



Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment

Region 16
(DeKalb County)



In Partnership with

DCCYC

DeKalb County Collaborative
for Young Children



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Region 16 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 16 Needs Assessment, which includes recommendations developed by our Action and Family Councils. Additional findings, analysis, and recommendations can be found in the full report.

Key Findings

Region 16 is comprised of DeKalb County and is in northern Illinois approximately 60 miles west of Chicago off Interstate 88. It is uniquely situated between the greater Chicago suburbs and rural Illinois with a population of approximately 100,414. There are approximately 7,601 children under the age of 6. Region 16 is a racially, ethnically, linguistically, and socioeconomically diverse region. Eleven percent of children under age 6 and their families live in deep poverty which is income less than 50% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines (FPL). Over one-third of children are eligible for publicly funded ECEC programs based on household income (less than 200% FPL). The Region 16 team endeavored to engage families representing the diversity of DeKalb County with a focus to connect with families belonging to Priority Populations and communities most impacted by systemic racism and oppression. Birth to Five Illinois: Region 16 has a memorandum of understanding with the DeKalb County Collaborative for Young Children (DCCYC). The DCCYC Steering Committee, with the addition of a few members adding to the diverse perspectives, has been serving as the inaugural Region 16 Action Council.

Slot gaps illustrate how many children cannot be served based on licensed capacities. There are 2,166 total available ECEC slots in Region 16 for 7,601 children under age 6, creating a slot gap of 5,435 in licensed child care, licensed family child care, and license-exempt child care. In publicly funded programs there are 742

available slots for 2,694 children eligible based on family income levels at or below 200% of FPL, creating a slot gap of 1,952 children unable to be served. Several challenges to accessing ECEC have emerged as families have shared their lived experiences including cost, waitlists, insufficient hours of operation, unable to provide care for children with disabilities, etc. One DeKalb County caregiver shared, “it’s so hard to find good care for an affordable price that covers actual working hours for the average person...not just 9-5, but all shifts.” In Region 16 available slots are directly related to workforce shortages which are impacted by the lack of competitive wages and benefits. “We can’t just say that the number of spots is the problem or the solution to everything. There has to be a network of support that goes with the work,” explained one ECEC professional. Many needs regarding ECEC in DeKalb County have been identified. The most pressing need for families is increased affordable, full-day, quality, ECEC slots. Affordable and available ECEC slots for families and competitive pay for ECEC professionals directly correlate. Region 16 Action and Family Councils determined recommendations to address identified needs.

Region 16 Needs

- More affordable quality child care slots including more publicly funded slots and less restrictive income eligibility for CCAP.
- Greater availability of infant/toddler slots.
- Greater availability of slots for split shifts, 2nd shift, and 3rd shift.
- Increased accessibility to ECEC programs for children with disabilities.
- Publicly funded, competitive pay for ECEC professionals.

Region 16 Recommendations

- Subsidize child care for all families based on a flat percentage of income over the next 3 years starting with families with the lowest incomes.
- Provide funding to pay ECEC professionals a regionally competitive wage comparable to their K-12 colleagues within the next 3 years.
- Provide level, non-competitive, grant funding for publicly funded ECEC programs based on community needs in the next 5 years.
- Expand infrastructure to encourage new and incumbent ECEC professionals to enter or advance in the field.
- Ensure children with disabilities have access to quality ECEC programs from birth and that ECEC programs are culturally responsive.
- Become aware of and support regional community saturation efforts like Basics DeKalb County.

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

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REGION 16 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.



7,601

Children Under
the Age of 6
in Region 16



2,694

Children 0-5
at 200% Federal
Poverty Level



1,952

Children 0-5
Without Publicly
Funded ECEC Slots

100%

All caregivers who participated in focus groups, interviews, and Council meetings identified the high cost of Early Childhood Education and Care programs and services as a burden on their family.

“It’s so hard to find good care for an affordable price that covers actual working hours.” - Parent

“It’s literally my whole paycheck goes to my day care. Like, I bring nothing home.” - 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 16 NEEDS

1. More affordable, quality child care slots, especially for publicly funded programs targeted for infants, toddlers, and families working overnight shifts.
2. Increased accessibility to ECEC programs for children with disabilities.
3. More culturally responsive and linguistically accessible ECEC programs.
4. Publicly funded, competitive pay for ECEC professionals.

REGION 16 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Subsidize child care for all families based on a flat percentage of income over the next 3 years, starting with families with the lowest incomes.
2. Provide funding to pay ECEC professionals a regionally competitive wage comparable to their school-based colleagues within the next 3 years.
3. Expand infrastructure to encourage new and incumbent ECEC professionals to enter or advance in the field.
4. Ensure children with disabilities have access to quality ECEC programs from birth and that ECEC programs are culturally responsive.



“We can’t just say that the number of spots is the problem or the solution to everything. There has to be a network of support that goes with the work... when the staff feel good about the job they’re doing then they can take care of the children well” - ECEC Professional

Overview & Acknowledgements

Introduction

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

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

This report will be used in a variety of ways.

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

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

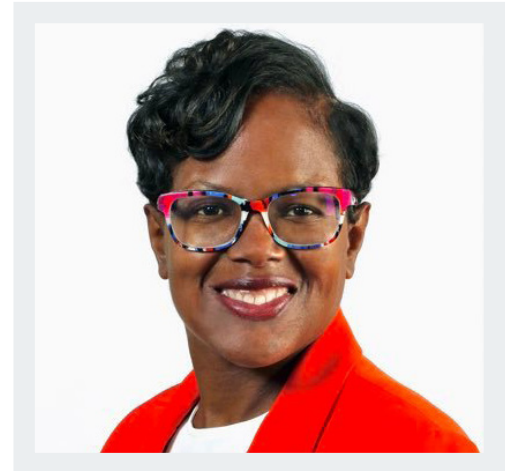
Third, policy makers, elected officials, and state agencies that administer ECEC programs will receive a copy of the report to give them a local view of the ECEC landscape in the areas they serve. The goal is to provide decision-makers with context from a community perspective so they can better understand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

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



Letter from State Leadership

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

Letter from Regional Leadership

The Birth to Five Illinois: Region 16 Early Childhood Needs Assessment could not have been completed without many contributors. Foremost, we must acknowledge the courage of our Family Council members. Their vulnerability in sharing their experiences is central to this report. Also integral to our success is the partnership with the DeKalb County Collaborative for Young Children (DCCYC) as the inaugural Region 16 Action Council. DCCYC has established a foundation of collaboration around the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) system. We want to specifically thank Amanda Christensen, Regional Superintendent of Schools and the Coordinator of DCCYC for her co-leadership in our work. Furthermore, the Region 16 Action Council showed up consistently to Council meetings ready to dig into the data.

Additionally, we thank the many participants in focus groups and community partners that helped us make sense of the data, with a distinct appreciation for the ECEC providers who participated. Special shout outs to the DeKalb County Regional Office of Education, Basics DeKalb County, Byers Brewing Company, Northern Illinois University Child Development and Family Center, Genoa Public Library, 4-C: Community Coordinated Child Care, Children's Home & Aid, Barb Food Mart, FLAP Illinois, DeKalb County Sheriff's Office, and Sycamore Public Library for partnering with us to engage families and providers across our Region. Each of these entities helped engage stakeholders by inviting us to their events, using their facilities for focus groups, or recruiting focus group participants for us.

Moreover, we thank the support system that made this needs assessment possible. Each Region 16 Team member worked together collaboratively, learning from one another. At different times throughout this process, we have each turned to our colleagues from multiple Regions for an encouraging word or a listening ear. We appreciate the INCCRRA staff and Birth to Five Illinois State Team for supporting this important work in 39 Regions across the State. We have a special appreciation for Christina Foster, the coaching consultant provided to Region 16 through Illinois Action for Children. She has been a wonderful thought partner and cheerleader as we developed this report. We thank our families who joined us in this endeavor as Birth to Five Illinois hit the ground running and found its stride, successfully establishing a statewide regional infrastructure that elevates the voices of families and providers.

Thank you, Region 16 - DeKalb County stakeholders for joining us in redesigning the ECEC system with families at the center.

Thank you,

Samantha McDavid (she/her)

Regional Council Manager: Region 16

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.

