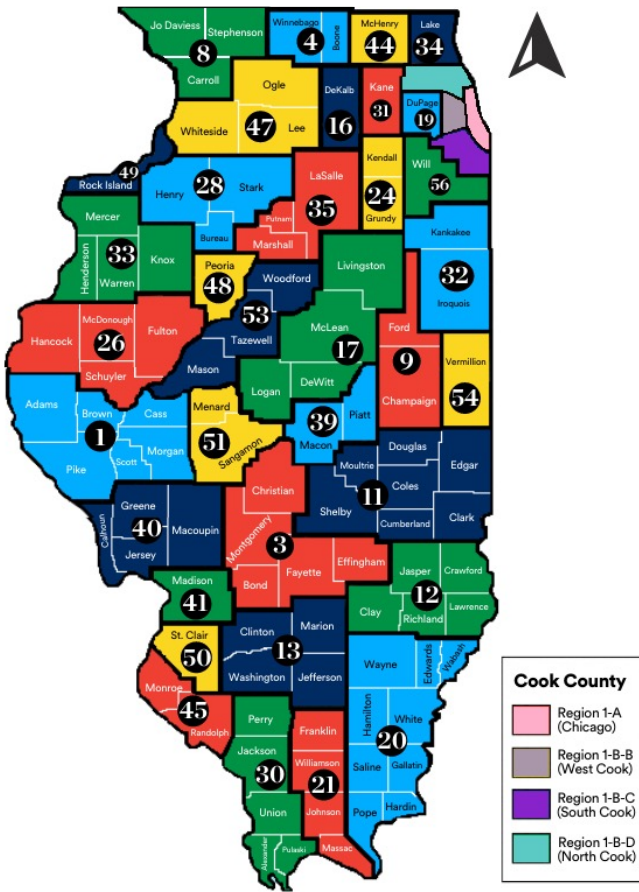


Timeline

- **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.

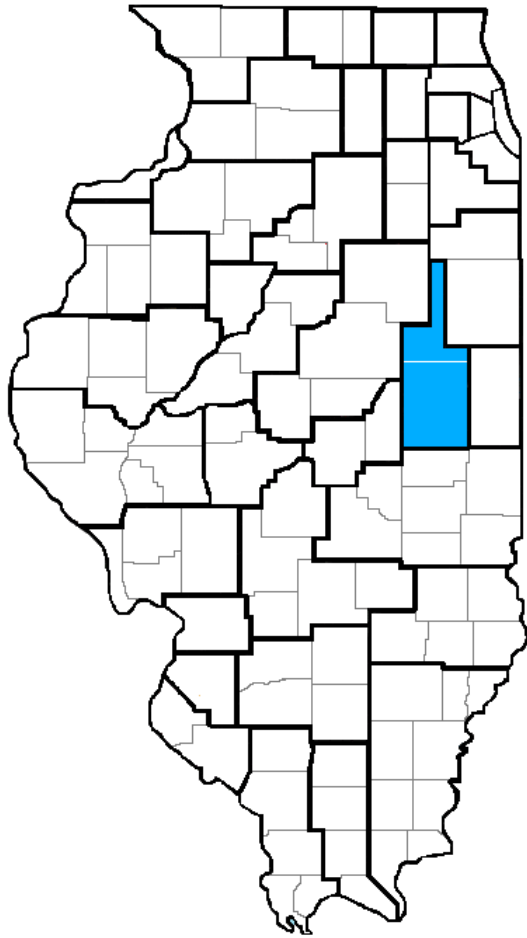
Regional Needs Assessment Methodology

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 9

Regional Community Landscape



Regional Boundaries

Region 9 is composed of Champaign and Ford Counties. The Region is in east central Illinois close to the border of Indiana. Region 9 has 14 school districts, as well as the University of Illinois and Parkland Community College. Champaign County is home to the diverse University of Illinois (U of I) campus, bordered by a busy downtown area and its sister city, Urbana. The city of Champaign-Urbana is bordered by rural areas that consist of smaller towns and townships, and a plethora of farms where crops such as corn, soybeans, and other commodity crops are grown. Champaign is also home to many attractions that invite people from all over the country, such as the U of I Arboretum, multiple local farmers markets, the Spurlock Museum, and the Krannert Art Museum. Champaign County has many major employers such as KTH Parts Industries, Rittal Corporation, Honeywell International Inc., and Russell T. Bundy Associations, Inc. Champaign County has robust activities and clubs that bring people together both in person and online. Popular destinations include breweries, sports clubs, water parks, and the State Farm Center. Community members also can connect virtually on popular Facebook groups like Spotted and Chambana and Chambana Moms.

Ford County is north of Champaign County and is shaped like an upside-down letter T. Ford County is known for its most populated towns, Gibson City and Paxton, which have a competitive sports rivalry. The northern extension of the county consists of rural townships and farmlands that also grow corn and soybean crops. Ford County is home to bustling Fair Grounds that attract families and children with delicious food, rides, and other attractions. Ford County is also home to the Fairbury Speedway and the Ford County Historical Society and Water Tower Museum. Ford County's main employers include Gibson Area Hospital, Alamo Group Inc., Heartland Health Center, and Solae LLC.

These two counties, although very different from each other, rely on the strength of their community systems to support and enrich personal and professional endeavors. Region 9 is a living example of Midwest culture and the importance of community building.



A child gazing curiously at the surrounding lights.

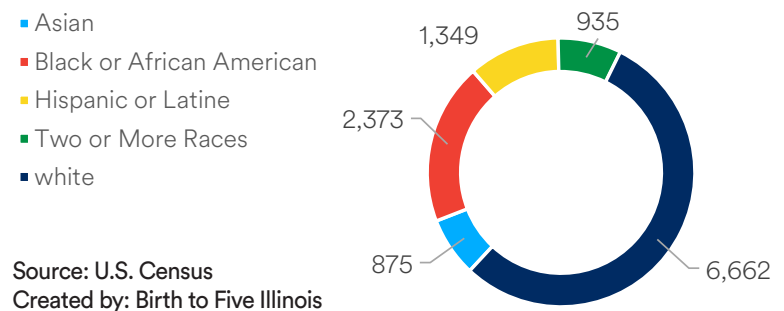
Land Acknowledgement¹

We would like to acknowledge the following Native territories which make up the current cities, towns, and townships of Region 9: Peoria, Myaamia (Miami), Očhéthi Šakówiŋ (Sioux), Kaskaskia, and Kiikaapoi (Kickapoo). Birth to Five Illinois respects and honors these territories as we continue to educate ourselves on the history and deep significance of the Native Peoples who live on these lands. We recognize the impacts of colonization and the practices and spiritualities tied to these lands. We strive for equity as we learn more about our relationship with the land and its history and as we move forward in creating better lives for children and families who reside in these territories.

Regional Demographics

According to the 2020 Census, Region 9 has an overall population of 223,161; 210,006 people are in Champaign County, and 13,155 are in Ford County. Across the Region, there are 14,238 children from birth to age five. While most of the children are white, many identify as Black or African American, Hispanic, or Latine, Asian, or two or more races (Figure 1). There are also identifiable communities of Hispanic/Latine and French-Congolese individuals in Urbana, Rantoul, and Paxton. There have been increasing numbers of racially diverse residents, especially in Champaign County, due to the presence of the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) which has one of the country's largest populations of international undergraduate and graduate students.

