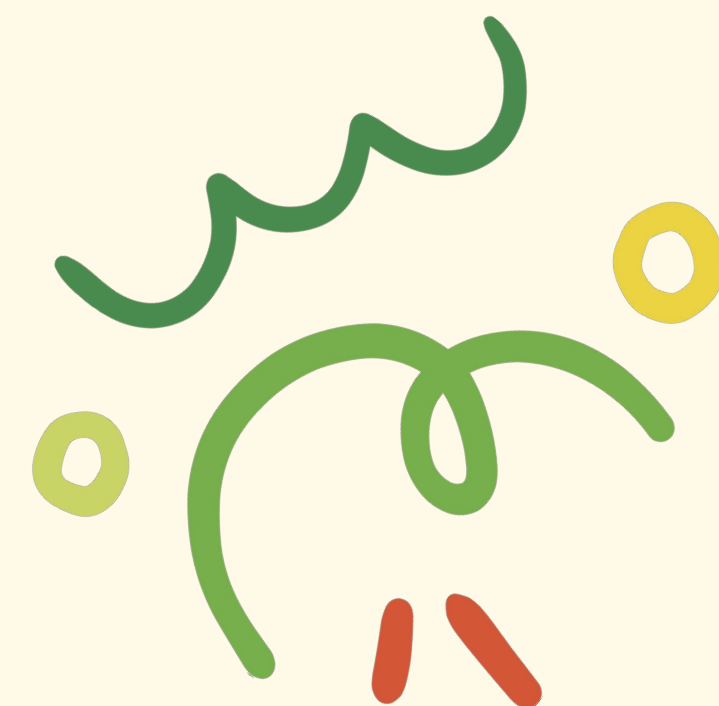




Growing Farm to ECE in Head Start: What Successful Implementation and Support Look Like

July 22, 2026

ASPHN Farm to ECE Webinar Series





Acknowledgement

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Welcome



Carrie Dooyema, MPH, MSN, RN
Health Scientist, Early Care and Education Team
Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity & Obesity
National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health
Promotion



Agenda & Speakers

1. Background

2. Examples of Farm to Head Start

Speaker: Tina Routh, Director of the Early Childhood Department, Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians,

3. Supporting Farm to Head Start

4. Example of Farm to Head Start Support from SPAN State

Speaker: Sarah Flores, Program Director of Community Initiatives and Systems, Illinois Public Health Institute

5. Q & A



Head Start Rigor: Optimum Environments



HS implement a research-based curriculum, that

- supports optimum individualization and growth
- supports family engagement in children's learning and development
- Includes ALL areas of development outlined in Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework (ELOF)

All this delivered via learning that is developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate.

Learning, includes:

- Language & reading,
- Math & science skills
- Social/emotional skills
- Physical skills
- Creative arts.



Farm to Early Care and Education (ECE)

CORE ELEMENTS OF **FARM** *to* **ECE**



NATIONAL
FARM *to* **SCHOOL**
NETWORK



5 Ways Farm to ECE Can Help Head Start Goals and the ELOF



1. Provides meaningful, integrated learning experiences across all domains.

- Approaches to Learning
- Language and Literacy
- Cognition
- Perceptual, Motor, and Physical Development
- Social and Emotional Development

2. Improves healthy eating behaviors

3. Popular family engagement opportunities

4. Connects HS to communities and local food systems

5. Practical strategy for HS's comprehensive services model

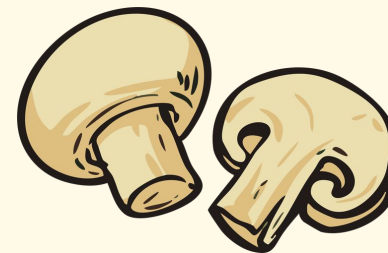
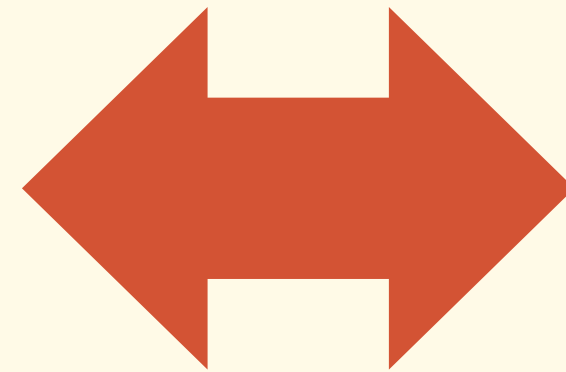


Leveraging Programs for Each Other



Head Start Good for Farm to ECE

- Established nutrition and wellness infrastructure
- Strong family engagement systems
- Trusted community partner
- Nationally serving children who benefit most from access to healthy foods

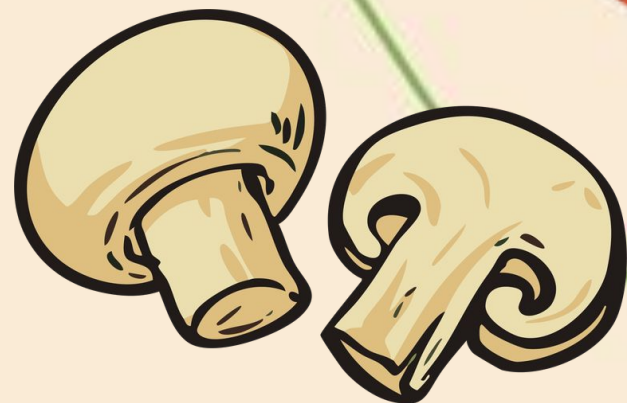


Farm to ECE Good for Head Start

- Makes healthy eating appealing (not pressurized)
- Learning all ELOF domains
- Builds lifelong healthy eating habits
- Increases family engagement
- Connects HS/children to community & local food system

Tina Routh

Tina is the director of the MS Band of Choctaw
Indians Department of Early Childhood.



