

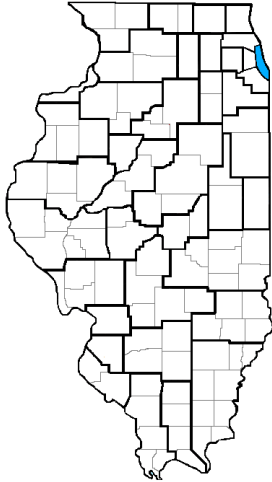
# ACTION PLAN



## **Region 1-A**

Cook County – City of Chicago

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In partnership with Every Child Ready Chicago (ECRC).

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## Letter from Family & Action Council Members

The communities throughout our Region helped lead discussions by providing information through focus groups, interviews, community meetings, and surveys, and we are grateful for their help in developing our Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment and Addendum, both produced in 2023. Their voices and passion for improving the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) system to make it more equitable for all children, caregivers, and families are the driving force behind our work and are evident in this Region 1-A Action Plan.

Council members and others in the community had a chance to share their experiences with ECEC programs and services and add their input to the next steps, detailed in this Action Plan, to move the needle on several recommendations identified in our Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment. We especially want to thank the following community members for their support in developing our Regional Action Plan:

- Altgeld-Riverdale Early Learning Coalition
- Ana Maria Accove, All Our Kids Statewide Program Administrator
- Chicago Early Learning: Gaddys Ybarra, Project Manager, Mayor's Office; Colin Hill and Elijah Olijie, Vera Creative; Gabriela Tenorio, COFI
- Chicago Head Start Collaborative
- Connect Home Visiting Chicago (formerly ConnecTeen)
- David Faich, Raising Illinois
- Jewish United Fund (JUF) Early Childhood Collaborative
- LARC Interpreters Iveliz Rodriguez, Noemi Moreno, and Alejandra Garcia
- Margaret F. Lee Violence Prevention/Intervention Collaboration
- North Lawndale Early Learning Collaboration

Our hope is that the Action Plan will broaden access for children and families citywide, transforming lives, while also providing a clear overview of existing community resources and their accessibility levels through local and state agencies.

We are excited to present our Regional Action Plan to our community partners and families and look forward to working with everyone to implement the recommendations included in the plan.

With gratitude,

Birth to Five Illinois: Region 1-A Family & Action Council Members

## Action Plan Development

Between fall 2022 and spring 2023, the Action Council, Family Council, and Regional Birth to Five Illinois Team reviewed quantitative and qualitative data related to Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services, programs, and supports and worked together to create an [Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment](#) to highlight the experiences of families and caregivers in the Region. The report includes recommendations to improve ECEC opportunities at both the local and state level to make the system more equitable for all children. Councils developed an Action Plan based on several prioritized recommendations that will be used to help communities across the State raise awareness of ECEC services, expand the reach of services and resources to families, and advocate for better access to programs.

This Action Plan is aimed primarily at caregivers, community stakeholders, policymakers, elected officials, state agencies, and potential funders. It is our hope that caregivers find opportunities to talk about their experiences and become advocates for ECEC to help drive long-term, sustainable change in their communities. We also hope that community stakeholders build off the results of the Action Plan and help lead the efforts as we reimagine the ECEC system at the local level. We hope these plans provide an easy entry point for policymakers, elected officials, state agencies that administer ECEC programs, and funders to support community-led efforts, lending their expertise and support to bringing the plans to fruition.

## How this Document is Designed

Each Recommendation has an Action Plan that is rooted in Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI),<sup>1</sup> a method that involves setting SMART goals, gathering feedback, evaluating progress on a regular basis, and making data-driven decisions. SMART is an acronym for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound.<sup>2</sup> Council members developed SMART goals for each Recommendation they chose and identified key partners who could help implement each goal. They determined how long it might take and the steps needed to achieve the goal.

Councils were asked to think about the potential risks, barriers, and solutions for each Recommendation. They also considered who else needed to be engaged in the work to be successful and what funding may be needed to fully implement the Action Plan. In this document, only state agencies, elected officials, and state agency representatives in public service roles are listed by name. This list only identifies those individuals who may be instrumental in pushing the Action Plan; it does not imply their commitment or obligation to do so. Local and regional organizations and individuals were considered but are not listed, which allows Regional Teams and Councils to engage with community members in a collaborative manner.

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK559239/> for more information.

<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/nc-smart-goals-fact-sheet.pdf> for more information.