Figure 1: Children Under Age 6 by Race and Ethnicity



Children & Families in Priority Populations

Priority Populations are twelve demographic groups identified by the Illinois Early Learning Council.² After reviewing the definition of priority populations, community members and Council members identified the following groups of individuals residing in Region 9: Children of underage parents, children experiencing homelessness, children in poverty (at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level) or deep poverty (at or below 50% of the Federal Poverty Level), children with disabilities, children/families with Illinois Department of Children and Family Services involvement, and children in families that face barriers based on culture, language, and religion.

Other groups were identified as priority populations in Region 9 by Council Members: migrant or seasonal workers, children of migrant or seasonal workers, children in families with refugee or asylum status, families who are students or faculty at UIUC, and families who do not have legal documented status in the United States. Unfortunately, there is limited or no data on these groups of individuals.

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.

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

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

Children Born to Underage Parents

In 2020, there were 147 children born to mothers aged 19 and under in the Region: 136 in Champaign, 11 in Ford. Underage parents are prioritized for enrollment in Prevention Initiative (PI) services and in Early Head Start (EHS). In Region 9, PI programs provide home visiting and EHS provides home visiting as well as center-based programming. PI and EHS programs both have support services to ensure these underage parents and their children access public health services and social services in their county, including offering transportation if necessary. Additionally, the Pregnancy Resource Center in Champaign County offers services to underage parents in Champaign County. Underage parents in Ford County can seek services from Brightpoint (formerly Children’s Home and Aid Society Illinois).

Children in Families Experiencing Homelessness

According to the Illinois State Board of Education, in Region 9, there were 37 Kindergarteners identified in 2020 (the most recent information available for children younger than six) as experiencing homelessness or who were unhoused across the Region. Thirty-six children were identified in Champaign County and one in Ford County. Services available for unhoused families in Ford County include Ford County Women’s Shelter, the Emergency and Homeless Prevention Services through Catholic Charities Ford County, Angel Services Illinois Homeless Outreach Care, and the Ford County Housing Authority.

In Champaign County, unhoused families can seek services through Champaign County Coordinated Entry-Centralized Intake for Homeless (CIH) Assessments, Champaign County Continuum of Service Providers to the Homeless, Champaign County Regional Planning Commission Homeless Services, C-U at Home, and Austin’s Place Women’s Shelter. In Region 9, the Champaign County Regional Planning Commission Workforce Development program also supports individuals seeking training and job placement.

Children in Families Experiencing Poverty or Deep Poverty

The Federal Poverty Level (FPL) is a measure of income level created by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that calculates the minimum amount of money needed by a family to cover their basic household needs, such as food, housing, utilities, and other necessities. In many cases, it is used to determine eligibility for programs and services. Someone living at or below 50% FPL is considered by state and federal agencies to be experiencing deep poverty, at or below 100% FPL is considered to be living at “the poverty line”, and at or below 200% FPL is considered to be experiencing poverty (Figure 2).

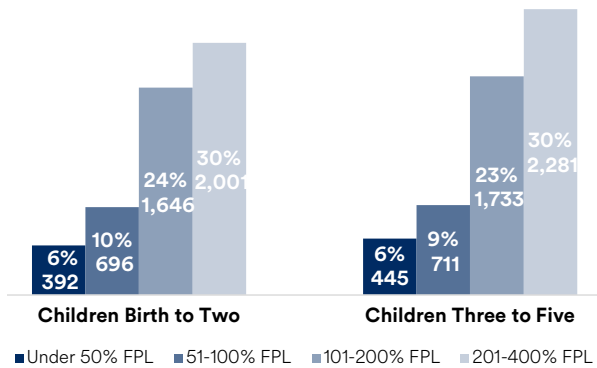
The Region has many children living at or below 200% FPL, qualifying many of them for Prevention Initiative, Preschool for All, and Preschool for All Expansion services (Figure 3). At 100% FPL and below, families are income-eligible for Head Start and Early Head Start. There are a total of 1,407 children younger than six in families with income at or below 100% FPL and 837 children in families with income at or below 50% FPL.

Figure 2: Federal Poverty Levels for a Family of Four

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

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

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

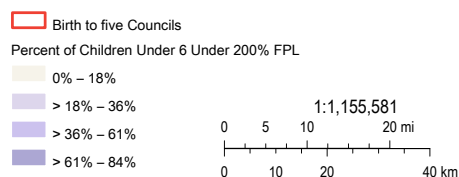
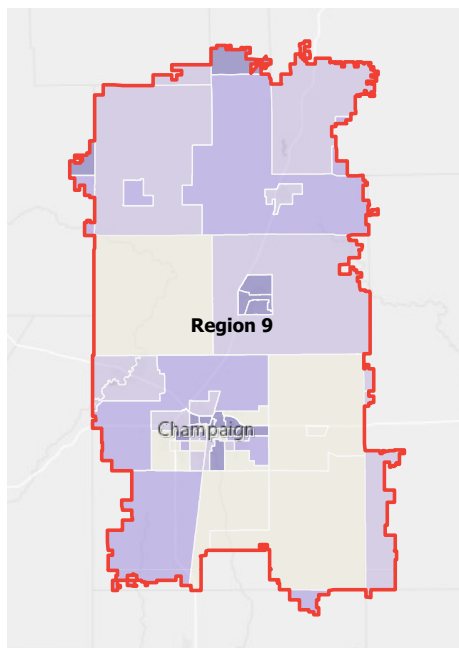


Source: U.S. Census
Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

Resources for families and children experiencing poverty and deep poverty in Region 9 include local food pantries, as well as employment and housing support.

The map (Figure 4) shows the density of the population of children birth to age five in households that live at or below 200% FPL. As the density of children increases, the color on the map darkens. The lightest areas of color (off-white) indicate that 18% of children in families in the area live at or below 200% FPL. The darkest areas of color (purple) indicate that 61 to 84% of children in families in the area living at or below 200% FPL. The villages of Rantoul and Savoy, and the city of Champaign have the highest number of children in families living at or below 200% FPL. In Ford County, at the northern edge of Region 9, there is also an area where a high number of children in families live at or below 200% FPL.

Figure 4: Location of Children with Family Income at or Below 200% FPL



Source: IECAM
Created By: Illinois Action for Children CS3

Children with Disabilities

According to the Erikson Risk and Reach Report³, there were 653 children under the age of six years in Champaign County, and 73 children under the age of 6 years in Ford County who had been assessed and identified as having a disability. Council members noted that these numbers do not include waitlisted children in the Region, and that the numbers per county would likely be much higher if they were to include the children on waitlists.

Services for children with a suspected or diagnosed delay or disability are available through publicly funded Early Childhood programs and local school district Early Childhood programs. Additionally, the Champaign County C-U Autism Network, and the Developmental Services Center provide support to children with a disability and their families in Champaign County. And the Champaign County Regional Planning Commission offers services to Champaign and Ford Counties through the Independent Services Coordination program.

“ I cannot think of one child care in Champaign that is good for children with Autism. Teachers need more training, not only teachers, but I have had meetings with directors and they also could use some training. I can’t tell you how many centers have kicked out my child due to “behavior”. They don’t know what to look for therefore they are of no help.