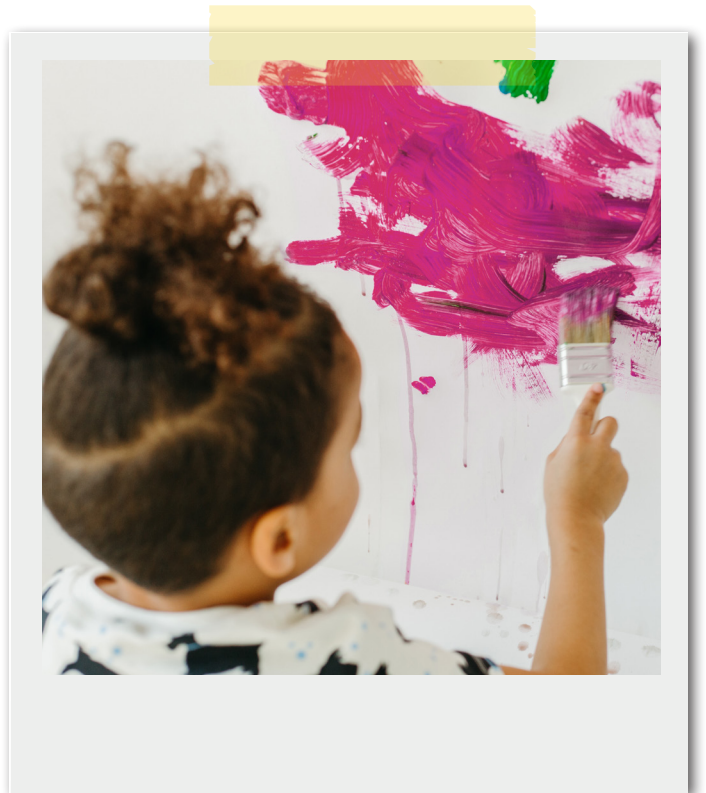
The **mission** of Birth to Five Illinois is to create a statewide regional infrastructure that will amplify input from communities in the development of policies and funding priorities. We support the mobilization of communities to build and sustain equitable access to inclusive, high-quality early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

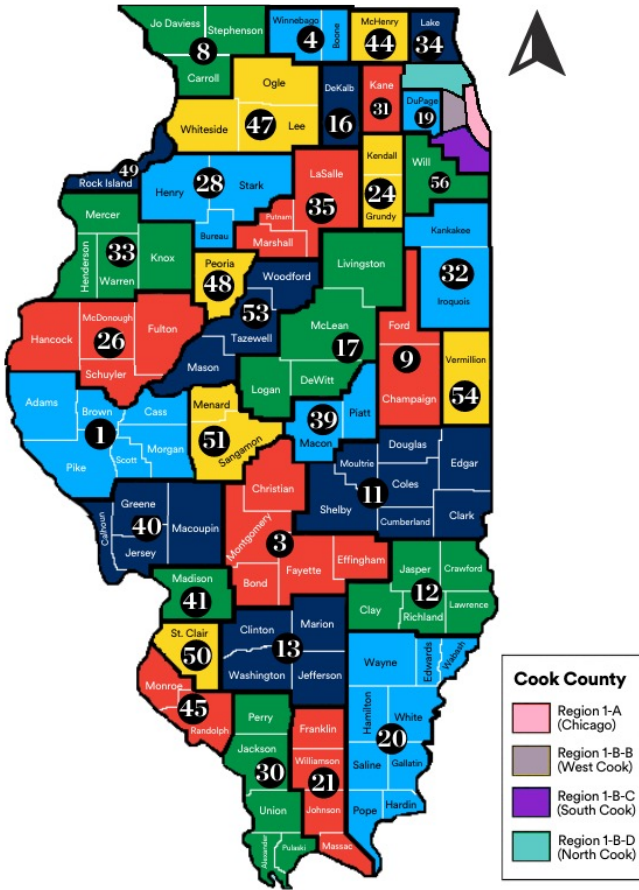


Timeline

- **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.

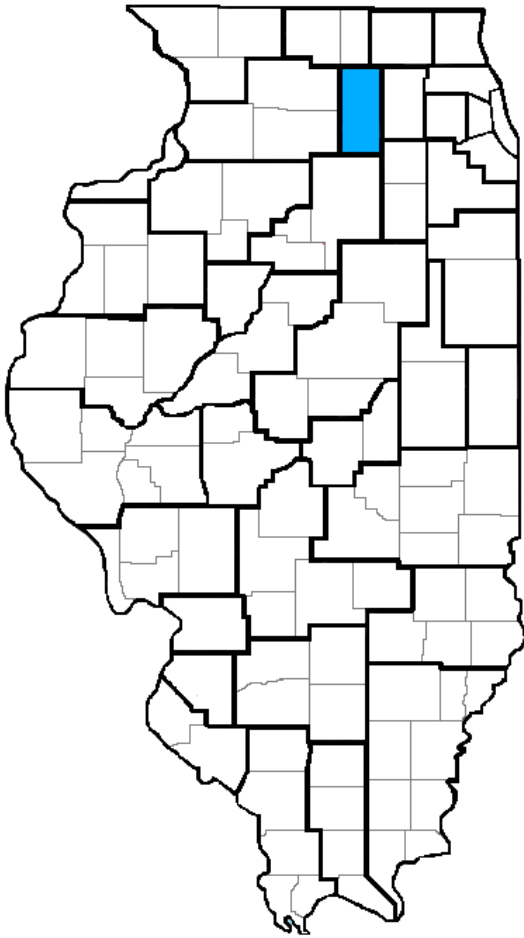
Regional Needs Assessment Methodology

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 16

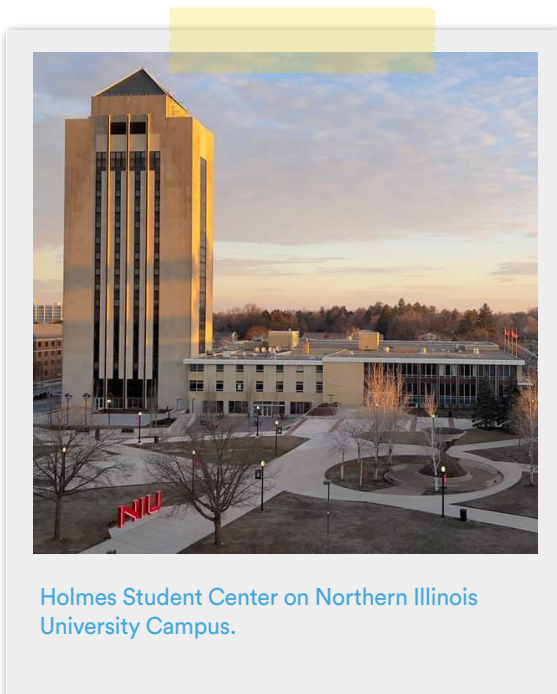
Regional Community Landscape



Regional Boundaries

Region 16 is comprised of DeKalb County and is in northern Illinois approximately 60 miles west of Chicago off Interstate 88. It is a diverse Region uniquely situated between the greater Chicago suburbs and rural Illinois. With a population of approximately 100,414, just over half of the population resides in the DeKalb/Sycamore area. Region 16's boundaries include the school district boundaries of Hiawatha CUSD 426, Genoa-Kingston CUSD 424, Sycamore CUSD 427, DeKalb CUSD 428, Indian Creek CUSD 425, Hinckley-Big Rock CUSD 429, Somonauk CUSD 432, and Sandwich CUSD 430. Our eight community unit school districts range in enrollment from about 400 students to 6,700 students. Most of the resources in Region 16, including Early Childhood Education and Care services, are centrally located in the DeKalb/Sycamore area.

Region 16 is also home to Northern Illinois University and Kishwaukee Community College, with a history of developing strong educators. Over 80% of DeKalb County is rural farmland known for its rich soil. Its strong agricultural history began when DeKalb County became the birthplace of the Farm Bureau Movement. DeKalb County is also known for the invention of barbed wire in 1873 and hybrid corn research that began in 1924 by the DeKalb County Agricultural Association, still recognized today by the winged corn emblem found around the globe. Region 16 has a strong industrial and manufacturing sector, including long-standing businesses, such as Suter Company, Bayer, Target, Nestle, and 3-M. In the last several years, DeKalb County has had significant economic development, adding new well-known businesses such as Ferrara Candy, Facebook Meta, and Amazon to the Region.



Holmes Student Center on Northern Illinois University Campus.

Land Acknowledgement¹

Region 16 acknowledges our boundaries are comprised of the lands traditionally inhabited and cultivated by the Bodwéwadmí (Potawatomi), Myaamia (Miami), Očhéthi Šakówiŋ (Sioux), Hoocąk (Ho-Chunk), Ojibwaakiiwaki·hina·ki (Sauk) and Meškwahki·aša·hina (Fox), Kiiikaapoi (Kickapoo), and Peoria. Over the last two centuries, the Shab-eh-nay (Shabbona) Band of the Prairie Band Bodwewadmí Nation lived in DeKalb County. Many Bodwewadmí words are commonly used and recognized in DeKalb County, including the Village of Shabonna, named for the revered Chief Shab-eh-nay. The mighty Kishwaukee River, Bodwewadmí, for the “river of the sycamore,” flows south to north from Shabbona to Genoa. We acknowledge all Indigenous Peoples who came before us and who continue to contribute to Region 16.

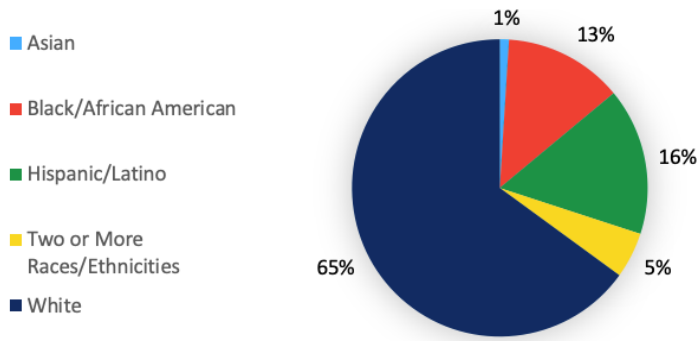
¹Based on information provided at <https://native-land.ca>

Regional Demographics

Region 16 is home to approximately 100,411 people with just over half of our population living in the centrally located cities of DeKalb and Sycamore; the rest of the County is rural farmland dotted with small towns and villages. There are approximately 7,601 children under the age of six.