Growing Farm to ECE in Head Start: What Successful Implementation and Support Look Like

Presented By Tina Routh



From the beginning.....



World of Child "Care"



Exercise activities



More activites...



Healthy Eating Habits





How can we
eat better??



Growing





Getting the veggies in the home

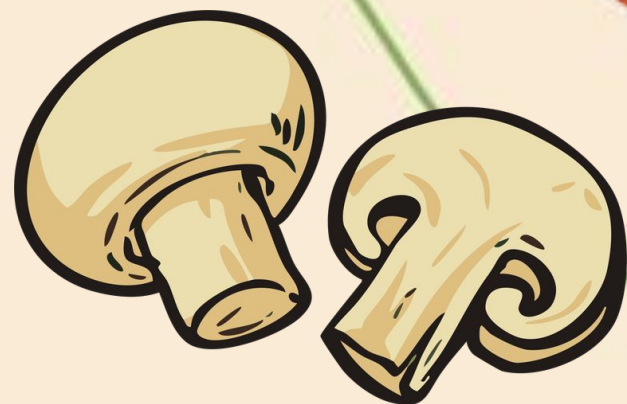


Healthy Eating is a Choctaw Tradition.

Thank you.



Supporting Farm to Head Start



Ways to Support Farm to Head Start

- Communications
- Resources
- Training & Technical Assistance
- Support Community & Peer Networking
- Funding/Grants



Supporting Head Starts



Spectrum of Options



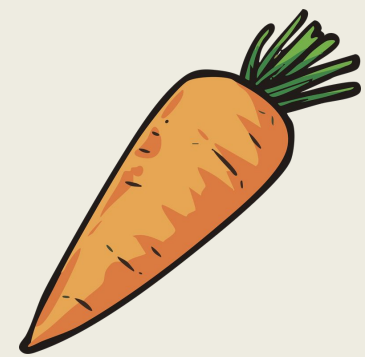
Farm to ECE resource
Compendium



Social Media Campaign



Garden mini-grant
opportunities



Listening sessions or
surveys



Farm to ECE training & office
hours

Sarah Flores

Sarah Flores is the Director of Community Initiatives and Systems at the Illinois Public Health Institute, where she has worked for 13 years.

Her portfolio includes ECEs, Breastfeeding Continuity and Care, and Physical Activity in the Built Environment.





**Illinois
Public Health
Institute**

Advancing Health Justice

IPHI and Illinois Head Start Association Partnership -Supporting Policy/Practice Change at Head Start Sites

Presentation by the Illinois Public Health Institute

07/22/2026

ISPAN IS MADE POSSIBLE WITH FUNDING FOR THE CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION
AND ADMINISTERED BY THE ILLINOIS PUBLIC HEALTH INSTITUTE IN COLLABORATION WITH PARTNERS IN
THE ILLINOIS ALLIANCE PROMOTE OPPORTUNITIES FOR HEALTH