- Caregiver

³ <https://www.erikson.edu/applied-research/policy-leadership/early-childhood-data-reports/risk-reach-reports/>

Children with Welfare System Involvement

Children and families that are involved with the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), are those receiving intact family services, families with a parent who is a youth in care, or children in foster care. Compared to Ford County, there are many children from birth to age 18 in Champaign County who have been removed from their primary caregiver’s home and placed in substitute care. Of this number, the largest number of children were placed with foster parents. At a community event, foster parents noted that there were barriers to placing children in child care, such as the cost of enrolling them at a center and that they do not always have the necessary documents to enroll foster children in care.

“ I do not have my child’s birth certificate and the school is making it almost impossible to enroll him. They know I am a foster parent, and this is out of my control. This is so frustrating.

– Foster Parent ”

Figure 5: Number of Children in Substitute Care

County	Foster	Relative	Institution/Group Home	Other	Total
Champaign	224	208	34	23	489
Ford	16	19	0	0	35

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

Children in Families that Face Barriers Based on Culture, Language & Religion

The Region has seen a small decrease in households whose primary language is Spanish or another language since 2017. But, as of 2020, around 4% of the total households in the Region primarily speak Spanish or another language. Families in the Region whose primary language is not English are often here because one or both parents/caregivers are students or faculty at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) or are in the Region for employment such as migrant and seasonal workers. The languages spoken by these families include Spanish, but also include indigenous languages.

“ We need to look at including families in the area in the conversation rather than professionals. There are struggles with the duality of them knowing their native language due to how some language is translated. It is not always correct and that poses a problem, and we need to have a bigger conversation.

– Action Council Member ”

Due to student housing at UIUC, there is a concentration of individuals and families on campus in Champaign County who speak various languages other than English as their primary language. There is no information about concentrations of individuals/families who have Spanish as their primary language in either county within the Region.

Resources available in Region 9 to families who are not primary English speakers include the U of I Refugee Center, Immigration Project Inc, YMCA Welcoming Center, and Immigrant Services of Champaign-Urbana.

This information is important to understand who makes up the community in Region 9. This information can be used to enhance the allocation of grant funding, distribute funds according to local needs, and legislators could create policies that provide support based on the demographic needs of their communities.

Local Community Collaborations

A formal Local Community Collaboration is an important piece of the Early Childhood landscape and involves diverse organizations, agencies, and individuals from many sectors that meet on a regular basis to share information and resources, and act as a bridge between families and ECEC providers. Ultimately, Local Collaborations seek to strengthen community relationships. This is done through learning more about each other's programs and leveraging services for the betterment of the community. Region 9 has four formal Local Community Collaborations and many informal groups that meet to coordinate services and refer families to them.

The Champaign County Home Visiting Consortium is a group of representatives from eight Home Visiting programs whose mission is to build a system of care that supports expectant families and families with children birth to age five who face access and other barriers. The Consortium meets monthly to discuss openings, updates from programs, referrals, and professional development. They focus on increasing enrollment of children in Early Learning programs; provide developmental, social-emotional, hearing, and vision screenings; work with families to teach developmental activities; connect families to resources; help families transition to preschool; and support Kindergarten readiness.

The Kindergarten Readiness Goal Team serves children ages birth to five in Champaign County and has 42 members from all areas of Champaign County. The Local Collaboration provides a Coordinated Intake process to connect families more easily to resources and services and collaborate to provide developmental screenings for children in their service area. Furthermore, they have implemented a program to increase parent education, and offer Kindergarten Readiness summer camps to increase enrolment of children into Early Learning programs. The Kindergarten Readiness Goal Team also helps support the efforts of the Read, Talk, Play Every Day project, facilitated by the Champaign County United Way. The mission of the Kindergarten Readiness Goal Team is that every child will be ready to learn when they reach Kindergarten.

“ I am the parent of W and home visitors have had a very big impact on W. When she sees them walk through the door and she gets happy! They take time to help W but also help me. The therapy sessions and home visits are a blessing to me and my little family. We appreciate these ladies and admire them.

– Parent (Champaign County)



An inquisitive child and a smiling adult admiring tulips.

Additionally, there are two Local Interagency Councils (LICs) for Early Intervention (EI), one in Champaign County and one in Ford County. The LICs are a collaboration of families, community agencies, and Early Childhood providers that serve children birth to age three and their families, with a special focus on children with developmental delays. They coordinate, design, and implement the Child Find process, which locates children in need of development screenings and subsequent referrals to services. They recruit qualified providers to help meet the service needs of families, caregivers, and children, raise awareness about ECEC programs and provide support through family events, family support groups, and networking. They are responsible for coordinating all resources and services available within each local service area.

Ford County community members do not have the same level of support for families due to the lack of Collaborations serving this area. Another Collaboration in Ford County could offer more support for families seeking child care and education services, developmental screenings, and parent/family education. Additionally, more Local Collaborations in Ford County could help eliminate barriers such as impractical commute times, long waitlists, and ineligibility due to location of residence.

Some service providers in Ford County and Champaign County collaborate informally to better meet family needs. Some informal Collaborations providing support to community members in less connected areas of Region 9 are the Butterfly Project, Ford County Networking Group, Champaign Urbana Autism Network, and Driven to Reach Excellence and Academic Achievement for Males (DREAAM).

It is important that this information is captured to analyze the number and strength of collaborative efforts in the Region. This analysis should lead to a better understanding of where more collaboration would be important to meet the needs of the Region.

Early Childhood Education & Care (ECEC) Programs

Region 9 has a variety of ECEC services, with the majority located in Champaign County. Early Childhood care and services include publicly funded ECEC programs: Early Head Start, Head Start, Preschool for All, Preschool for All Expansion, Early Intervention, Prevention Initiative, and IDHS Home Visiting, as well as licensed and license-exempt center and home care.

An increase in the number of programs and/or in the capacity of the current programs would help address this need. A secondary challenge for delivering Early Childhood Special Education services is the shortage of qualified staff which is discussed in a later section entitled Workforce.

While programs and services are available throughout the Region, the heaviest concentrations are in Champaign County, in the cities of Champaign and Urbana, and a small number of programs concentrated in and around Rantoul (Figure 9). Throughout the rest of the Region, there are a limited number of ECEC programs. Two entities in Champaign County offer multiple publicly funded programs in their buildings: 1) Champaign County Regional Planning Commission Early Childhood Education Division (RPC) operates 12 types of programs in Champaign County in its five buildings; 2) Urbana School District #116 operates two types of programs in its Urbana Early Childhood Center.

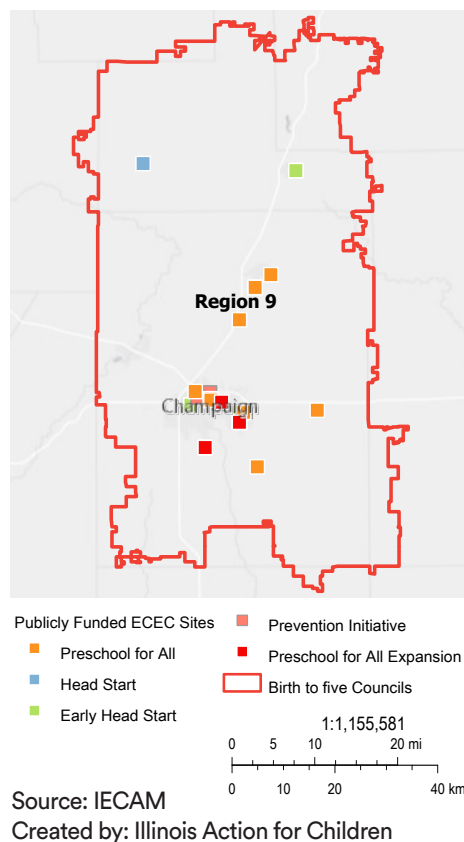
Early Head Start

The Administration for Children and Families grants funding to individual agencies to provide services to pregnant individuals and ECEC services to children younger than three years old. Early Head Start (EHS) programming can be center-based, home visiting, or in family child care homes and operate year-round. A child with a disability is provided services consistent with their Individual Family Services Plan (IFSP). Through family support staff, EHS programs also offer child health and family development services as well as family engagement opportunities. At least 90 percent of an Early Head Start program's enrollment must be families who have income at or below 100% FPL. Families receiving TANF, SNAP, or SSI; unhoused families; and foster children are automatically eligible.