Region 16 is a racially, ethnically, linguistically, and socioeconomically diverse region. Over half of the children under age six are white (65%) followed by Hispanic/Latine (16%), Black/African American (13%), Two or More Races (Non-Hispanic/Latine (5%), and Asian (1%). Approximately 12.5% of families in DeKalb County speak a language other than English at home, with Spanish being the most common. Many other languages are spoken, including but not limited to Arabic, Urdu, and Greek, especially in communities near the university.

Figure 1: Race and Ethnicity of Children Aged 5 and Under in Region 16 (FY 2021)



Source: IECAM
Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

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's used to determine eligibility for programs and services. Someone living at or below 50% FPL is living in deep poverty, while 100% FPL is living at the federal poverty line (see Figure 2 for income bands by family size). Eleven percent of children under age six and their families live in deep poverty in the Region (Figure 3). Over one-third of children are eligible for publicly funded ECEC programs based on household income, typically set at or below 200% FPL.

Figure 2: Federal Poverty Level Guidelines by Family Size³

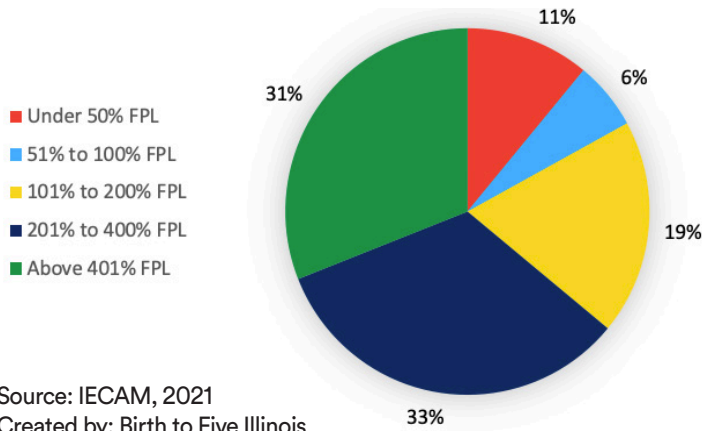
| Family Size | 50% FPL | 100% FPL | 200% FPL | 400% FPL |
|-------------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|
| 1 | \$6,440 | \$12,880 | \$25,520 | \$51,040 |
| 2 | \$8,710 | \$17,420 | \$34,480 | \$68,960 |
| 3 | \$10,980 | \$21,960 | \$43,440 | \$86,880 |
| 4 | \$13,100 | \$26,200 | \$52,400 | \$104,800 |
| 5 | \$15,340 | \$30,680 | \$61,360 | \$122,720 |

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

² Not numerically represented in the chart are American Indian and Alaskan Native, or Hawaiian Native and Other Pacific Islander due to the small number of respondents.

³ For families/households with more than five persons, add \$4,480 for each additional person to find the 100% of FPL. Each year the FPL is adjusted.

Figure 3: Number of Children Aged 5 and Under at Different Federal Poverty Level Income Bands



Source: IECAM, 2021
Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

The lived experiences of Region 16 families illustrate the impact of the cost of child care on their household income stability. One caregiver shared, “If care had been affordable, I could have gone back to work [as a teacher]”.

Another way to consider how household income impacts Region 16 families is to consider Asset-Limited, Income-Constrained, Employed (ALICE) families. According to United Way of Illinois (2020), ALICE families include adults who are working outside the home but are still living with financial hardship. Looking at ALICE data provides a more comprehensive understanding of how the cost of ECEC can drastically impact a family’s financial stability. Thirty-six percent of all DeKalb County families receive insufficient income and fit

into the ALICE designation. Over 56% of DeKalb County children under the age of five live in a household under ALICE conditions. The cost of ECEC is a leading contributor to families with young children living at or below a survival budget, which is based on the bare minimum hourly wage families need to pay their bills including housing, transportation, food, technology, and child care (see Appendix B).

“It’s literally my whole paycheck goes to my daycare. Like, I bring nothing home.”
- Caregiver Utilizing ECEC Services

Children and Families in Priority Populations

Other important demographic data to understand in the Region are priority populations, which are twelve demographic groups identified by the Illinois Early Learning Council (2021) based on criteria that they are distinctive, timely, measurable, underserved, and at-risk⁶. Data on priority populations are limited and difficult to track across the ECEC system. The Birth to Five Illinois: Region 16 Team endeavored to engage families belonging to the following priority populations represented in DeKalb County:

- Children of underage parents.
- Children in families experiencing poverty.
- Children with disabilities.
- Children without permanent housing or shelter.
- Children with Illinois Department of Children & Family Services (DCFS) involvement.
- Children who face barriers due to immigration status.
- Children that face barriers based on culture, language, and religion.
- Children who are impacted by caregiver involvement in the Criminal Justice System.

⁴ https://www.unitedforalice.org/Attachments/AllReports/2020ALICEReport_IL_FINAL.pdf

⁵ <https://oecd.illinois.gov/content/dam/soi/en/web/oecd/documents/priority-populations-updated-2021.pdf>

⁶ Birth to Five Illinois does not generally use the term “at-risk”. A definition of “at-risk” can be found at <https://oecd.illinois.gov/content/dam/soi/en/web/oecd/documents/priority-populations-recommendation-final-approved.pdf>

Available data for Region 16’s priority populations is listed below. Data was included in a 2021 Ounce of Prevention (now Start Early) report:⁷

- There are 1,278 children ages birth to five living in homes at or below 100% FPL.
- 193 children ages birth to five were referred to Early Intervention for supports and services after their initial screening.
- 378 children ages three to five had an Individual Education Program (IEP).
- 36 children were born to minor-aged parents.
- 17 Kindergarteners were identified as unhoused and receiving McKinney-Vento services.

Some of the challenges in tracking priority population data across systems are due to deficits in syncing and data sharing across organizations. There are challenges in engaging priority populations directly; however, their perspectives are just as important to understanding the ECEC system in Region 16. Additionally, though priority populations may represent small portions of the community, using an equity lens supports prioritizing their needs for ECEC. The demographic landscape of Region 16 illustrates a population diverse racially, ethnically, linguistically, geographically, and socioeconomically. As we endeavor to use an equity lens in decision-making, it is important to understand the intersectionality of the identities and experiences of Region 16’s families. Without understanding the demographic landscape of our community, our ECEC system cannot strive to be accessible, better, and fairer for every DeKalb County family.



Children standing in their rain boots.

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.

⁷<https://oecd.illinois.gov/content/dam/soi/en/web/oecd/documents/final-priority-population-data-scan-and-guide.pdf>

Local Community Collaborations

Illinois Action for Children (2022) defines a Local Early Childhood Community Collaboration as a group of organizations, agencies, and individuals from across different sectors coming together to coordinate and improve the ECEC system within a defined geographic region. The DeKalb County Collaborative for Young Children (DCCYC) has established a strong foundation for collaboration in ECEC systems in Region 16.⁸ DCCYC was founded in 2016, with the DeKalb County Regional Office of Education (ROE) serving as the backbone organization for the DCCYC. From the beginning, DCCYC has been a partner in the regional Birth to Five Illinois work; our two organizations share a Memorandum of Understanding. The DCCYC Steering Committee, with the addition of a few members adding to the diverse perspectives, has been serving as the inaugural Region 16 Action Council.

This Local Early Childhood Collaboration has been leading ECEC systems change work across three areas of impact with objectives and indicators included in their strategic plan. The DCCYC consists of partner committees and work groups focusing on Kindergarten readiness toolkits, increased capacity and quality of child care, community and school alignment, birth to third grade educator alignment, trauma-informed practices within ECEC, and Coordinated Intake for home visiting programs. Additionally, the DCCYC has adopted an early learning initiative that saturates the community with common messaging through cross-sector partnerships. Basics DeKalb County, housed at the ROE, encourages every member of our community, emphasizing parents/caregivers as a child's first teacher, to have meaningful interactions with children in everyday situations. The messaging includes five simple but powerful ways to engage young learners and boost brain development.⁹ Basics DeKalb County also provides early learning opportunities through their text messaging program, toddler garden story times, and playgroups across the County.

“ Basics DeKalb County is definitely a strength with their programs and texting.
– Caregiver ”

In 2021, the DeKalb County ROE, with support from the DCCYC and Illinois Action for Children, led the region in Community-Based Planning for Expansion (CBP).¹⁰ This project has provided a foundation for the Regional Needs Assessment in Region 16. Over the course of a year, the ROE discussed data and asset maps, examined the ECEC landscape, engaged families, explored ECEC workforce development, and identified recommendations for ECEC expansion as funding became available. Further collaboration around ECEC workforce pipeline development continued after CBP ended with higher education institutions, regional high schools, and the Child Care Resource & Referral Agency.

Additionally, since CBP, the ROE has also implemented the Integrated Referral and Intake System (IRIS), a community referral system, without any current cost to other community partners.¹¹ Though this system will support collaboration across sectors in multiple systems, it is already greatly impacting collaboration in the early childhood sector. Since Region 16 lost funding for a dedicated Coordinated Intake specialist for home visiting, the ROE has been able to absorb Coordinated Intake because of IRIS. The recommendations from CBP have grounded the Action and Family Councils' discussions and decisions throughout this Regional Needs Assessment.¹² Having this foundation allowed the Region 16 Action and Family Councils to dive deeper into the data and increase family voice throughout the Regional Needs Assessment.