Presenter

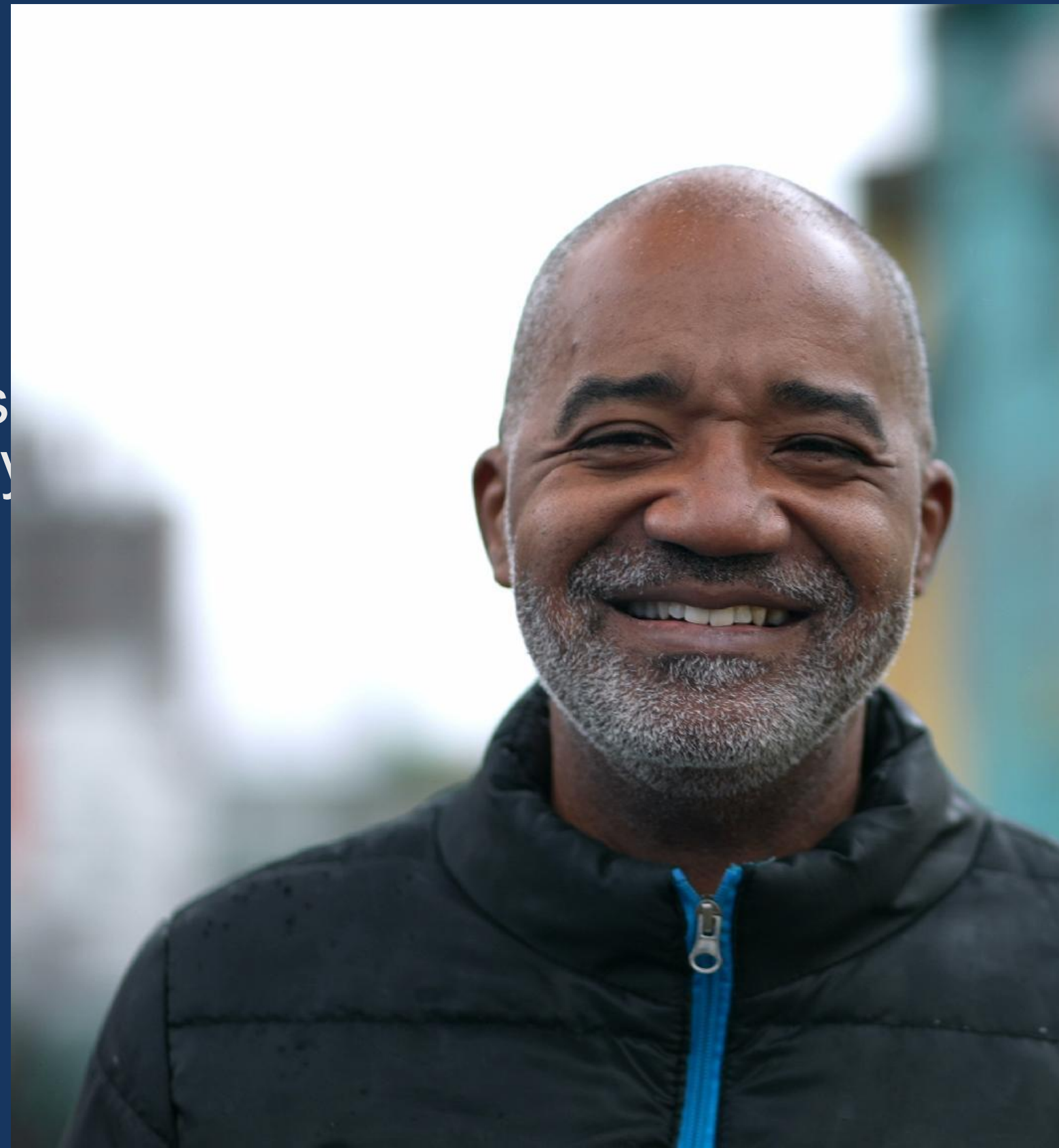
Sarah Flores

*Program Director –
Community Initiatives and
Systems*



IPHI's Mission

The Illinois Public Health Institute collaborates to advance health justice through equitable policy systems, and institutional change.



SPAN OVERVIEW

- ▶ Five-year initiative to implement physical activity and nutrition interventions in Illinois
- ▶ Funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)



SPAN STRATEGIES & OUTCOMES

BREASTFEEDING



Increase access to programs that provide continuity of care for breastfeeding families.

EARLY CARE & EDUCATION



Increase the number of ECE providers meeting nutrition and physical activity best practices.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY/ BUILT ENVIRONMENT



Increase policies, plans, or community design changes that increase access to physical activity.