Early Head Start in Champaign County is administered by the Champaign County Regional Planning Commission. This agency offers a continuum of programming to match services to family needs as they change over time from prenatal services to home visiting to center-based or family child care home services. The capacity for EHS services in Champaign County is 231 enrolled children plus pregnant individuals. Early Head Start in Ford County is administered by an interim agency, CDI Management. This home-visiting program has a capacity for 11 enrollments.

The disparity between the two counties arises from various factors but is primarily due to the difference in population density.

Figure 6: Location of Publicly Funded ECEC Programs⁴



⁴Note: Locations with more than one publicly funded program only show one program. To filter the map by program type, please visit <https://iecamregionalreports.education.illinois.edu/dash-snapshot-report/landing>, choose Birth to Five Illinois Region 9, and go to the Early Care and Education tab.

Head Start

The Administration for Children and Families grants funding to individual agencies to provide child development and health services to children three years to Kindergarten entry age and family support services. Children receive developmental screenings and referrals for full evaluation when warranted. Teaching staff conduct ongoing assessments to monitor children's progress. Child and family mental health and dental services are also available. Many Head Start programs operate part-day classrooms, four days a week, or six-hour classrooms, five days a week. By using funding from multiple sources, some Head Start programs operate full working-day classrooms year-round for children of working parents. Any child with a disability is provided services consistent with their Individualized Education Plan (IEP). At least 90% of a Head Start program's enrollment must be families who have income at or below 100% FPL. Families receiving TANF, SNAP, or SSI; unhoused families; and foster children are automatically eligible.

Head Start in Champaign County is administered by the Champaign County Regional Planning Commission. This agency offers a continuum of programming to match services to family needs as they change over time from home visiting to center-based services or family child care home services. Head Start in Ford County is administered by an interim agency, CDI Management. This program serves children at two centers with 7-hour sessions, Monday through Friday. Children receive developmental screenings and referrals for full evaluation when warranted. Teaching staff conduct ongoing assessments to monitor children's progress. Child and family mental health and dental services are also supported.

There is a significant difference between the options for Head Start services available to families in Champaign County and the options available to families in Ford County primarily due to the difference in the population density of the two counties and the difference in the level of infrastructure of the two agencies operating their respective Head Start program.

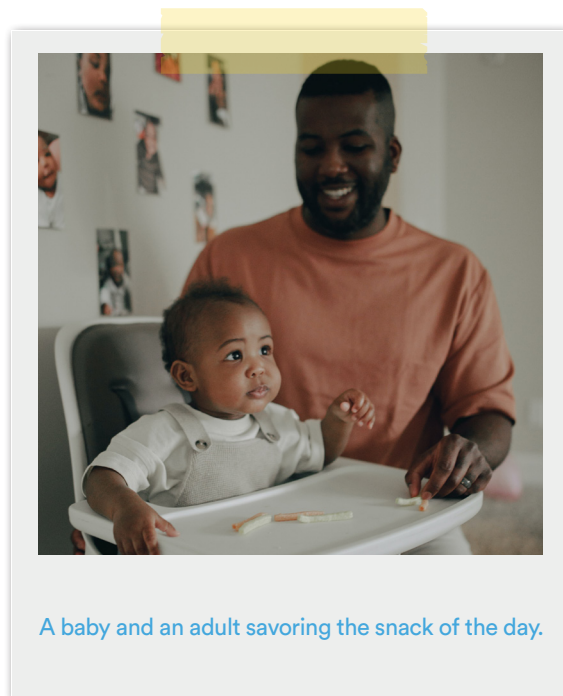
Preschool for All & Preschool for All Expansion

Preschool for All (PFA) and Preschool for All Expansion (PFA-E) are funded by ISBE to provide ECEC services to children three years to Kindergarten entry age. PFA programs operate part-day classrooms during the school year. PFA-E programs operate six hours per session during the school year. Any child with a disability is provided services consistent with their IEP. These programs also offer family involvement opportunities for parents.

To be eligible for PFA or PFA-E services, children must be identified (via a research-based developmental screening tool), as those who face barriers to academic success. Additionally, the child or family must meet at least two locally identified eligibility criteria. Family income must be at or below 200% of the federal poverty level (FPL). IECAM data lists the capacity for PFA and PFA-E enrollments for 2021 as 1,393.

Early Intervention

Early Intervention (EI) is a state system that provides various supports and services for families to help their children under age three meet developmental milestones. EI services include evaluation to determine if a child has a delay/disability, development of an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) for any child with a delay/disability, service coordination, and supports such as therapy services.



A baby and an adult savoring the snack of the day.

Funding for EI comes from the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS). Families with income above 185% FPL pay a fee on a sliding scale for direct services like physical, developmental, and speech therapy. To be eligible for EI services, a child must have a developmental delay identified through a research-based evaluation of 30% or more or be “at risk” of substantial developmental delay because of specific risk factors defined by Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). IECAM reports that 246 children in Champaign County and 14 children in Ford County received Early Intervention services during 2022.

“ Many services of support seem stagnated. Community engagement is critical in supporting the sufficiency of Early Childhood Care and Education services and supports.

– Community Member ”

Prevention Initiative

Prevention Initiative (PI) programs are funded by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) and provide intensive, research-based, comprehensive child development family support and engagement services for expectant individuals and families with children from birth to age three. Typically, PI funds are awarded to school districts and social service agencies that offer services in a center-based and/or home visiting settings. According to the Illinois Early Childhood Asset Map (IECAM), there were four PI programs in Champaign County with a total of 320 enrolled children and pregnant families. There were no PI programs in Ford County.

IDHS Home Visiting

The Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) Home Visiting Program supports pregnant people and parents/caregivers with young children from birth to age five by funding local home visiting agencies. These services are for families who live in communities that face greater risks and barriers to achieving positive maternal and child health outcomes. Providers must follow the eligibility requirements of their chosen research-based program model. Agencies must also prioritize eligible families based on eligibility criteria. IECAM reports that in 2022 there were 32 families enrolled for IDHS Home Visiting services in Champaign County and none in Ford County.

Early Childhood Special Education

The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) administers Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) services for children ages three to five provided through local school districts and special education cooperatives. ECSE professionals and related service personnel provide specialized educational and therapy services in a variety of settings to children with disabilities.

School districts in Illinois receive local (property taxes), state (appropriated by state legislature), and federal (appropriated by Congress) funds to support special education services.

To receive special education services, a child must qualify in one of 14 categories defined in IDEA using age-appropriate assessments. School district staff assess a child suspected of having a disability. The capacity for Early Childhood Special Education is unlimited because services must be provided to every child 3-5 years old who has a disability.

