

Region 1-B-C Discussion Notes

Cook South

General Comments

- Attendees thought the area was above the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), except for Harvey. The amount of children below FPL shocked some attendees.
- Attendees were surprised by the ethnicity of this area. There is almost the same percentage of African American and White residents.
- There is an opportunity to offer more bilingual services for children in the region.
- South and East parts of the region have a higher number of people living below FPL.
- Children do not have the resources that they need to flourish and thrive. “We need to do better”.
- There was surprise that the percentage of children in south suburbs that were not prepared for kindergarten was higher than that of all of Illinois.
- Gaps in areas where no programs were represented in certain areas on the map. In the northwestern and southeastern portions of the area, there are gaps in programs.
- There are not as many Early Head Start (EHS) programs as expected.
- Who is serving the children that are not in these slots? There is a huge gap between the number of children and the number of available slots.
- There needs to be flexibility in guidelines to increase EHS enrollment.
- The map area near Orland/Tinley has a lot of Forest Preserve (which may explain the lack of services available).
- This is data prior to COVID. There is interest in how COVID has impacted the data that was shared.
- Parents’ income with children 0 to 5 years of age should not be a factor regarding child care eligibility; there should be no cap!

- Children aged 0-3 are really underrepresented.
- Providers just recently have a Head Start delegate that they can apply with, as CEDA did not recruit for new partners. Now Easter Seals has offered slots to providers and has recruited for newer providers.
- Could it be that some parents are staying home and homeschooling their preschoolers due to fear of COVID-19?
- In my experience, many of those areas where there are gaps are more affluent areas and the children have a parent who stays home to provide care.
- There is a breakdown that occurs between birth-3 to 3-5 services for children with special needs. Cal City has no slots for special needs or contained classrooms, so children are not served.
- Many parents have to get legal representation to get services.
- There are some very transient areas, so a lot of times the services do not follow the family.
- Transportation for children with special needs is not meeting the needs of those children or their families.
- Parents have to make the choice between having child care for a full day or having 2 hour special needs services with the school district.
- We need more social workers, nurses, speech pathologists and other special education providers in schools/centers. We need more experts to partner with Early Childhood educators to best serve all our children, but especially our children with special needs.
- It would be good to see comparative data across years due to COVID, as well as providers ExceleRate ratings across types of early learning programs.
- We need local small group cohorts partnered up with Community Colleges and Universities providing classes in our region.
- Clarity and ease of finding information is imperative to doing better by our families!

Strengths/Assets

- There is a strong community of child care providers in the region, both center based and family child care providers.
- Best efforts are made to have later hours to accommodate working families. COVID hours were shortened but hours have since been extended.
- Good union – SEIU – works with Gov. Pritzker. There are a lot of good things in store for providers.

Needs/Challenges

- Families with children with special needs - parents do not always believe in the resources that are shared with them to support their children. Families believe that the child will grow out of the disability or that the staff are picking on the child. Family is hesitant to accept services.
- Loss of ECE providers in South Suburbs, including CEDA Head Start.
- Transportation for before and after school children.