“ Using IRIS with the Health Department has been really successful and streamlined to refer families for services.
– Community Member ”

⁸ <https://www.dkroeedteam.com/dekalb-county-collaborative-for-young-children.html>

⁹ <https://basicsdekalbcounty.org/>

¹⁰ <https://www.actforchildren.org/program-supports/family-community-impact/community-expansion>

¹¹ <https://connectwithiris.org/>

¹² <http://www.dkroeedteam.com/dekalb-county-collaborative-for-young-children.html>

Early Childhood Education & Care (ECEC) Programs

Understanding the ECEC program landscape helps determine strengths and needs in Region 16. There are several different types of ECEC programs represented in DeKalb County, including licensed child care centers, licensed family child care homes/group homes, and license-exempt child care. Licensed child care programs are generally privately owned in centers or homes, while license-exempt ECEC programs are generally established in non-profit organizations, such as faith-based organizations. Whether in a center or home, licensed child care must meet the minimum licensing standards dictated and monitored by the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS).¹³ License-exempt child care programs are monitored but are not required to meet all licensing requirements. Furthermore, many families utilize Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) care, which is also license-exempt but unmonitored, except when FFN participates in the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP).



A child sitting cross legged with an open book in hand.

Family child care homes are generally licensed for capacities of up to eight children between the ages of six weeks and 12 years, depending on available square footage, and including children that live in the home. The actual enrollment numbers depend on child ages, which determine staff-to-child ratios. There are 39 licensed family child care homes in DeKalb County. Both licensed family child care and child care centers, as well as license-exempt child care

centers may determine the ages they are willing to enroll and the hours of programming as long as it is within licensing standards. For example, a half-day preschool that offers programming for two-year-olds two days a week and three-year-olds three days a week is licensed as a child care center. There are 19 licensed child care centers in DeKalb County. Licensing can be granted to offer programming during second and third shifts as well if requirements are met.

Figure 4: Number of Child Care Sites by Type

| Type of Child Care | # of Sites |
|-----------------------------|------------|
| Licensed Child Care Centers | 19 |
| Licensed Family Child Care | 39 |
| License-Exempt Child Care | 6 |

Source: IECAM, 2021
Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

Licensed family child care and child care centers may seek ExceleRate Illinois Circles of Quality,¹⁴ or other accreditations, such as the National Association of the Education of Young Children,¹⁵ that require lower staff-to-child ratios, greater square footage per child, etc. Seeking these ratings or accreditations may allow the providers to access special funding opportunities, and they also help distinguish ECEC programs as quality options. However, the increased quality also impacts actual enrollment numbers. As family child care providers and child care center directors endeavor to attain higher ratings of quality or accreditations, they may need to increase space per child, decrease staff-to-child ratios, and hire more experienced or credentialed staff. Understanding the difference between licensed capacity and enrollment is essential to understanding the barriers to access and availability that families experience, as well as the additional measures family child care providers or child care center directors may take to reach higher ratings of quality that impact enrollment. As one child care

¹³ <https://sunshine.dcf.illinois.gov/Content/Licensing/BecomeLicensed.aspx>

¹⁴ <https://www.excelerateillinoisproviders.com/>

¹⁵ <https://www.naeyc.org/accreditation>

Center Director shared, “My license says I can have 12 [children] in that room, my accreditation wants me to have 8 [children]. Then I think about the needs of the children and the staff...I would never fill my center to licensed capacity. Everyone would quit.”

“ Ratios determine quality interactions. You cannot have high-quality interactions when the teachers can only get to basic needs, and that’s what licensed capacity is.
- Child Care Director ”

Publicly funded ECEC programs are funded by state or federal dollars. Some publicly funded programs are licensed by DCFS when they are providing care, such as preschool. Other publicly funded programs, such as home visiting, do not need to be licensed because they do not provide care. Eligibility for these programs may be based on needs determined by an evaluation of the child/ family and some weigh several factors, including household income, to determine eligibility. Publicly funded programs in Region 16 include Early Intervention (EI), Early Childhood Special Education, three Preschool For All (PFA) programs located in school districts, a Preschool For All Expansion (PFAE) program, a Head Start program, a Prevention Initiative home visiting program, and an Early Head Start home visiting program. To qualify for EI a child must be less than three years old and have a physical or mental condition which typically results in developmental delay.¹⁶ When a child ages out of EI at age three (up to three years and three months if a birthday falls before the school year begins), but still qualifies based on a developmental delay or disability, they are eligible to transition to the Early Childhood Special Education program through their local school district.¹⁷

Figure 5: Number Publicly Funded Sites by Type

| Publicly Funded Program Type | # of Sites |
|------------------------------|------------|
| Prevention Initiative | 1 |
| Preschool For All | 3 |
| Preschool For All Expansion | 1 |
| Early Head Start | 1 |
| Head Start | 1 |

Source: IECAM, 2021
Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

The publicly funded ECEC programs using weighted eligibility, such as household income, vary in the ages they serve and the type of service they provide. Home visiting programs offer support for families that are expecting or with children under the age of three through regular interactions in the families’ home or other public settings.¹⁸ Home visiting programs support families in parenting, building resiliency, and understanding early childhood development and may include doula services for pregnant people or group settings. There are three home visiting programs in DeKalb County: a Prevention Initiative program,¹⁹ an Early Head Start program,²⁰ and a Healthy Families Illinois Program. Preschool For All,²¹ Preschool For All Expansion, and Head Start²² all serve children ages three to five with priority given to four and five-year-olds transitioning to Kindergarten. All of the Preschool For All programs in Region 16 are housed in school districts and offer half-day prekindergarten for eligible children. The Preschool For All Expansion program and Head Start program offers full-day preschool for eligible children. Of these programs, Head Start is the only program that offers transportation.

¹⁶ <https://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=30321>

¹⁷ <https://www.isbe.net/Pages/Early-Childhood-Special-Education-Services.aspx>

¹⁸ <https://igrowillinois.org/homevisiting/>

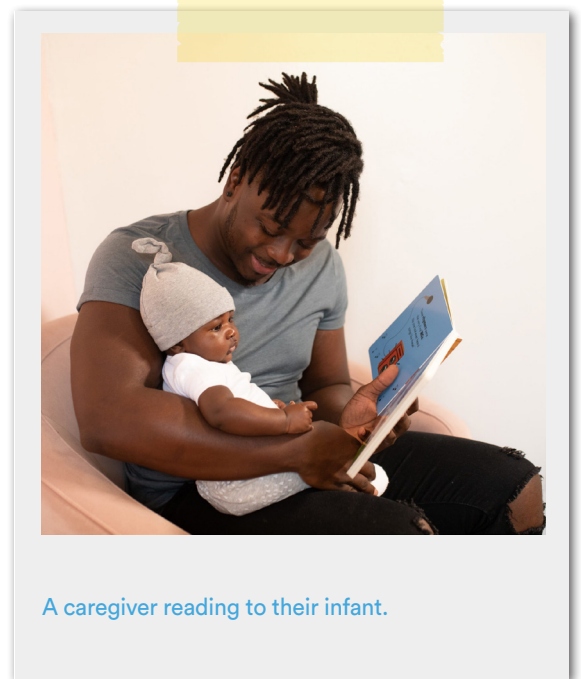
¹⁹ <https://www.isbe.net/Pages/Birth-to-Age-3-Years.aspx>

²⁰ <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/programs/article/home-based-option>

²¹ <https://www.isbe.net/Pages/Preschool-For-All.aspx>

²² <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ohs/about/head-start>

The Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), a publicly funded program, subsidizes the cost of child care for families.²³ Licensed child care providers, license-exempt child care programs, and license-exempt FFN caregivers can choose to accept CCAP. Eligibility is determined by household income, and families may have to pay a co-pay for care. With income requirements recently expanded, CCAP makes child care more affordable for more families; however, accessing it is not without its challenges for families. One caregiver described the challenges they had applying for CCAP, “They ask for a lot. I had to go get copies of my daughter’s birth certificate. Obviously, they needed copies of my paycheck stubs, but they also wanted me to email them and then bring paper forms in...it’s a process.” Even with these challenges, CCAP is an integral part of the ECEC system that allows families to not only afford child care, but also potentially grow their family income and financial stability.



A caregiver reading to their infant.

“My sister actually recently went through the process as well and she ended up getting denied for care because she works in DeKalb, but her address is in Elgin because she was homeless when she filled it out.”

– Caregiver

Though there are many types of ECEC programs represented in the Region, families and providers acknowledge there is not enough capacity. As one caregiver shared, “Everybody should be able to access what they need.” Currently, too many families struggle to find the care they want and need.

²³ <https://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=87061>

Slot Gap

Another way to think about capacity is the number of seats or slots that ECEC programs are licensed to fill. A slot gap is the difference between the proposed capacity and the number of children that could be eligible to use that type of slot. In other words, slot gaps illustrate how many children cannot be served based on licensed capacities. Keep in mind that capacities do not reflect actual enrollment and the slot gap number is a snapshot in time. It is, however, a helpful reference point to understand how many children are unable to be served in an ECEC program.

The wait lists that families report experiencing when trying to access ECEC in DeKalb County tell the story of slot gaps. Some families have experienced over a year wait list for the care they want for their child(ren). Other families make significant sacrifices when they cannot find an ECEC option that works for their situation.