Child Care Centers & Family Child Care Homes

In addition to publicly funded programs, families have the option of utilizing licensed and license-exempt centers and homes. Community members shared that child care is limited in the rural areas of the Region. There is a concentration of child care services in the population centers where more children live. This means that many families do not have child care within proximity to where they live or work.

Figure 7: Number of Sites, Capacity of Licensed and License-Exempt Providers

Provider Type	Number of Sites	Capacity
Licensed Child Care Center	39	3,972
Licensed Family Care Home	180	1,764
License Exempt Care Center	14	942

Source: IECAM

Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

Child Care Assistance Program

The Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) and local Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agencies work together to provide families with the information and resources they need to find and select the best child care for their child. CCAP can be used by eligible families to help pay child care fees in a licensed child care center, a license-exempt child care center, a licensed family child care home, and in other license-exempt care settings such as a friend or relative providers.

In 2020, the most current information available, 2,272 children in the Region were receiving child care services through family enrollment in CCAP in 439 child care settings. Many child care providers and community social services programs refer families for CCAP services when identifying a family's need for child care. The child care slot gap is discussed in the following section.

Insights from the available data shared by Council members suggest that Region 9 requires more funding for both private and public ECEC services and service providers. Ford County has no Prevention Initiative programs and limited Head Start and Early Head Start programming. The number of child care providers in the rural areas of both Champaign and Ford Counties is limited. Council members emphasized that expanding ECEC services/service providers depends on finding and maintaining qualified staff. Community members stated if policymakers and funding sources have a better understanding of the ECEC landscape in Region 9, they would support families and ECEC providers as they deserve.

“Parents have to find child care and there is not a lot to offer in rural areas.”
– Family Council Member

Slot Gap

Slot Gap is a term used to describe the difference between the number of children who might need child care and the capacity (or slots) across child care options. There were two slot gaps that were identified for this report: the publicly funded program slot gap, which measures the number of slots in publicly funded programs against the number of children living at or below 200% FPL; and, the overall child care capacity slot gap, which measures the capacity of all licensed child care, licensed family home care, and license-exempt child care centers against the total number of children ages five and under in the Region

Publicly Funded Programs

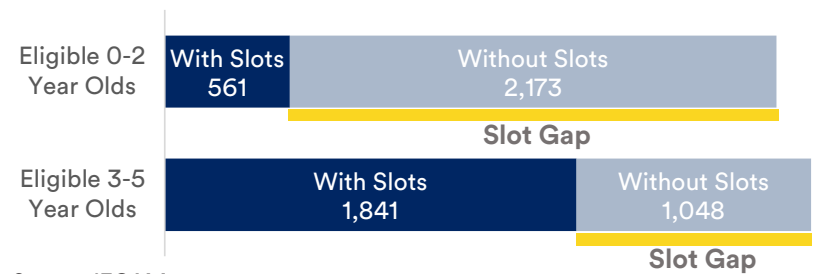
The first type of slot gap to consider is in publicly funded programs, such as Early Head Start, Head Start, Preschool for All, Preschool for All Expansion, and Prevention Initiative. Enrollment eligibility is determined by several factors, but income is a key measure commonly used to determine eligibility for enrollment. Early Head Start and Head Start use an income threshold of 100% FPL; and Preschool for All, Preschool for All Expansion, and Prevention Initiative use an income threshold of 200% FPL.

In Region 9, most income-eligible children from birth through two years are unable to enroll in publicly funded services due to a slot gap in services; for three- to five-year-olds, that slot gap is smaller but still significant (Figure 8).

Community members reported that the publicly available capacity data for ECEC services are missing some home visiting programs because their agency’s primary office is in other Regions. This includes agencies like Baby Fold, Brightpoint (formerly Children’s Home and Aid), and Healthy Beginnings through Carle Hospital. In Ford County, the Jumpstart program through Easter Seals is excluded from Region 9 publicly available data because their address is in Joliet. However, the number of enrollments provided by these programs in Region 9 does not make a significant change in the overall slot gap for birth to two services.

The lack of ECEC services for this Region was impacted by the closing or reduction of services in the last three years. Community members noted that the most recent data collection was 2021. They shared that during 2022 and to date, many classrooms were closed due to staff shortages and increased operating expenses. For example, the Savoy Head Start Center, which serves children ages three to five, closed during 2022 due to the shortage of staff, which increased the slot gap for three- to five-year-olds in the Region to 1,205.

Figure 8: Publicly Funded Early Childhood Education and Care Slot Gap



Source: IECAM
Created by: Illinois Action for Children

“ I think the closure of Head Start is detrimental to children who have developmental delays. If you take away Head Start you take away the early screenings which are so needed and the waiting lists for most centers are really long. This is not only harming the child but also the families because parents cannot work if they don’t have care for their child. ”

– Family Council Member

Child Care Services Slot Gap

The second slot gap to consider is the gap in the number of slots available in licensed and license-exempt child care centers and homes. The majority of the 14,238 children in the Region under the age of 6 do not have a slot, if their families wished to enroll them in a licensed or license-exempt child care centers or homes (Figure 9).

This does not serve a full picture of child care in the Region, however. Some of the children listed without slots are enrolled in a publicly funded program, meaning that they do not need a slot in a licensed or license-exempt program.

The Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) is available for income-eligible families who need child care to work. Most, if not all, child care programs in Region 9 accept the CCAP voucher that pays a portion of the child care services fee. In 2020, there were 5,183 children from birth to five who were income eligible for CCAP.

Knowing the data and understanding why there are slot gaps is important to be able to address the needs of children and families in Region 9. Community members identified the most pressing factor driving this slot gap in Region 9 is that federal and state funding needs to provide more slots for the number of children who are eligible for publicly funded services.

Figure 9: Child Care Capacity Slot Gap



Source: IECAM
Created by: Illinois Action for Children



From left to right: Nicole Kitchens, Caitlyn Scarbro, Brenda Eastham, Kelly Russell, Rachel Charters, Jackie Charles, and Tyler Reynolds.

Without universal access to ECEC services, it is likely that not every child would have a developmental screening prior to entering Kindergarten. Greater access to ECEC services would also increase the percentage of children entering Kindergarten who are identified as ready for their first public school experience. Regarding the calculated slot gap of 7,762 for child care services, even though not all families need or want child care, the option to enroll in these services is critical to family economic stability and equity.

Early Childhood Education & Care (ECEC) Workforce

The ECEC workforce is comprised of passionate people dedicated to enriching the lives of young children in Champaign and Ford counties. However, feedback from community and Council members said that finding and retaining Early Childhood professionals has been and continues to be a challenge for programs throughout the Region due in large part to educational and training requirements and low pay.

Among the Region 9 ECEC programs, the educational and credential requirements vary depending on the type of program. Minimum qualifications for directors and teaching staff in licensed centers and for family child care, and home providers, are set by the Illinois Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS). In publicly funded programs, the funding source sets the minimum qualifications for a center director and all teaching staff, including home visitors and family child care providers. Programs can require greater qualifications than DCFS or its funding source. No matter the type of program or the funding source, all staff in a program must pass a background check and ECEC staff must also obtain at least 15 hours of professional development annually (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Child Care Positions and the Minimum Requirements

Position	Minimum Requirements
Licensed Center Director	60 college credit hours
Licensed Center Teacher	60 college credit hours
Head Start Center Director	Gateway Credential level 4; 60 college credit hours
Head Start Teacher	Associate's degree
PFA/PFA-E Director	Bachelor's degree; PEL Admin
PFA/PFA-E Teacher	Bachelor's degree; PEL ECEC
Licensed Family Child Care Provider	High school diploma; 6 hours training

Source: IECAM

Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

One resource for development of the ECEC workforce is the Illinois Gateways to Opportunity (also known simply as Gateways), a statewide professional development support system. Gateways provides guidance and support to individuals and programs serving children, youth, and families, and offers a credentialing process for ECEC Center Directors and staff.