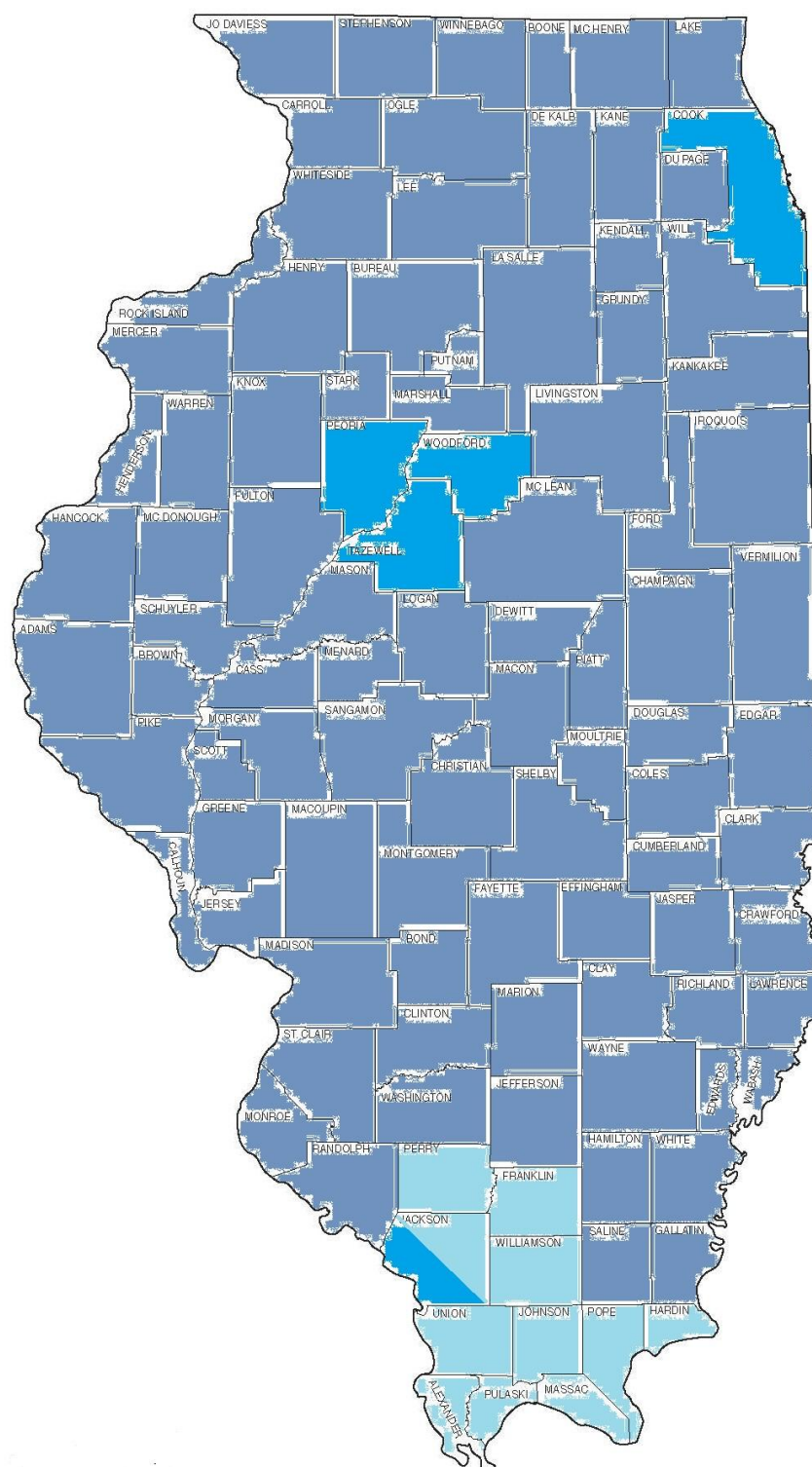
NUTRITION



Increase access to nourishing foods.



SPAN Reach



Statewide

SPAN Round 1:

- Chicago /Cook
- Tri-County Region
- Jackson County

SPAN Round 2:

- Jackson/Franklin/
Williamson/Perry Counties
- Southern Seven Counties

Key SPAN Approaches

PSE Change – State, regional,
institutional

Capacity building and TA

Partnership building/linkages

Education and
communications



CDC's Spectrum of Opportunities for State-Level Obesity Prevention Efforts Targeting the Early Care and Education Setting



Building a Relationship

Listening Conversations:

Illinois Head Start Association

Quality Enrichment Circle Meeting

Directors' meetings

2025 Statewide Directors Institute – in person

Session Overview

- ▶ SPAN Overview (15 min)
- ▶ Research Overview (2 presentations – 20 min + 5 min Q&A)
- ▶ Breakouts: (45 min)
 - ▶ Physical Activity, Farm to ECE/CACFP, Lactation Supports
- ▶ Next Steps/Close (5 min)

ACF Priority:

Promoting Healthy Eating and Nutrition for Head Start Children and Families



U.S. Department of Health & Human Services & Administration for Children & Families



OFFICE OF HEAD START

ACF Administration for Children and Families	U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES	
	1. Log No. ACF-OHS-IM-25-03	2. Issuance Date: 03/19/2025
	3. Originating Office: Office of Head Start	
	4. Key Words: Nutrition	

INFORMATION MEMORANDUM

TO: All Head Start Recipients

SUBJECT: Promoting Healthy Eating and Nutrition for Head Start Children and Families

INFORMATION:

Head Start programs play a vital role in supporting healthy eating and nutrition for enrolled children and families. Access to healthy foods and other nutrition services helps children grow, develop, and learn. Good nutrition is essential for brain development and provides children with the energy needed to stay active and focused throughout the program day. A balanced diet helps strengthen a child's immune system, reducing the risk of infections and illnesses. It also prevents childhood obesity, which can lead to chronic diseases like heart disease and diabetes.

This Information Memorandum (IM) affirms the critical role of Head Start programs in ensuring children and families have access to healthy food and comprehensive nutrition services. It also includes an overview of relevant statutory and regulatory requirements and reminds programs of the resources and partnerships available to support robust nutrition services for children and families. Lastly, this IM provides tips to foster enthusiasm for healthy eating in early learning environments and encourages Head Start programs to use innovative strategies to promote health and nutrition. An appendix of additional resources is included to guide programs in their efforts.

Using Research Base to
Frame Work and Drive
Input-Gathering
Conversations:

SPAN ECE Statewide
Surveys

ECE research papers

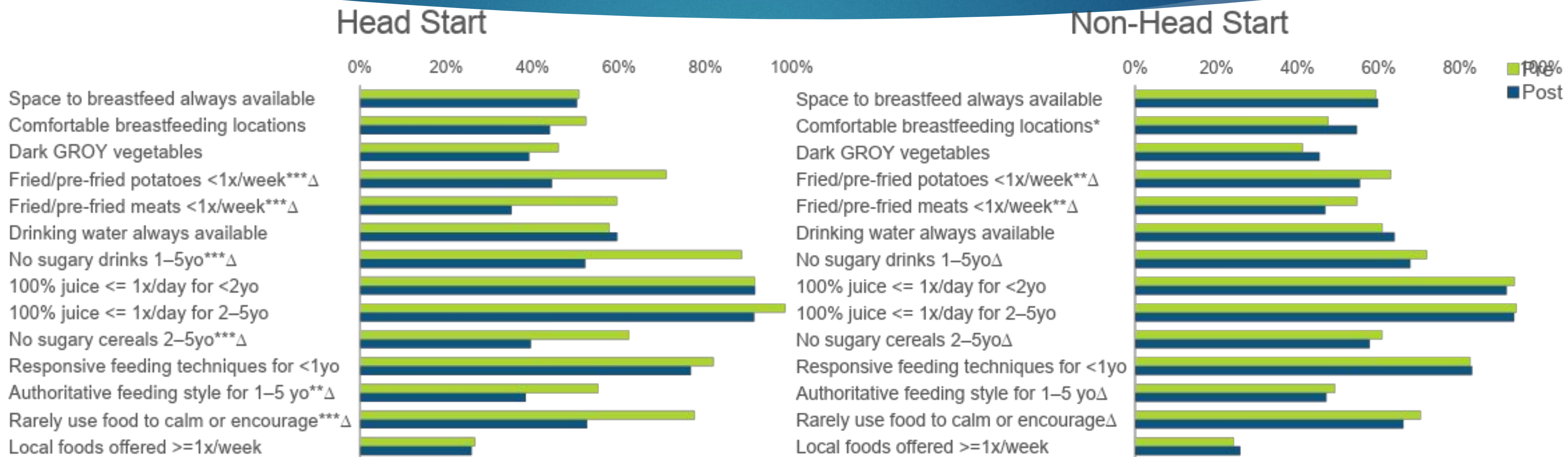
Head Start focus group



ECE Statewide Survey Findings

- Declines over time in meeting nutrition and PA-related best practices statewide
 - Particularly pronounced for Centers, CACFP sites, and **Head Start sites**
 - Serving sugary drinks/cereals more often
 - Serving fried/pre-fried foods more often
 - Less use of authoritative feeding style
 - More sedentary time for toddlers

Statewide ECE Survey Results: Head Start programs less likely to meet nutrition-related practices than non-Head Start programs and saw significant declines, 2019-20 vs. 2022



Change over time statistically significant at the *p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001 levels.

Δ Difference in change over time significantly different for Head Start vs. non-Head Start sites.



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Head Start Focus Group Results - Nutrition (2024)

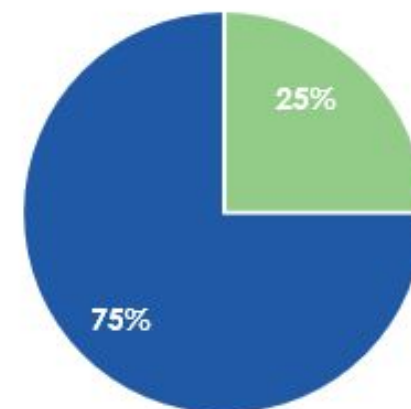
- ▶ What are some challenges you face in implementing nutrition best practices at your site?
 - ▶ Picky Eaters/Like unhealth foods/Children do not like casseroles/mixed dishes
 - ▶ Substitutions for allergies/intolerances
 - ▶ Menu is designed for the school district (older children), may not be in accordance with preschool requirements
- ▶ What kind of support would you want/need to help you implement more of the nutrition best practices listed in this handout?
 - ▶ More materials/classes for parents on healthy foods so healthy eating can be reinforced at home
 - ▶ Parents need help with food costs at home
 - ▶ WIC is an excellent resource to refer parents to for education and food assistance
- ▶ What would help you include more local foods in your meal and snack offerings?
 - ▶ Central office orders food, no control
 - ▶ Collaboration to purchase local foods

Input-Gathering to Identify Head Start Priorities

- Facilitated discussions
- Survey tools, e.g. Menti

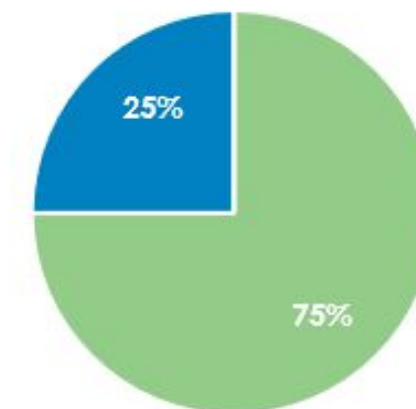
Purchasing Partnerships and Interest

Do you already have any **purchasing partnerships in place with area ECE programs, schools, or other entities?**



■ Yes
■ No

Are you **interested in SPAN support** related Head Start-driven partnerships **to form CACFP buying hubs?**



■ Yes
■ Not Sure
■ No

CACFP Challenges

- What challenges does your Head Start face in procuring foods that align with CACFP Meal Patterns? For example, distance to stores, delivery issues, and finding foods that fit the CACFP standards