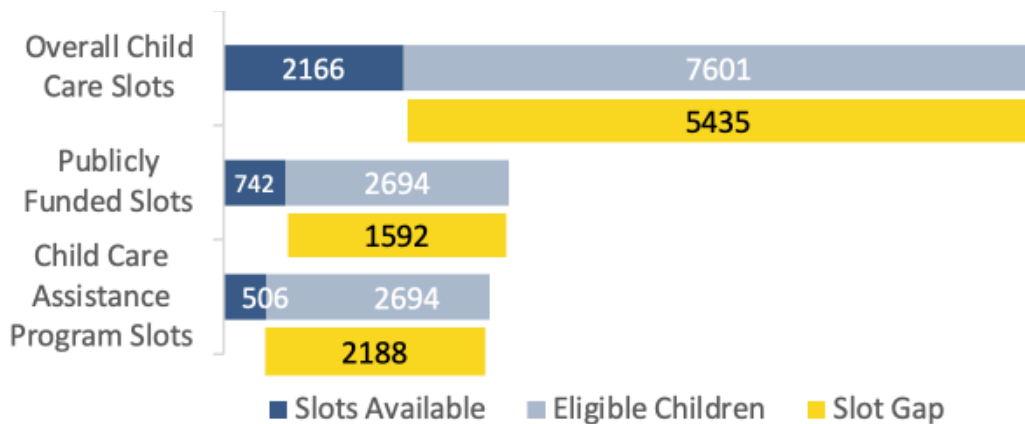
“ I waited a semester plus three months and I had to have a family that I was not comfortable with watch my daughter.

– Caregiver & Community Member

”

Figure 6 illustrates three different slot gaps. Overall child care slots include the capacities of licensed family child care homes, licensed child care centers, and license-exempt child care centers. There are 2,166 total available ECEC slots in Region 16 for 7,601 children under age six, creating a slot gap of 5,435 in licensed child care, licensed family child care, and license-exempt child care.

Figure 6: Early Childhood Education and Care Slot Gaps by Funding



Source: IECAM, 2021
 Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

Publicly funded slots include Head Start, Preschool for All, and Preschool for All Expansion programs for children ages three to five. They also include Early Head Start and Prevention Initiative programs for children ages birth to two. Publicly funded slots are funded by state or federal dollars and have eligibility requirements, including income. In publicly funded programs there are 742 available slots for 2,694 eligible children eligible based on family income levels at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), which is \$46,060 for a family of four, creating a slot gap of 1,952 children unable to be served.²⁴ It is important to note that publicly funded programs include home visiting programs that provide regular, individualized visits from family support specialists. While home visiting programs are a valuable and needed supports for families, they do not meet child care needs. All 211 of the publicly funded programs

²⁴ Each publicly funded program has a slightly different income eligibility and 200% of FPL most fairly represents the eligibility across programs.

serving children ages 0-2 are home visiting programs. Furthermore, 150 of the publicly funded home visiting slots serving children ages 0-2 are split between Region 16 and two other counties outside of Region 16. This effectively reduces the 211 publicly funded slots by 100 slots for children ages 0-2. Regarding children ages 3-5, the 531 publicly funded programs include 400 half-day prekindergarten slots. To understand how slot gaps differ based on age range see Appendix B.

Another slot gap Region 16's Councils examined and discussed is the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) slot gap. This slot gap is a little different in that it is not dependent on licensed capacities, but rather if an ECEC program accepts CCAP subsidies as payment. Children living in homes with incomes at or below 225% FPL are eligible for CCAP. Due to data reporting, the Action Council took a more conservative approach to estimate the number of children eligible based on 200% of FPL. Using this approach, at least 36% of DeKalb County children are living in homes with income at 200% FPL or below. There are 506 CCAP slots across all ECEC in Region 16 and at least 2,694 children are eligible for CCAP based on family incomes creating a CCAP slot gap of 2,188.

Mapping ECEC slots by licensed capacity, age ranges accepted, and length of time, reveals details about Region 16's ECEC landscape (see Appendix C). After closer examination, approximately 1,598 ECEC slots accommodate full-day care, revealing an adjusted slot gap of 6,003 for children under age six needing full-day care. Looking more closely at what slots are available in Region 16, it is evident that there are areas with fewer ECEC options. Specifically, the northern and southern parts of DeKalb County do not have enough ECEC slots, serving fewer than 25% of the area's children. Twenty percent of children under age six living in those sub-regions lack the access they need. Looking at full-day slots, there are enough in the southern sub-region of DeKalb County to serve approximately 10% of those under the age of six. Within the City of DeKalb, the Annie Glidden North (AGN) neighborhood in the northwest quadrant of the city, home to approximately 10% of Region 16 children under the age of six, is the most populous. The AGN neighborhood is the only section of Region 16 that has a majority Black population. The area has the lowest median income of any subregion in Region 16.²⁵ The disinvestment in this neighborhood has led to barriers in accessing both high-paying jobs and ECEC services for families. Located within the AGN area, there are approximately 40 licensed, full-day, child care slots for over 700 children. Though there is public transportation available, transporting young children is a challenge.

It is important to remember that slots are based on licensed capacity, not actual enrollment, therefore, they may project an inflated number. Additionally, there is no effective way to track the number of families that use informal, in-home Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) care and how that impacts slot gaps. Slot gaps are fluid just as enrollment numbers are. Moreover, one child can use more than one slot. For example, a child may attend a Preschool For All program at their local school district for 2.5 hours in the morning and then go to a licensed child care provider for the remainder of the day using a full-day slot. There is no effective way to track how many children are utilizing two slots, which can also inflate the number of available slots. Slot gap information helps illustrate where the needs are greatest by age or by program type. Mapping available slots reveal limited access to ECEC programs geographically, but when combined with a racial equity lens, mapping reveals where communities of color have less access to ECEC programs than white communities.

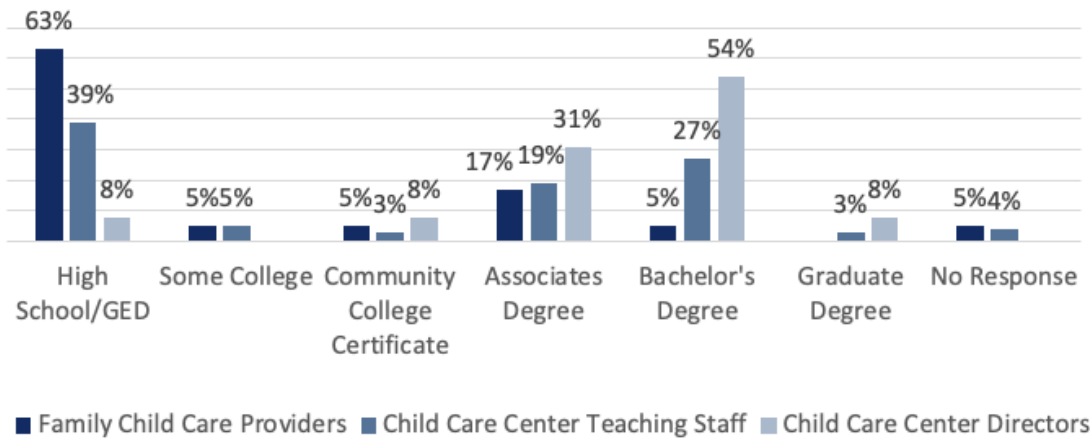
²⁵ <https://censusreporter.org/profiles/14000US17037001003-census-tract-1003-dekalb-il/> and <https://censusreporter.org/profiles/14000US17037001002-census-tract-1002-dekalb-il/>

Early Childhood Education & Care (ECEC) Workforce

Understanding the ECEC workforce landscape supports a comprehensive view of the strengths and needs within the Region. ECEC professionals are an integral part of our community, as they care for and support the healthy development of the children. About 556 professionals are working in various roles in ECEC in Region 16; of those 556, there are 59 family child care providers and 39 child care center directors. About 97% of the ECEC workforce in DeKalb County are women. While the ECEC workforce is not quite as racially and ethnically diverse as the children they work with, about 25% self-identify as Black, Latine, Asian, or multiracial, and 75% self-identify as white.

There are very few ECEC providers who identified as bilingual in Region 16. Many ECEC professionals complete post-secondary courses to attain higher levels of education and credentials in Early Childhood Education (ECE) and/or Early Childhood Development. Figures 5 and 6 show the post-secondary educational attainment and ECE credentialing of the Region’s ECEC workforce.²⁶ The Action Council discussed regional professional development opportunities for current ECEC professionals and ways to support further professional development.

Figure 7: Post-Secondary Educational Attainment of ECEC Professionals in Region 16



Source: INCCRRA
 Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

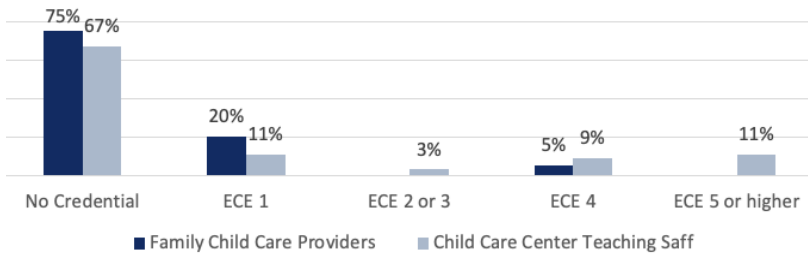
ECEC professionals have been described as the “workforce behind the workforce”, meaning without Early Childhood educators and providers a significant portion of our community would not have safe, quality options for child care and education that enable them to work outside the home. If the ECEC workforce suffers, the community suffers. ECEC leaders shared that some of the biggest challenges are teacher stress and burnout, meeting the social-emotional needs of children and families, and hiring staff.