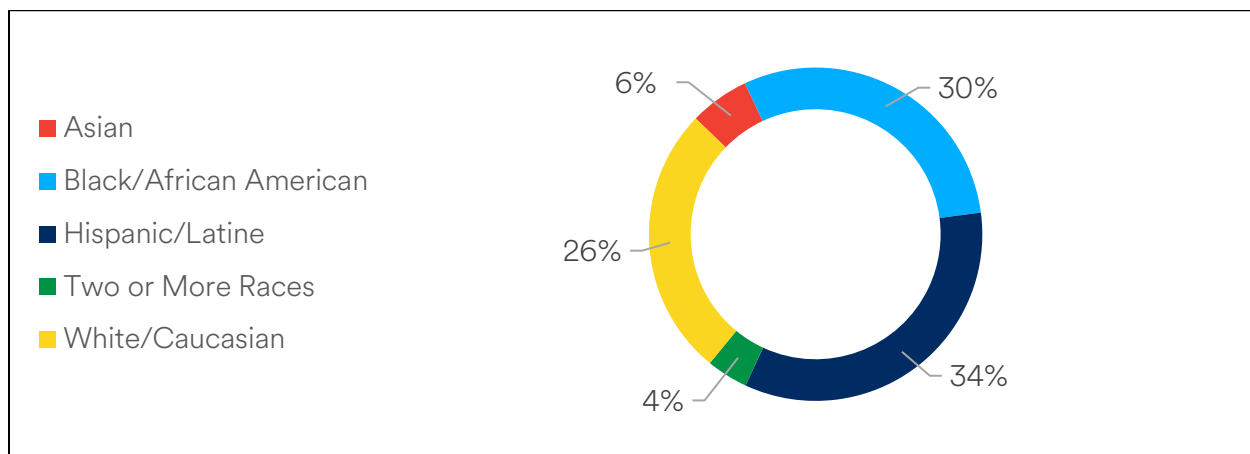
Action Plans will be reviewed in the summer with the community to discuss progress toward the SMART goals, potentially identify new goals and steps to meeting them, and talk about next steps for implementing the Recommendations.

## Region 1-A

Region 1-A is located in northeast Cook County and includes the entirety of the city of Chicago.

In 2022, the total population of the Region was 2,271,914; 182,704 were children birth through age five. Unlike most other Birth to Five Illinois Regions, the number of Hispanic or Latine and Black or African American children are greater than the number of white children living in the Region. While the city offers the chance for people of diverse socioeconomic backgrounds to live in the same space, there are some distinct patterns when looking at the racial and ethnic demographics across the Region (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Percentage of Children Aged Four and Under by Race/Ethnicity<sup>3</sup>



Source: IECAM  
Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

Across the Region, there are 104,100 slots in publicly funded, licensed, and license-exempt child care centers and homes for children birth through age five (Table 1). Currently, Region 1-A does not have enough spots available for families who might want to enroll their young child in an ECEC program.

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<sup>3</sup> Other races/ethnicities have too small of numbers to be represented in the chart: American Indian and Alaska Native, 48; Other, 11 people.

Table 1: Number and Capacity of Early Childhood Education and Care Programs

Program Type/Name	Ages Served	Number in Region	Capacity/Funded Enrollment
Early Head Start	Ages Birth to Three	180	5,684
Head Start	Ages Three to Five	155	5,081
Preschool for All	Ages Three and Four	500	22,015
Preschool for All Expansion	Ages Three and Four	0	0
Licensed Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	493	38,507
Licensed Family Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	967	10,294
License-Exempt Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	352	22,519

Source: IECAM

Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

For additional data and information, please access Region 1-A’s Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment at: [www.birthtofiveil.com/region1a/#report](http://www.birthtofiveil.com/region1a/#report).

## Recommendation 1



Build upon the Chicago Early Learning centralized online application system to include and streamline all Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) and related program offerings. In addition to the online platform, work to establish community hubs for in-person one-stop-shop services, including a plan to provide families Coordinated Intake support which will connect them to all the programs for which they are eligible and provide "warm referrals" to comprehensive wrap-around services.

While there are numerous ECEC programs available to families in Chicago, navigating the system to find the programs in which parents and caregivers want or need to enroll their children is not easy. Community and Council members desire one place they can go to that includes detailed information about available programs in the Region, instead of having the information spread out across several sites.