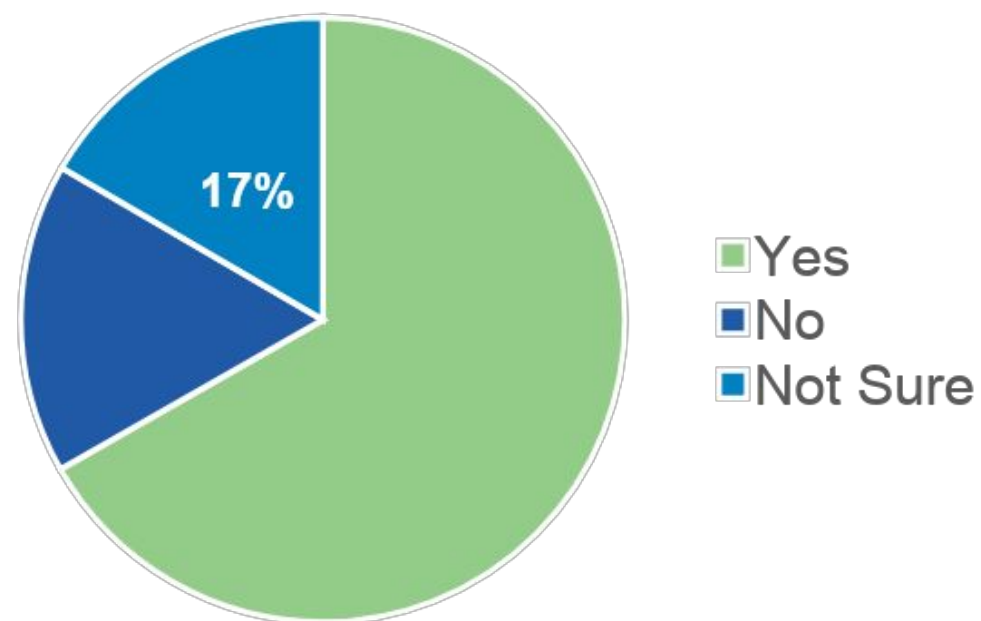


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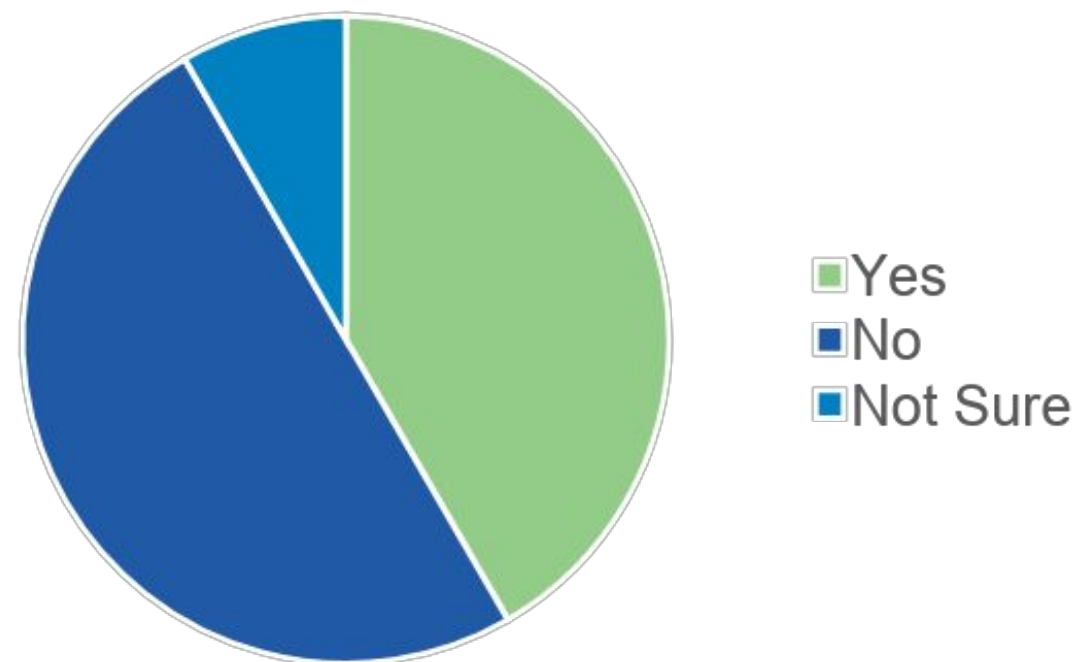


Lactation Engagement and Promotion

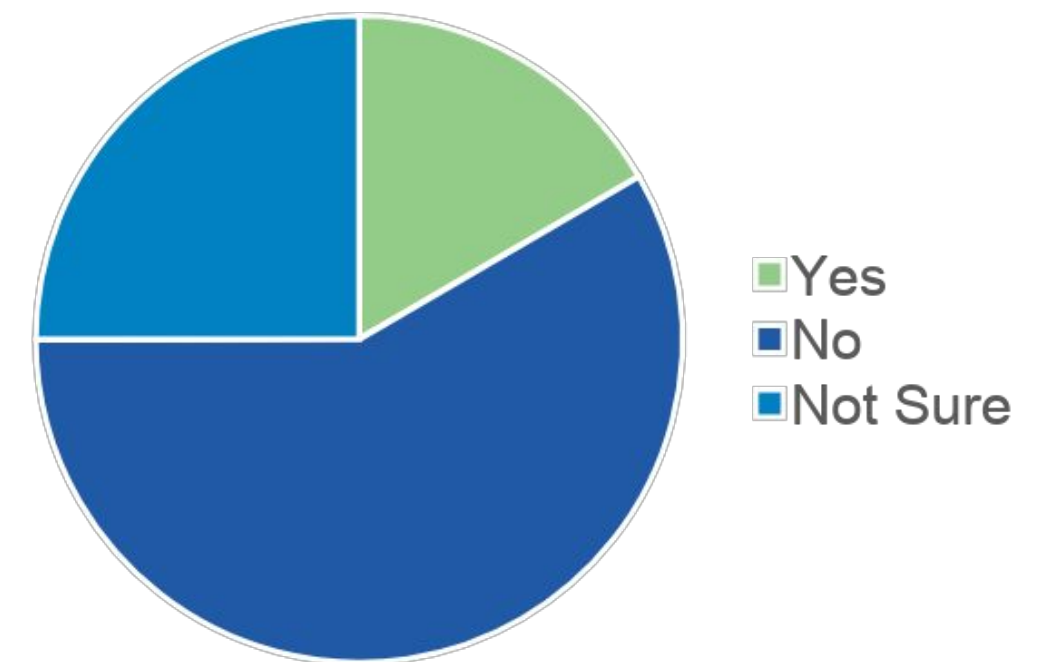
Is Head Start a place to engage lactating parents?



Do you already provide or promote lactation support services at your Head Start sites?



Do you have a staff person trained in lactation supports on staff?