Shortages in the ECEC workforce exist across the State and exacerbate the challenges ECEC professionals face. Slot gaps in Region 16 are impacted by workforce shortages. During the Community-Based Planning for Expansion (CBP) project, a survey was distributed to child care center directors. Over 60% reported they were experiencing staff shortages in 2021. Workforce shortages continue to impede fully operational ECEC programs and continue to cause closed classrooms, reduced hours of operations, longer waitlists, and temporary closures. One ECEC professional described how they would like to expand their PFA-E program but cannot do so without knowing if they can staff the program. For ECEC providers striving to maintain ExceleRate Silver and Gold Circles of Quality, lower staff-to-child ratios are required, which is more difficult to fulfill due to workforce shortages. Moreover, knowing that the cost of ECEC programs is a barrier to families,

²⁶ <https://registry.ilgateways.com/>

many ECEC professionals are finding it difficult to balance the cost for families with higher salaries for credentialed staff necessary to attain higher ratings and accreditations.

Figure 8: Early Childhood Education (ECE) Credentialing of Region 16 ECEC Professionals²⁷



Source: INCCRRA
Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

ECEC professionals are concerned about the workforce pipeline, especially regarding quality candidates. There are a few regional strategies to address the workforce shortage, including pipeline development. Throughout the CBP process, there were many conversations around workforce development. Communication and collaboration have increased between Region 16 high schools, the ROE, Kishwaukee Community College, NIU, and Coordinated Community Child Care (4-C). These entities have begun to align recruitment and development strategies to increase the ECEC workforce. Pathways to Play is an Educator Rising program the ROE has developed in partnership with area high schools to encourage high school students to consider a career in ECEC through experiential learning. Additionally, 4-C actively recruits and supports community members in establishing and licensing family child care homes.

The state of Illinois has prioritized ECEC professional support over the last several years. One initiative is the Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity (ECACE) Scholarship Program.²⁸ 4-C, Kishwaukee Community College, and NIU have actively been recruiting and supporting incumbent ECEC professionals to access higher educational attainment through the ECACE Scholarship Program. ECACE provides other grant funding that has allowed Kishwaukee Community College to better align their ECE courses to Gateways to Opportunity credentials, hire more ECE faculty, and reinstate the associate degree pathway for ECE. Moreover, the ECACE grant allows other assistance for books, materials, transportation, and child care that are not covered by the scholarship.

Since the start of the ECACE grant in 2021, Kishwaukee Community College has seen significant increases in

²⁷ ECE Credentials are achieved through Illinois Gateways to Opportunity.

²⁸ See <https://www.isac.org/ECACEscholarship>



Family playing outside.

“ We need people and the community needs child care. Those are needs that have increased over the last 5 years...I still have 3 classrooms closed that I would have access to if I could hire more staff, and that has not been our reality.

– ECEC Professional

“ For me, seeing the students decrease in the child development program and really seeing those numbers decline...I worry about the financial implications of early childhood in terms of being able to recruit quality individuals.

– ECEC Professional

enrollment for ECE courses. Both NIU and Kishwaukee Community College participate in the Prior Learning Assessment project that allows college credits to be awarded via scenario-based assessment of Gateways level 2 competencies for incumbent workers with a Child Development Associate (CDA). Other State initiatives that are utilized in the Region include the Great START Wage Supplement Program available to individual ECEC educators and Strengthen and Grow Child Care Grants.

There has been a focus on supporting current ECEC professionals and building an ECEC workforce pipeline through regional and statewide initiatives, but ECEC workforce shortages persist. The demands of the job and educator burnout have affected the ECEC workforce. However, according to local ECEC professionals, the greatest barrier to retaining incumbent workers and attracting new ECEC educators is the compensation within the sector.

“The grant has also provided the resources necessary to increase and improve our connections with area early childhood care providers and other stakeholders. Perhaps even more important than the resources has been the focused attention on early childhood education within the college, the ICCB [Illinois Community College Board], and the State.

– Higher Education Employee”

“For all the requirements and education and skill that we want to have for this sector, there needs to be equitable pay so that those staff feel like the work that they’re doing is able to at least meet their needs.

– ECEC Educator”

“Until we can make this a professional job and not a stepping stone to get to the professional job...then we can get those teachers...We’re educators and what we do at this level is just as important...until we can be able to compensate and give them these benefits, it will help us to gain teachers...we’re not babysitters but educators.

– ECEC Professional”

Knowing that the “workforce behind the workforce” is what allows our families to meet their needs for ECEC, it is integral that as a community we recognize their contributions. The Region 16 Action and Family Councils discussed not only the ECEC workforce landscape, but also what more could be done to support workforce development regionally. Understanding the realities of the incumbent ECEC workforce and the challenges to recruiting ECEC professionals to the sector is the first step to strategizing solutions.

“We can’t just say that the number of spots is the problem are the solution to everything. There has to be a network of support that goes with the work. We’re here and we’re willing to do the work, but we’re not willing to sacrifice the needs of the staff...When your staff is cared for and when the staff feel good about the job they’re doing then they can take care of the children well.

– ECEC Professional”

Parent/Family/Caregiver Voice

“

It's so hard to find good care for an affordable price that covers actual working hours for the average person...not just 9:00am-5:00pm, but all shifts.

– Caregiver

”

Redesigning an equitable ECEC system in Region 16 and across Illinois must include families as co-decision makers. If family voice is not amplified and centered in our regional and state efforts to make Illinois the best state to raise a young family, the decisions made will be less effective. Equity in access to ECEC, as well as equity in outcomes for all children, are the goals of authentic family engagement. What equity in access “looks like” is families having access to the ECEC programs and services they want and need for the well-being of their families. Equity in outcomes looks like all children being supported to develop optimally during the largest period of brain growth in their life,

resulting in children demonstrating Kindergarten readiness, social-emotional well-being, appropriate physical development, etc. Furthermore, if there is not a focus on racial equity, disparities between racial, ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic groups will continue and even widen resulting in inequitable outcomes.

The Region 16 Team has endeavored to engage families representing the geographic, socioeconomic, racial/ethnic, and linguistic diversity in DeKalb County. Additionally, there was a focus on amplifying the voices of families belonging to priority populations and other communities that have not historically been included in decision-making. Families in Region 16 have been very open about their experiences accessing ECEC. Several themes have emerged as families have shared their stories. Most of the themes include cost, availability, and quality.

Every caregiver shared that ideally, they want high-quality ECEC programs for their children. Region 16 caregivers defined high-quality ECEC programs as (among other qualities) having low staff-to-child ratios, supporting children reaching developmental milestones, and having open and responsive communication. Preference for Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) care, licensed family child care, or care at a center varied based on personal experiences.

The affordability of ECEC programs, specifically child care, is a theme that every caregiver has mentioned. Families needing care for multiple young children, families living with low incomes, or families who are Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed (ALICE) are especially impacted by the cost of child care.

There is only one PFAE program, which provides care from 8:30am to 3:30pm, in Region 16 and it has a capacity of 40 slots. The PFA-E and Head Start programs are the only full-day, publicly funded programs, with a total of 131 slots for the entire County. Families also shared that when they were receiving the Child Tax Credit advance during the pandemic, they were able to use that to pay ahead or pay for their child care co-pays.²⁹ Many families shared that budgeting for child care is difficult

²⁹ See <https://www.irs.gov/pub/taxpros/fs-2022-32.pdf>



Birth to Five Illinois staff at the Kindergarten Readiness Forum.

“

My son got approved for the PFA-E and if we didn't have that program and he didn't get approved...we couldn't afford child care.

– Caregiver

”

and they either make do with less, including necessities at times, or find themselves budgeting knowing they are going into debt. Other families shared their concerns for the near future that if they were to have another child they would be in a tough financial position.

“ The hours were not adapted to work schedules. I have to be at work at 5:30. There was no place that had those hours.
– Caregiver ”

Even when the cost is not a factor, families across Region 16 accessing full-day child care are generally met with waitlists ranging from several months to over a year. Waitlists for infant and toddler slots have the longest waitlists. Availability is greatly reduced when families have additional needs, such as care for a split shift, second or third-shift jobs, extended hours to accommodate longer shifts, or specialized care for children with disabilities. Caregivers shared the difficulty in piecing together care that may include inconsistent care, significant travel time, or missed work. Even though COVID restrictions in ECEC have lifted, many ECEC providers have not been able to restore pre-COVID hours of operations due to staffing shortages, leaving families with inadequate hours of care.

“ I had to put myself on the waiting list for 6 months, and then another 6 months if there was no place, every 6 months.
– Caregiver ”

When affordability and availability are barriers, families make compromises. Several caregivers reported that cost and availability trump quality until they can find a care arrangement with which they were happy. Some caregivers have utilized FFN care even when they had safety and well-being concerns. Several unexpected sacrifices were revealed through surveys that have the potential for long-term, negative impacts, such as missing health care appointments, missing support group sessions (Al-Anon/Narc-anon/grief groups), missing quality time with friends/family, and forgoing other self-care practices because there was no child care available.

“ We went from friend care to in-home child care to a child care center. The flexibility was less, the cost was so much more but I felt the quality was better.
– Caregiver ”



Shabbona Story Time.

Many caregivers report choosing high-quality child care when it is available at the expense of their financial stability. Sacrificing job opportunities or making the difficult decision to completely lose a household income is a common experience for Region 16 families because they did not have affordable and/or available care; this decision has a domino effect of decreased household incomes, gaps in employment, etc. that disproportionately affects women.