The Child Care Resource Service (CCRS) offers training to potential and current ECEC staff and providers.⁵ Parkland Community College currently offers an associate degree in applied arts in Early Childhood Education program in Region 9. CCRS trainings and Parkland ECEC courses align with the Gateways to Opportunities credentialing process.⁶ Another resource for the ECEC workforce is the Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity (ECACE). ECACE provides scholarships to help support individuals going back to school to earn a credential, an associate degree, and/or a bachelor's degree.⁷

⁵ <https://ccrs.illinois.edu/>

⁶ <https://www.parkland.edu/Main/Academics/Departments/Arts-Media-Social-Sciences/Areas-of-Study/Social-Sciences/Early-Childhood-Education>

⁷ <https://www.ecace.org/Higher-Education-Navigators.html>

The Champaign County Regional Planning Commission (CCRPC) provides support for workforce development throughout the Region. The CCRPC supports job seekers including a job club, career counseling, and finding help to pay for industry-recognized credentials. There are also supports for employers including on-the-job training, job postings, and incumbent worker training.⁸

While the Region 9 ECEC workforce demonstrates many strengths in numerous ways, community members expressed challenges that are facing the workforce and their employers. These challenges impact ECEC quality and accessibility in the Region. The feedback expressed by community members included:

- A lack of racial, ethnic, and gender diversity among Region 9 ECEC staff.
- A need to increase effective training of staff to support diverse students.
- A need to hire and retain qualified staff.
- Acknowledging the impact of staff shortages on the availability of services.

Across the Region, most licensed Center Directors and center teaching staff self-identify as white (Figure 11). However, a large number of licensed family child care providers identify as Black or African American. In general, the racial and ethnic identities of the Region’s teaching staff correspond with the racial and ethnic identities of children birth to five years. Families whose primary language is not English, or who do not self-identify as white, shared their preference for program staff who align with their linguistic, cultural, racial, and/or ethnic identities.

Figure 11: Region 9 Workforce and Children by Race/Ethnicity

	White	Hispanic or Latine	Black or African American	Asian	Multi-Racial	Other
Licensed Center Directors	89%	1%	8%	1%	0%	1%
Licensed Center Teaching Staff	67%	8%	17%	3%	4%	1%
Licensed FCC Providers	50%	8%	37%	0%	4%	1%
Children Age Birth to Five	54%	11%	19%	7%	8%	1%

Source: INCCRRA, IECAM
 Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

Additionally, community members shared their frustration with the lack of gender diversity and cultural competency in classrooms. Specifically, there are typically no male teachers in a center, or at best only one or two, male teachers even if the center has several classrooms. Community members also stated there is a lack of representation of Black men and members of the LGBTQIA+ community in teaching staff. A provider shared that in his ECEC bachelor’s degree program, he is the only Black student out of more than 60 students and professors in the program. A community member emphasized the importance of representation in the workforce for students of all races, ethnicities, and backgrounds.

Most publicly funded programs operate inclusive classrooms with a mix of children without a disability and children with a disability – a best-practice strategy. Children with a disability receive therapy services defined in their Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for a specific amount of time each week from a therapist, typically not a classroom teacher, licensed to provide therapy services. However, a high-quality approach to the inclusion of children with a disability may not be what all children receive. A Council member stressed that in her experience there is inadequate support for and understanding of children with developmental disabilities.

⁸ <https://ccrpc.org/programs/workforce-development/>

Community members stated the COVID-19 pandemic uncovered issues and exacerbated them and these issues are still in play. For example, teachers are encountering a greater number of students who need extraordinary amounts of one-on-one attention due to their challenging behavior, loss of learning time, and/or mental health issues when in an ECEC setting.

Additionally, community members noted that during the COVID-19 pandemic the ECEC teacher shortage reached crisis levels, highlighting existing problems in Early Childhood Education. For instance, Champaign County has only one physical therapist to serve children who qualify for EI services. There are two components to this staff shortage: staff who have left the ECEC field and a lack of qualified applicants to take their place or fill new positions. A common reason staff cited as to why they left the ECEC field is the low wages and little to no benefits offered with the position. Typically, child care centers and family child care homes offer the lowest wages (Figure 11). In Champaign County, the median salary for all child care professionals is \$27,040⁹; in Ford County, the median salary for all child care professionals is \$29,681.¹⁰

“ Teachers should be seen as second-hand parents to children and think about their wellbeing and needs with the same lens.
– Early Childhood Education Student ”

Figure 12: Median Child Care Center Hourly Wages by Position

	Champaign	Ford ¹¹
Administrative Director	\$17.79	-
Director/Teacher	\$14.84	-
Teacher	\$14.00	-
Assistant Teacher	\$11.50	\$10.75
School-Age Worker	\$11.50	-
School-Age Assistant	\$11.25	-

Source: INCCRRA
Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

Figure 13: Percentage of Child Care Staff Receiving Benefits by County¹²

	Champaign	Ford
Health Insurance	46%	67%
Dental Insurance	39%	67%
Paid Sick Leave	92%	100%
Life Insurance	50%	50%
Pension/Retirement	46%	67%
School-Age Assistant	\$11.25	-

Source: INCCRRA
Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

⁹ https://www.inccrra.org/images/SDA_Profiles/DR4522-SDA-10.pdf

¹⁰ https://www.inccrra.org/images/SDA_Profiles/DR4522-SDA-9.pdf

¹¹ Note: There were only enough respondents to report Assistant Teacher hourly wages for Ford County.

¹² Note: Percentages based on survey respondents, but may not be representative of all child care sites in either county.

Another reason staff have left the field is burnout. Early Childhood professionals in the Region shared that staffing shortages are elevating the symptoms of burnout in the remaining staff. While workers reported children needing more emotional and behavioral support from staff than prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, other responsibilities such as planning, documentation, and child assessments have not been reduced. As individuals leave the Early Childhood field, the remaining staff experience even greater stress and workload.

Another factor that has driven staff shortages is the issue of staff education requirements versus staff experience. Community members said that credentialing and degree requirements are necessary for improving and maintaining knowledge, but they can also serve as barriers to hiring teachers who have necessary skills obtained via experience in the ECE field.

“

We want to grow our program, but we cannot. I want to speak about teachers, I have interviewed a lot of teachers and some of them were really good, they had all the passion and knowledge about this business. They are who I want in my program, but my hands are tied when it comes to hiring them because they lack a college degree and or even college credits.

– Pre-K Director

”

Due to a shortage of staff in the ECEC field, community members feel that the process for obtaining services for their children has become more difficult in the past three years. A community member shared that she was on a waiting list for her child to receive child care services for over a year. The shortage of staff leads to programs closing classrooms, an entire center, which results in less capacity, leaving waitlists will be longer.

ECEC providers and Action Council members believe a better understanding of the workforce in Region 9 will make obvious the need for more funding for both private and public ECEC services and service providers to ensure enough qualified staff and providers.