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Developed Support Options Aligned to Head Start Priorities

SPAN Support: Local Food Purchasing/Local Food Procurement

- Setting: Illinois Farm to ECE Network
- Goal/Mission: Increase the health and wellbeing of children within ECE programs across Illinois with nutritious, local and healthy food options. Identify barriers and related solutions to advancing Farm to ECE in Illinois, and advance strategies related to procurement guidance and logistics, training, education/resources, funding and policy development
- Experts Engaged: Seven Generations Ahead, Chicago Food Policy Action Council, Food Works
- Other Key Participants: Local CCR&Rs, SNAP Educators*, Local Health Departments, Farmers, and others
- Quarterly Virtual Meetings: March, June, September



SPAN Support: Lactation Support Community of Practice

- Training on lactation support practices based on further feedback on needs. Could include:
 - Family-Centered Approach
 - How to offer Individualized, Culturally Appropriate Support
 - Important Role of Head Start Staff
 - Create Friendly Environments for Breastfeeding
 - Help Develop Policies and Procedures
 - How to Engage Community Partners
- Setting: Health, Safety and Nutrition QEC meetings

Determining your needs and interests – A Year of Input Gathering

- Connected with Head Start through SPAN-Engaged Regions
- Survey
- Gathered inputs at Directors' meetings
- Selected Area of Focus
- Supports selected

Farm to ECE & Head Start: A Natural Alignment

- ▶ Farm to ECE is...
 - ▶ Gardening
 - ▶ Local Procurement
 - ▶ Education
- ▶ Aligns with Head Start to achieve...
- ▶ Program Performance Standards
- ▶ Early learning Outcomes Framework
- ▶ Explore opportunities to integrate Farm to ECE into existing trainings and systems



Strategy Outcome:

- ▶ Increased state-level ECE policies and activities that advance Farm to ECE
- ▶ Increased ECE programs implementing Farm to ECE

How Head Start Programs Can Help Promote Breastfeeding

- ▶ Family-centered Approach
- ▶ Offer Individualized, Culturally Appropriate Support
- ▶ Important Role of Head Start Staff
- ▶ Create Friendly Environments for Breastfeeding
- ▶ Help Develop Policies and Procedures
- ▶ Engage Community Partners



What Support Could Look Like

We want to **co-design** supports that make breastfeeding easier for families and staff through:

Policy

- Written breastfeeding/lactation policies
- Guidance for staff on navigating services

Systems

- Integrating lactation referrals into enrollment workflows
- Strengthened partnerships with WIC, FQHCs, doulas

Environment

- Creating dedicated spaces for lactation
- Supportive signage and materials
- Culturally responsive visual environments

What Next?

Opportunity **grounded in your priorities:**

- **Lactation Support Community of Practice (CoP)**
 - Peer learning
 - Action planning
 - Support



What Will this Look Like?

- Joining portions of your meetings to do this work (February, in-person in March, and April, and continuing TA)
- Short, guided action steps
- Tools and templates (policies, checklists, workflows)
- Connecting with peers doing similar work
- Support from IPHI and other partners

This is meant to build on what you're already doing

Framing CoP Promotion to Align with Head Start Priorities

FREE 2026 Head Start Nutrition Support Opportunities



Support for Your Real Needs

The Illinois Head Start Association (IHSA), in partnership with the Illinois Public Health Institute (IPHI), is excited to offer **two FREE learning and support opportunities** for Illinois Early Head Start and Head Start programs through the CDC-funded Illinois State Physical Activity and Nutrition (ISPAN) program.

These opportunities are developed directly from feedback and identified needs shared by Illinois Head Start Programs, designed to support programs and staff in meeting Head Start requirements.

Why Participate?

- Strengthen child engagement using local food through Farm to Early Care & Education practices.
- Improve lactation-supportive policies, environments, and referral practices
- Meet Head Start program and regulatory requirements related to nutrition services and family engagement
- Learn alongside peers and connect with experts and community partners across Illinois

Who Should Participate?

This opportunity is perfect for Early Head Start/Head Start program leaders, staff, community partners, and parents/caregivers involved in supporting family health and nutrition. It is especially relevant for those working in lactation, family services, home visiting, and nutrition programs.

Session Schedules

Participation is designed to be practical, flexible, and aligned with existing program schedules. Programs may choose to participate in one or both opportunities!

Farm to ECE Community of Practice

- 1** Friday, April 24, 2026
10:00 AM - 12:00 PM CT
- 2** Friday, May 15, 2026
10:00 AM - 12:00 PM CT
- 3** Friday, August 14, 2026
10:00 AM - 12:00 PM CT

Lactation Community of Practice

- 1** Friday, April 17, 2026
10:00 AM - 12:00 PM CT
- 2** Friday, May 1, 2026
10:00 AM - 12:00 PM CT
- 3** Friday, September 11, 2026
10:00 AM - 12:00 PM CT

Participation Opportunities:

- Virtual and in-person learning opportunities
- Peer learning with other Illinois Head Start programs
- Training, tools, and resources for program needs
- Optional one-on-one assistance