“ We have to go by cost and availability but in the long run we ended up with me leaving outside work and I babysit from home.
– Caregiver ”

Finding ECEC programs that can meet the more individualized needs of children with disabilities is one of several themes regarding the accessibility of ECEC programs that emerged throughout the Regional Needs Assessment process. Many families shared how difficult it was to find an ECEC program that could provide the support their children with disabilities need; many opt to stay home and care for their children themselves even when they prefer employment outside the home. When families have found ECEC programs that meet the needs of their children with disabilities, they have met barriers to accessing the wrap-around services their children are eligible for such as occupational, physical, and behavioral therapies. Families with children with disabilities experience significantly more barriers to accessing ECEC programs than families with children without disabilities.

“ It took a year and that’s a whole year I felt my boys could have had services.
– Caregiver ”

“ I’m having the biggest challenge with therapies. After 3 [years] it was like everything stopped... I mean I have the notes from the doctor saying she needs certain therapies and...I don’t mind traveling, but there’s waiting lists, or they don’t have them around.
– Caregiver ”

Transportation, though not the most pervasive barrier, is a challenge for many families, especially when a child attends a publicly funded half-day preschool. Families eligible for publicly funded ECEC programs generally have incomes at or below 200% FPL. There is only one publicly funded ECEC program that offers transportation: Two Rivers Head Start. This program has a licensed capacity of 91 slots to serve 1,420 eligible children. Public transportation is only available in sections of the cities of DeKalb and Sycamore within Region 16. Half-day programs pose the greatest challenge because children need to be transported from a half-day program to another care location to accomplish full-day care. For caregivers working outside the home during the day, coordination of transportation is difficult.

“ Any program that I enroll my kids in, I always made sure they have like, drop off and pick up... before I had bought my car, you know, I have to get on the bus the majority of the time.
– Caregiver ”

“ I have several friends that pay specifically for someone to pick their child up from preschool or child care and take them to after-hours care.

– Caregiver (from rural part of Dekalb County)

”

Some barriers are harder to see in the data but become more visible when families from racial, ethnic, or linguistic groups that are historically underrepresented are engaged. For families whose primary language is not English, there are barriers to completing CCAP applications and communicating with ECEC organizations. It is important to note that translation or interpretation does not equate to access. For families that speak a primary language other than English and have never navigated the ECEC system before or have immigrated to this Region and are unfamiliar with the ECEC system, translation is only one step to reducing barriers.

“ There are assumptions that you know the hours and programs...people who are here know it but not someone who is new to this country or community.

– Caregiver

”

There are very few licensed child care options that provide services in Spanish or a language other than English. Several families who have immigrated to the Region disclosed mistrust of ECEC programs, regardless of the setting, and insufficient/ineffective communication was cited as part of that mistrust. Black families and families who face barriers due to income have expressed challenges to trusting unknown caregivers and feeling they were not treated fairly when trying to access ECEC programs. Black families have shared multiple times they feel there are negative assumptions made about them by ECEC providers. Families with low incomes shared they felt that families who pay full tuition out-of-pocket were given priority for slots and treated in a more welcoming way. There were several families that reported cultural considerations were not considered for communication preferences, food, activities, and even behavioral expectations.

Overall, families shared that they often rely on family, friends, and acquaintances on social media for recommendations for ECEC programs. Many of them are aware of 4-C as a resource for finding child care or applying for CCAP. There are several ECEC programs that families recognize as high-quality. Frequent communication and opportunities to be involved in their child’s care and education were often cited as ways ECEC programs gained the trust of families. Many times, families mentioned Basics DeKalb County, home visiting programs, and programs at local libraries as helpful resources and services. However, there is a consensus that there needs to be more awareness about these supports. Elevating these voices of families in decision-making for ECEC must occur for equity in access and equity in outcomes.



A parent holding their baby.

Regional Strengths & Needs

Region 16 Strengths

Quality Programs and Services:

- Several licensed child care centers and publicly funded programs with Gold Circle of Quality Excellence rating and/or NAEYC accreditation.
- Preschool For All Expansion and Head Start programs that offer full-day publicly funded programs.
- School district preschool, including publicly funded and blended programs.
- Home visiting programs that support parents/caregivers as teachers.
- Early Intervention services.
- Basics DeKalb County Toddler Garden programming and Basics DeKalb County Parent Playgroups.
- Public library story programs for young children.

Resources and Supports for Families:

- Coordinated Community Child Care (4-C) referrals for child care and CCAP application support.
- Basics Insights text program that supports parents/caregivers as teachers.

Resources and Supports for ECEC Professionals:

- 4-C support to become licensed as a family child care provider.
- 4-C communities of practice and professional learning for ECEC professionals.
- ECACE grants that fund 4-C, Kishwaukee Community College, and NIU to recruit, mentor, and support ECEC professionals to attain higher credentials and degrees.
- ROE support for Region 16 school districts to adopt more play-based curricula for early elementary grades, which is a developmentally appropriate practice and allows for smoother transitions for students.

Regional Collaboration:

- DeKalb County Collaborative for Young Children and DeKalb County Regional Office of Education as the backbone agency.
- IRIS as a regional referral system.
- The vision for the Birth to 8 Mental Health Coalition.
- The alignment and communication between Region 16 school districts, the ROE, higher education, and 4-C around the development of the ECEC workforce.
- The partnership between the ROE and Region 16 high schools' ECEC-focused Educator Rising program, Pathways to Play.

Region 16 Needs

Child Care Affordability & Accessibility:

- More affordable and publicly funded child care slots in rural and population-dense areas.
- Transportation provided by providers/programs.
- Less restrictive income levels for CCAP.
- Additional slots to serve infants, toddlers, and overnight shifts.
- More infant/toddler mental health professionals.
- Wrap-around and/or integrated services that address the social-emotional, behavioral, and therapy needs of children.
- More bilingual ECEC programs.
- Additional programs for children with disabilities, including shorter waiting list for EI.
- Lower qualifying thresholds to access EI, especially for social-emotional health.
- Resources to increase family/caregiver awareness of 4-C, CCAP, home visiting programs, child development/milestones, and EI.

Support for ECEC Professionals:

- Public funds to pay ECEC workers competitive wages without increasing costs for families.
- Social-emotional support and other benefits for staff.
- Workforce pipeline development and investment.
- Increased recognition of ECEC professionals as educators and professionals in their field to combat the stigma of ECEC professionals as “babysitters”.

Recommendations

As the needs for ECEC in Region 16 were identified, recommendations began to emerge. The recommendations were developed to consider State responsibilities and regional responsibilities. The consensus among both the Family Council and Action Council was enrollment cannot be increased unless both cost and availability are addressed together. Affordable and available ECEC slots for families and competitive pay for ECEC professionals directly correlate. The Region 16 Family and Action Councils put forth the following seven recommendations.

Recommendation 1

- State: Subsidize child care for all families based on a flat percentage of household income over the next three years, starting with families with the lowest incomes.
- Regional: Encourage regional ECEC providers to assess and increase their CCAP utilization over the next year.

Recommendation 2

- State: Provide funding to pay ECEC professionals working in private and publicly funded programs a wage regionally comparable and competitive to their school-based counterparts without raising costs for families over the next three years.
- Regional: Explore ways to braid public funding with ECEC programs to regionally subsidize ECEC salaries over the next two years.

Recommendation 3

- State: Provide level, non-competitive, grant funding for publicly funded ECEC programs that are based on community needs in the next five years and continue to fund expanded and new publicly funded ECEC programs including PI, PFA/PFA-E, EHS, HS, and CCAP annually.
- Region: Explore the feasibility of regional organizations to respond to RFPs and NOFOs for publicly funded ECEC programs over the next six to twelve months and support the implementation of new or expanded publicly funded programs in FY 24 through FY 26.

Recommendation 4

- State: Expand infrastructure to support greater ECEC workforce pipeline development, including the ECACE grant and Educator Rising programs, and incentivize entering the ECEC field over the next five years.
- Region: Support ongoing regional alignment of ECEC from birth to third grade and support ongoing regional efforts to increase the local ECEC workforce pipeline, including Pathways to Play.

Recommendation 5

- State: Require all child care centers and schools that receive public dollars to adhere to the tenets of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) for all children, beginning at birth. Additionally, these programs should adhere to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Developmentally Appropriate Practices to ensure an inclusive, culturally responsive classroom environment for all children. Provide funding to support staff development and make structural and programmatic changes over the next three years.

- Region: Support the Birth to 8 Mental Health Coalition to conduct a stakeholder analysis and develop an implementation plan to address children’s social-emotional, behavioral health, and ECEC inclusion needs over the next year. Deliver ongoing professional development through multiple channels about inclusive and culturally responsive practices starting in FY 24.

Recommendation 6

- State: Become aware of, and support, regional community saturation efforts like Basics Illinois.
- Region: Continue implementing Basics DeKalb County across the Region.

Recommendation 7

- State: Provide funding to encourage care for non-traditional hours and/or transportation.
- Region: Explore drop-in care options/models for neighborhoods in which it would be the most useful/ utilized over the next year.

The recommendations formed by the Region 16 Family and Action Council are based on the lived experiences of families and providers in DeKalb County and the known data. The Councils endeavored to engage families in communities impacted most by systemic racism and oppression, as well as those defined as being in priority populations. Additionally, each recommendation correlates to identified needs. Region 16 stakeholders uphold that ECEC must continue to be a priority within DeKalb County and the state of Illinois if we are to be the best state to raise young children.