Parent/Family/Caregiver Voice

Community members stated that ECEC options for their children are limited and costly. Parents and caregivers have shared with their providers that they need access to full-day infant, toddler, and pre-K care. Further, there is a need in the community for child care and education programs for parents and families who work second and third-shift jobs. Parents/caregivers expressed that the current child care system does not take into consideration their work schedules.

Figure 14: Percentage of Parents Working by County in Region 9

County	Single Parent- Mother	Single Parent-Father	Two Parents
Champaign	29%	7%	65%
Ford	27%	6%	67%

Source: IECAM
Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

Figure 14 depicts the percentage of working parents/caregivers, emphasizing the importance of ensuring numerous and varied child care settings that fit the needs of parents and families.

The slot gaps in Early Child Care and Education emphasize a lack of capacity for children who are eligible for services in Region 9. Community members identified other factors affecting the accessibility of services: family income, transportation, language barriers, and family cultural preferences.

Family Income

Input from community members indicates that expenses such as rent, utilities, and food are increasing. Parents feel the burden of multiple factors putting pressure on their ability to pay for child care services. Caregivers expressed the difficult decisions they must make when cutting costs to be able to meet basic needs due to the cost of living and child care expenses. It is important to note that while earning an income that falls at or below 200% is a barrier to accessing child care services, demonstrating a monetary need is a requirement for publicly funded ECEC programs.

“Parents’ experiences with access to Early Childhood Care and Education can vary widely depending on factors such as their income, location, and the availability of programs in their area. For example, families on a fixed income may have limited access to high-quality Early Childhood education programs, while families living in rural areas may have difficulty finding available programs that are close to home.

– Action Council Member

”

“If parents want to start care services while waiting for CCAP approval, they have to find a way to pay for care. Most parents are not in a financial position to cover the cost, therefore, they had to wait weeks for approval to begin services. A parent expressed her frustration that she and her husband did not qualify for CCAP because they made just above the federal poverty line and could not pay for services without the assistance of CCAP.

– Community Member (Champaign County)

”

A community member shared that the lag time between submitting an application and approval for CCAP services is often problematic for families. Due to the lag time, families are essentially forced to find other ways to pay for child care until they receive CCAP approval, and they cannot work unless they have child care. Parents also took issue being denied CCAP approval because they were minimally over income for the program's income guidelines.

Transportation

Transportation is an obstacle for families wanting to engage in child care services when there is limited or no access to public or private transportation. Many families in Region 9, especially in the more rural areas, have limited to no transportation options which is a barrier to engaging their children in Early Childhood care services. This is prevalent in Ford County and more rural areas of Champaign County due to insufficient public transportation services and a shortage of transportation workers. The only public transportation service in Ford County, Show Bus, is currently suffering from staff shortages. Transportation options in Champaign County include the Mass Transit District, Uber, Lyft, and Arrow Taxi Service.

Language Barriers

Community members stated there are limited language services for parents/caregivers who speak a language other than English in the home. This can contribute to a lower quality of care for children due to teachers or providers not being able to communicate with children and their parents. Furthermore, parents/caregivers then have difficulty supporting their children in learning English.

There are no language support services offered in Ford County. Language support services in Champaign County for adults include Parkland Community College, First Presbyterian Church of Champaign, International Hospitality Committee English Classes, Saint Andrew's Campus Center, International Women's Connection of Champaign-Urbana, Urbana Adult Education Center, Intensive English Institute, the English Center, and the Wesley Foundation. These support services often require payment and/or an application to enroll in classes which can deter parents/caregivers from utilizing services.

“ There is a huge need for bilingual teachers. Language is a growing concern for our community. We must build trust with families and that is difficult with a language barrier.

– Pre-K Director for Rantoul City School District



Two adults holding an ecstatic child by the arms.

“ We don't even have Uber or a bus service here, or even a cab! It can be hard to even transport children from one town to the next, especially in rural areas, for child care.

– Family Member (Ford County)

“ Transportation is a huge barrier when it comes to getting our children to school. I heard that transportation might no longer be available for children in certain Early Head Start programs. If this is true, it would be a big barrier for my family and other parents.

– Mother (Champaign County)

Family Cultural Preferences

Community members specifically call out the need for more widespread accessibility and distribution of materials and services in the growing number of languages spoken across the Region. Representation of the diverse children that receive education and care in Region 9 is very important to parents/caregivers. Cultural competency in ECEC programs plays an important role in appropriately meeting the needs of children by valuing the representation of their home life in the materials and activities they are using to learn. Parents who do not see their lived culture represented and respected in an Early Childhood program will seek services elsewhere or disengage from services entirely. Caregivers and community members shared that in their experience there is a need for more inclusive teaching curriculums, classroom materials, and ongoing diversity, equity, and inclusion training for teaching staff to provide quality and inclusive care.

“

We need more parent representation that also reflects the various ethnicities and cultures as well as the languages we serve.

– Action Council Member

”

“

This is a problem in our community for working families. There are little to no home child care spots. Families are having to rely on the kindness of friends and family members to watch their children so they can work. I am helping my friend now by watching her grandson, but I am old myself and sometimes it is hard for me to come over and watch him. He has a lot of energy. We need more spots for families.

– Action Council Member

”

Impact of Barriers on Parents, Caregivers & Families

A symptom of the barriers to child care accessibility are waitlists. Community members shared that in their experience, wait lists, especially for the care of infants and toddlers, are very long. Another child care accessibility issue is the lack of second and third-shift care.

Community members shared that there is no formal, public mechanism for families to learn about the various ECEC programs and services available in Region 9. Families typically learn about resources through word-of-mouth. Programs and services are historically presented to them as initiatives and are often short-lived. Therefore, this has fostered a sense of mistrust in the community as well as a deficit in general understanding and awareness of available programs and services. Community members shared that families who are initially found ineligible for services are often under the assumption that they cannot access any future services and are reluctant to reach out again for help once rejected.

Regional Strengths & Needs

Through Action and Council meetings, community listening sessions, focus groups, interviews, and surveys, qualitative data was collected about the Early Childhood landscape, and strengths and needs were identified.

Strengths

Early Childhood Services

- Two Head Start/Early Head Start agencies with a variety of program options including full-working-day classrooms for families who need child care services.
- Local CCR&R, connecting families to more than 600 licensed and license-exempt centers and family child care homes and supporting ECEC providers.
- Spanish language programs for families, such as the C-U Early play groups.
- Local groups such as the United Way and the Champaign County Home Visiting Consortium that are supporting families in becoming Kindergarten ready.
- The Kindergarten Readiness Goal Team, a collaborative effort to leverage member programs working together on Coordinated Intake, developmental screenings, parent education, and community awareness about early learning programs.
- Champaign and Ford Counties' LICs with Child Find, public awareness activities, and a network of Early Intervention providers.
- Brightpoint (formerly Children's Home and Aid), with pregnancy resources and doula services, child welfare services, and counseling programs.
- The Butterfly Project, an initiative through Brightpoint, specifically for children and families exposed to violence in Ford County.
- The Crisis Nursery, an emergency-based child care facility in Champaign County
- Easter Seals, an Early Intervention home visiting service in Ford County.
- Developmental Services Center, with case management, family support, and family development services for children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities.
- Lighthouse Autism Center, with center-based applied behavior analysis therapy services to children diagnosed with Autism in Champaign County.