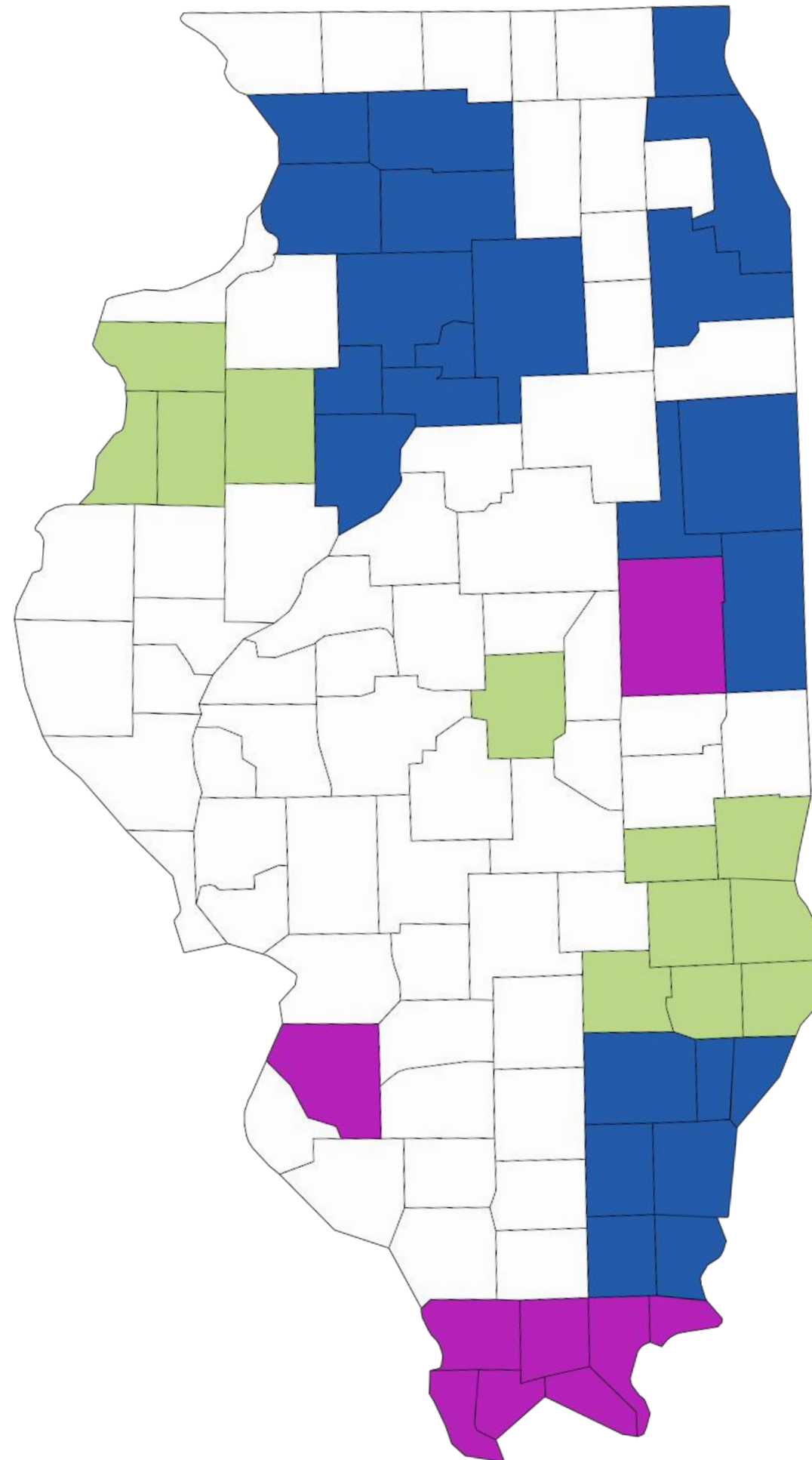
>> Register Now! 

Illinois Head Start Association, Head Start Communities of Practice Overview (Purpose)

- ▶ Purpose:
 - Provide support to 8-12 programs in sustainable PSE changes
 - Build peer learning across Illinois
 - Connect programs to TA and resources
 - Advance equitable nutrition and lactation supports

Statewide Reach

- 20 participating programs
- Representing urban, suburban, and rural communities statewide



Community of Practice Participation

-  Farm to ECE only
-  Lactation only
-  Both CoPs

**Each highlighted county represents one or more participating programs.*



Lactation Support CoP

Illinois Head Start Association, Head Start Lactation Support CoP Overview

▶ Goal

- Strengthen breastfeeding and lactation support within Head Start and Early Head Start programs through policy, systems, and environmental changes.

▶ Participating Programs

- 20 participating programs (15 lactation only, 6 participating in both)
- Representation from urban, suburban, rural, and priority SPAN regions

▶ Activities

- Go NAPSACC breastfeeding self-assessments
- Goal setting and action planning
- Peer learning and resource sharing
- Technical assistance from IPHI and partners
- Community partnership development



Farm to ECE Support CoP

Illinois Head Start Association, Head Start Farm to ECE Support CoP Overview

► Goal

- Support Head Start and Early Head Start programs to make progress in Farm to ECE through policy, systems, and environmental changes.

► Participating Programs

- 20 participating programs
- Representation from urban, suburban, rural, and priority SPAN regions

► Activities

- Go NAPSACC Farm to ECE self-assessments
- Goal setting and action planning
- Peer learning and resource sharing
- Technical assistance from IPHI and partners
- Community partnership development

Cross-Cutting Themes Across Both CoPs

- **What we are hearing across programs:**
 - Programs value practical, action-oriented strategies.
 - Peer learning helps participants identify ideas that feel achievable.
 - Assessment tools help programs move from ideas to implementation.
 - Small, incremental changes feel more manageable than large-scale initiatives.
 - Leadership support is important for sustaining change.





**Illinois
Public Health
Institute**

Thank you!

IPHOnline.org

Sarah Flores

Sarah.Flores@iphionline.org

Q & A





Thank you!
Reach out
emia@asphn.org

