



Illinois State Board of Education

Dr. Tony Sanders, State Superintendent of Education
Dr. Steven Isoye, Chair of the Board

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Early Childhood Block Grant – Fiscal Year 2024

Priority List Instructions

1. What does the Priority List show?

The Priority List identifies the district regions, counties, and ZIP codes that are “early childhood deserts.” An early childhood desert is an area of the state where there is an insufficient number of publicly funded slots to serve at least 80% of 3- and 4-year-old children from low-income families.

Twenty children per classroom is the maximum class size for a Preschool for All program. Fifteen children per classroom is being accepted as the minimum in communities where there are not enough children to fill 20 seats in a classroom so that ISBE can more effectively address the issue of early childhood deserts. The 15 children per classroom threshold aligns with the minimum class size for an inclusive classroom serving children with special needs.

2. What is the purpose of the Priority List?

The purpose of the Priority List is to assist potential applicants in determining if they are located in a district region, county, or ZIP code that is identified as an early childhood desert.

3. What data sources were used in the development of the Priority List?

The following data sources were used to determine early childhood deserts as a Priority List was developed for the FY 2024 ECBG:

- 2022 Illinois Early Childhood Asset Map data (i.e., number of Head Start and ECBG programs by county – excluding Chicago)
- 2020 Census data (i.e., data on poverty levels, number of children living in poverty)
- 2023 ECBG data (i.e., newly awarded programs, continuation programs, estimated number of children served, actual number of children served)

4. How many school district regions are considered pre-k deserts?

There are 196 districts/regions identified with a gap of 15 or more seats. A total of 108 of these districts (or 5,100 seats) show a 100% need (i.e., there are as many needed seats as priority eligible children).

5. What requests in the application benefit from the information in the Priority List?

Requests 1, 2, and 5, in particular, could benefit from the inclusion of information in the Priority List. In specific, these requests for information are:

- (1) Describe the area to be served indicated by high levels of poverty that has an insufficient number of other programs and services to fully serve all children and families who potentially could be at risk.
- (2) Indicate the number of slots needed to serve at least 80% of eligible children in the community and describe how the proposed program and activities align to the budget and will sufficiently meet the identified needs of the population to be served.
- (5) Describe how the program will target those children and families most in need of services who reside in early childhood deserts and that are in need of additional slots to serve at least 80% eligible children.

6. How might an applicant use information from the Priority List in the response to Request 1?

In describing “... the area to be served indicated by high levels of poverty that has an insufficient number of other programs and services to fully serve all children and families who potentially could be at risk,” the applicant may wish to identify the district region(s), ZIP code(s), and or county(ies) that constitute the area served by the applicant. Information on how the program participants does or will “feed” into extant programs

– both community-based organizations and districts – is helpful in making a strong case of how the applicant will serve eligible children.

7. How might an applicant use information from the Priority List in the response to Request 2?

The applicant may wish to use local information (i.e., data that the applicant possesses to make a case for need) and information in the Priority List (i.e., how information in the Priority List supports the local information) to indicate “... the number of slots needed to serve at least 80% of eligible children in the community ...”

8. How might an applicant use information from the Priority List in the response to Request 5?

The applicant could build off and use information to the responses to Requests 1 and 2 to describe how the program will target eligible families in a district region, county, or/and ZIP code.