Health & Wellness

- Carle Hospital and Order of Saint Francis Hospital, with mobile units to administer preventative health services (i.e., immunizations, pre-screenings, physicals).
- Gibson Area Hospital, the only hospital in Ford County.
- Ford and Champaign Counties' Public Health Departments, with various community outreach activities such as community health events and resource fairs.
- Community Resource and Counseling Center, the only mental health services serving children and adults in Ford County.

Cultural, Linguistic, Racial & Ethnic Diversity

- The University of Illinois-Urbana-Champaign, with the country's largest group of international students.
- Region 9's East Central location in the State, bringing in diverse job applicants from Eastern Illinois University, Southern Illinois University, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

Economy & Workforce

- Champaign County Regional Planning Commission (CCRPC), with its workforce. development program, mobile workforce center, Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, Homeless Prevention Rent Assistance, among other related programs offered to serve community members of the county.
- Parkland College's ready-to-work programs.
- Developmental Services Center, with residential and employment services for adults diagnosed with an intellectual or developmental disability.

Community Resources

- The Carter Foundation, a scholarship and programming foundation for youth, offers after-school academic assistance for children K-8th grade living in the Village of Rantoul in Champaign County.
- Chambana Moms Facebook page, advertising local support services in Champaign County.
- Libraries, in both rural and urban communities across the Region.
- Champaign Church of the Brethren, Community Service Center of Northern Champaign County, Cultivadores Pantry, Daily Bread Soup Kitchen, Faith Baptist Church and other churches, and local businesses offering food assistance in Champaign County.
- Gibson City food bank and Paxton food bank in Ford County.
- Local Park Districts in Champaign and Ford Counties.

Needs

Early Childhood Services

- Second and third-shift child care in multiple types of settings.
- Additional providers, especially physical therapists, for birth-to-three services.
- Additional infant and toddler child care slots, especially in rural areas of Region 9
- Affordable infant and toddler care.
- Affordable full-day child care for preschool-aged children.
- More ECEC therapists and specialists who speak a language other than English.
- More agencies that accept Medicaid so families can access therapy services, especially for children birth to age three.
- More affordable, higher quality, and easily accessible options for child care services
- More readily available information on the importance of quality Early Childhood. experiences for every child and Early Intervention for children with a delay/disability
- A larger pool of qualified ECEC workers.

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

- More diverse workforce.
- Mental health services available in Spanish and other languages.
- More translators, specifically for French, Vietnamese, Chinese, and Q'anjob'al languages.

Health & Wellness

- Additional mental health services for children ages three to five.

Economy & Workforce

- Competitive wages and benefits for ECEC staff.
- Strategies to increase and sustain the ECEC candidate pool .
- Recruitment and retention of staff through incentives, raises, and professional development.
- Additional affordable housing.

Community Resources

- Additional public transportation services in Ford County and rural Champaign County.
- More widely available information about ECEC services with community outreach efforts.

Recommendations

After reviewing quantitative and qualitative data, as well as identifying strengths and needs for the Region, recommendations were developed in three main areas: programming, workforce, and support programs, and priority areas were identified.

Early Childhood Education & Care Services

- Broaden and increase the availability of services with an emphasis on maintaining equitable options for marginalized groups, especially in Ford County and particularly for children birth to age three.
- Increase the capacity of family child care homes to provide 2nd and 3rd shift care.
- Campaign for employer participation in subsidizing a portion of the cost of its employees' 2nd and 3rd shift child care.
- Campaign for more private insurance companies to cover therapy services.

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

- Intentional outreach to provide individuals with information about the need for diversity in the ECEC workforce.
- Develop more training and resources on DEI and cultural competencies for the ECEC workforce.
- Increase outreach strategies to marginalized populations to make services more readily accessible.
- Expand the pool of interpreters and translators who speak the language of families in the Region.

Health & Wellness

- Increase parent education on mental health to better support young children through use of various parent engagement strategies to encourage participation in these trainings.
- Increase accessibility and affordability of mental health services for families.

Economy & ECEC Workforce

- Use incentives, competitive wages, and professional development to recruit and retain ECEC workers.
- Advocate for policies that promote a work-life balance throughout the ECEC landscape of programs and service providers.
- Develop incentivizes to encourage individuals to obtain education or credentials in ECEC to fill staffing shortages.
- Increase the number of housing vouchers for Region 9 community members so parents/caregivers are better able to pay for child care.
- Convene stakeholders to strategize workforce solutions to increase the candidate pool of ECEC-trained individuals, including current employees adding to their qualifications.
- Convene stakeholders to create a Collaboration focused on providing public transit system in areas other than municipalities in Region 9.

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

Appendices

Appendix A: References

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Appendix B: Additional Figures

Figure 1: Number and Percentage of Families, Children Utilizing Income Assistance

County	Overall Risk	Number of families in county	Percentage of children in county	Percentage of children in state
Champaign	Low	3	4%	25%
Ford	High-Moderate	250	19%	25%

Source: Erikson Institute, 2019
Created by: Erikson Institute

Figure 2 shows the number and percent of income-eligible children ages birth to four receiving Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program benefits.

Figure 2: Number and Percentage of Children Ages Birth to Four Utilizing WIC

County	Overall Risk	Number of children in county	Percentage of children in county	Percentage of children in state
Champaign	Low-Moderate	2226	51%	60%
Ford	Low-Moderate	152	54%	60%

Source: Erikson Institute, 2019
Created by: Erikson Institute

Figure 3 shows income eligibility defined as children living below 165% FPL, which is the SNAP income eligibility threshold in Illinois.

Figure 3: Number and Percentage of Children at or Below 165% FPL Utilizing Food Assistance

County	Overall Risk	Number of children in county	Percentage of children in county	Percentage of children in state
Champaign	High	4,432	97%	87%
Ford	Low-Moderate	252	74%	87%

Source: Erikson Institute, 2019
Created by: Erikson Institute

Appendix C: Focus Group and Interview Questions

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

Parents, Families, and Caregivers

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

Early Childhood Professionals and Others

1. What challenges do you think families have in accessing Early Childhood Education and Care programs and services?
2. What programs do you know of in the Region that serve children birth through age five and their families?
3. What services don't currently exist in your community and/or this Region for young children and/or their families that you would like to see?
4. What data do you think would be helpful in better understanding how priority populations access Early Childhood care and services, or the barriers/challenges they have accessing care and services?
5. Is child care readily available and close to employers in your community?
6. What accommodations has your business or company made for professionals with young children? How have these accommodations impacted your business or company?
7. Have you connected with child care providers in the community to build relationships and build relationships with partners to provide the care you need for employees?
8. Have you been put on a waiting list for child care services? What was that experience like? What kind of challenges did your family face due to being placed on a waiting list?
9. Do you know of any programs that support children ages birth to five from recent refugee/immigrant families or families who are unhoused/experiencing homelessness? If so, what are those?
10. What programs do you know of in the region that serves children birth to five? What programs have closed over the past two years?

Appendix D: Additional Resources

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

1. Champaign County Regional Planning Commission Annual Report (2022)
[Annual Report 2022 \(ccrpc.org\)](https://www.ccrpc.org/annual-report-2022)
2. Child Care Resource Service Annual Report (2021)
[PowerPoint Presentation \(illinois.edu\)](https://www.illinois.edu/child-care-resource-service/annual-report-2021)

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