In compiling this report, it is our hope that local and state leaders will use this information to advance ECEC services in the Region. We will continue our community engagement efforts to expand our understanding of the ECEC needs of local families and providers. If you have further questions about these recommendations or would like to get involved with the work of Birth to Five Illinois in Region 16, please find our contact information on the front inside cover of this Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment.

Appendices

Appendix A: Citations

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2. DeKalb County Regional Office of Education. (n.d.). *3rd annual kindergarten readiness community forum*. Retrieved from: <http://www.dkroeedteam.com/dekalb-county-collaborative-for-young-children.html>
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Appendix B: Additional Figures

Appendix B includes additional tables, graphs, and maps referenced in the Regional Needs Assessment. Direct quotes in Spanish are provided in this section as well as the English translations that are found in the Regional Needs Assessment.

Figure 1: DeKalb County Minimum Hourly Wage to Maintain a Survival Budget for ALICE Families with Young Children

| | One Adult, One Child | One Adult, One Child in Care | Two Adults, Two Children | Two Adults, Two Children in Care |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Child Care Cost Alone | \$273 | \$792 | \$547 | \$1,521 |
| Total Monthly Living Cost* | \$3,024 | \$3,664 | \$5,029 | \$6,269 |
| Minimum Hourly Wage for Household | \$18.14 | \$21.98 | \$30.17 | \$37.61 |

Note: Total monthly living cost includes housing, child care, food, transportation, health care, technology, taxes, and miscellaneous living costs for DeKalb County.

Source: ALICE, 2018

Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

Figure 2: Slot Gap by Funding Type and Age Range

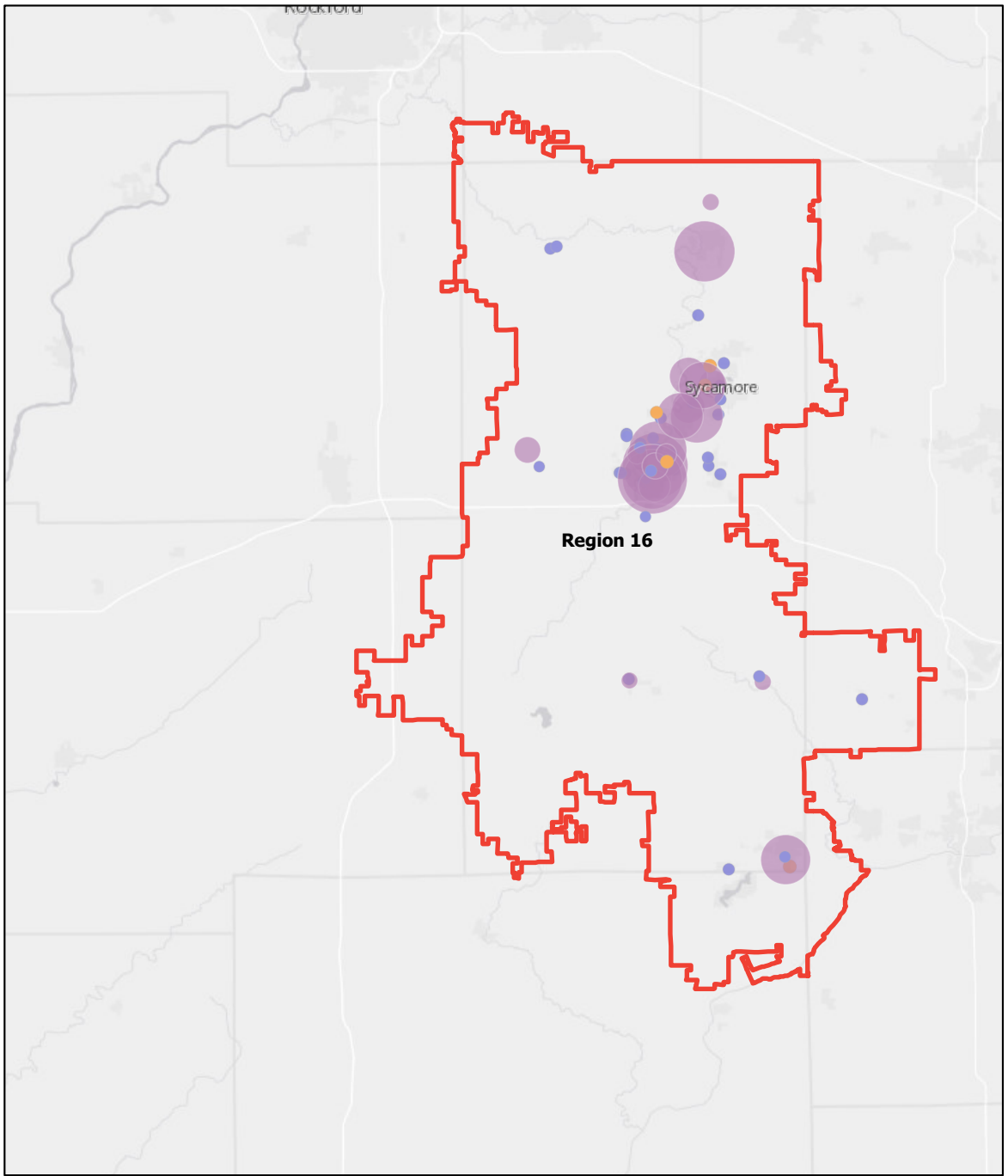
| Program Type | Ages Served | Number of Eligible Children | Number of Slots Available | Slot Gap |
|----------------------------|---------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|----------|
| All Child Care | Birth to Two | 3,751 | 751 | 3,000 |
| | Three to Five | 3,850 | 1,451 | 2,399 |
| CCAP | Birth to Two | 1,274 | 251 | 1,023 |
| | Three to Five | 1,420 | 255 | 1,165 |
| Publicly Funded Child Care | Birth to Two | 1,274 | 211* | 1,063 |
| | Three to Five | 1,420 | 531 | 889 |

Note: Every publicly funded ECEC slot for children ages birth to two is currently home visiting. Approximately 400 of these slots are half-day Pre-Kindergarten slots through school district Preschool for All programs. The number with an * includes 150 Early Head Start slots that are split between 3 counties.

Source: IECAM, 2021

Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

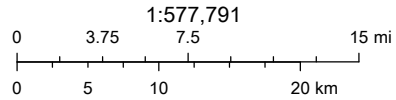
Figure 3: Location of Licensed ECEC Sites by Type and Capacity



5/23/2023, 2:30:50 PM

Licensed ECEC Providers

- Day Care Home
 - Day Care Center
 - Group Day Care Home
 - 6
 - 55
- 104
● 153
 Birth to five Councils



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

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

Source: IECAM, 2021
 Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

Figure 4: Original Direct Quotations from Caregivers in Spanish

| Direct Quote in Spanish | English Translation |
|---|---|
| Yo tuve que ponerme en lista de espera de 6 meses, y después otros 6 meses si no había lugar, cada 6 meses | I had to put myself on the waiting list for 6 months, and then another 6 months if there was no place, every 6 months. |
| Los horarios no se adaptaban a los horarios de trabajo, yo tengo que estar en mi trabajo a las 5:30, no ahí ningún lugar que tenia esas horas. | The hours were not adapted to work schedules, I have to be at work at 5:30, there was no place that had those hours. |
| Las personas que ofreciendo el servicio, está por eso, que tu ya saben los horarios, que tu ya sabes la programa... pero en realidad, una persona que viene llegando no lo conozco. | There are assumptions that the staff has, that you know the hours and programs...people who are here know it but not someone who is new to this country or community. |

Note: Every publicly funded ECEC slot for children ages birth to two is currently home visiting. Approximately 400 of these slots are half-day Pre-Kindergarten slots through school district Preschool for All programs. The number with an * includes 150 Early Head Start slots that are split between 3 counties.

Source: Birth to Five Illinois
 Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

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. Some questions were interpreted into Spanish for Spanish-speaking caregivers.

Caregivers

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

Early Childhood Professionals and Others

1. What challenges do you think families have in accessing Early Childhood Education and Care programs and services?
2. What programs do you know of in the Region that serve children birth through age five and their families?
3. What services don't currently exist in your community and/or this Region for young children and/or their families that you would like to see?
4. What data do you think would be helpful in better understanding how priority populations access Early Childhood care and services, or the barriers/challenges they have accessing care and services?
5. Is childcare readily available and close to employers in your community?
6. What accommodations has your business or company made for professionals with young children? How have these accommodations impacted your business or company?
7. Have you connected with child care providers in the community to build relationships and build relationships with partners to provide the care you need for employees?

Appendix D: Additional Resources

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

1. Cost Model for Early Childhood Education and Care Services:
<https://oecd.illinois.gov/content/dam/soi/en/web/oecd/documents/cost-model-for-early-childhood-education-and-care-services.pdf>
2. Early Childhood Education and Care Terms and Acronyms:
<https://iecam.illinois.edu/database/terms-and-acronyms>
3. Illinois Program Inventory Quick Reference Guide:
https://higherlogicdownload.s3.amazonaws.com/ACTFORCHILDREN/35e7dc4d-525c-45bc-ba2c-48e6466050e3/UploadedImages/Documents/0-5_Illinois_Program_Inventory_Quick_Reference_Guide_9_7_22.pdf
4. Illinois Salary and Staffing Survey of Licensed Child Care Facilities Fiscal Year 2021:
<https://www.dhs.state.il.us/OneNetLibrary/27897/documents/Child%20Care/FY21SSsv.7.IDHS.FINAL.pdf>

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Illinois
State Board of
Education



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