## SMART Goals

<b>SMART Goals</b>	<b>What steps will be taken to meet the SMART goal?</b>	<b>How will you know when the SMART goal has been achieved?</b>
<p>Throughout the remainder of FY24 and during FY25, ECEC agencies and organizations will meet quarterly to review and discuss the development of community ECEC service hubs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan for four meetings with ECEC agencies and organizations currently meeting, to take place between July 2024 and June 2025 to discuss development of hubs and any missing organizations.</li> <li>• Gather data to determine areas with the greatest need for a hub.</li> <li>• Identify other community members to invite to conversation about hub placement and development.</li> <li>• Create a plan and design a presentation to document the need for hubs and next steps.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When hub development group/committee has met four times and align/adjust meeting cadence.</li> <li>• When three other community members have been invited to provide input on the ECEC hubs.</li> <li>• When a plan has been developed.</li> <li>• When presentation/materials have been developed.</li> <li>• When the group/committee has met with the ECEC Transition Advisory Committee.</li> </ul>
<p>By June 2025, document ECEC services, programs, and resources to add to the Chicago Early Learning (CEL) website.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish resource sharing meetings between CEL staff and Community-Based Organizations (CBOs).</li> <li>• Collect data on which centers/providers are missing on the CEL website.</li> <li>• Add to the existing list of what other services can be added to the CEL website.</li> <li>• Gather feedback from families.</li> <li>• Work with Vera Creative to ensure information shared on the website is in plain language and accessible for all families who use it.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When the list has been completed and given to CEL administrators.</li> </ul>
<p>By the end of FY25, increase the number of families utilizing Family Navigators/Ambassadors in ECEC programs across the Region.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify programs with Family Navigators/Ambassadors that provide enrollment support.</li> <li>• Reactivate the Mayor’s Office citywide outreach committee.</li> <li>• Align data from goal #1 to create informational guide to distribute to physicians, schools, faith-based organizations, community centers, community collaborations, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When there is a 25% increase in families utilizing Family Navigators/ Ambassadors in the Region, tracked through shared CEL outreach form.</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure ambassador organizations and enrollment supports are listed on the CEL website.</li> <li>• Create a short video to promote usage of Family Navigator/Ambassadors programs that can be posted to social media and YouTube.</li> </ul>	
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## Risks & Barriers

<b>Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation</b>	<b>Proposed Solutions to Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation</b>
<p>The primary decision group may not fully reflect the diverse ECEC stakeholders and may lack a clear understanding of the decision-making timelines for stakeholders to provide input for system improvements at the appropriate time.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify existing stakeholders leading enrollment efforts to either invite to the CEL Steering Committee and/or identify strategies to ensure stakeholder input is gathered from existing tables.</li> </ul>
<p>A lack of a two-way communications plan and engagement framework between the CEL Steering Committee, Every Child Ready Chicago (ECRC), and existing citywide enrollment will create barriers to meeting goals.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revisit communication and engagement plans to identify opportunities to initiate two-way communication and additional stakeholders that need to be phased in.</li> </ul>
<p>Stakeholder buy-in and analysis of existing efforts that require using a CQI process and shared agenda and may not come with additional funding may limit Action Plan implementation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify all enrollment/outreach stakeholders and relaunch the Mayor’s Office city-wide outreach workgroup meetings so that relationship building, collaboration, and trust can be leveraged to explore shared agenda items.</li> </ul>
<p>Current messaging regarding Universal PreK and Preschool for All really refers to school-based vs CBOs. For some families, child care programs serve as preschool programs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review existing strategic plans to identify possible strategies that promote alignment between ECEC enrollment stakeholders’ and Mayor’s Office priorities that use existing funds in a more efficient way.</li> </ul>
<p>Access to transportation and technology for newly arrived families.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For newly arrived families in shelters, establish partnerships between CBOs and the Chicago Department of Family Support Services (DFSS) to do enrollment pop-ups at shelters to address the transportation and technology access issues.</li> <li>• For newly arrived families recently transitioning to housing, establish partnerships between ECEC and housing organizations and activate community navigators/parent ambassadors or Community Collaborations to canvas or do door-to-door outreach.</li> </ul>

## **Additional Engagement with State Organizations, Agencies & Individuals**

Council members and Regional staff identified additional community and state-level organizations, agencies, and individuals and what role they might need to play in implementing the Action Plan SMART goals and/or Recommendation. Local organizations, agencies, and individuals are still being contacted and their specific role is being defined at this time, so they have not been listed as a part of the Action Plan. However, Council members and Regional staff identified the following statewide organizations, agencies, and/or individuals who should be engaged further to help inform improvements and support the implementation of the new informational hubs:

- Early Intervention Child and Family Connections (CFC) Program Managers
- Home Visiting Coordinators
- iGrow Illinois Programs
- Illinois Head Start Association
- Local Interagency Council(s)

## **Possible Funding Sources**

The Council members identified the following additional possible funding sources to support this Recommendation:

- City of Chicago Collaboration funding
- Chicago Public Schools Community School Initiative
- Private, philanthropic funding

## **Community**

There are several community partners already involved in or working on similar recommendations/goals, including the Chicago Mayor's Office, Every Child Ready Chicago, the Chicago Early Learning Steering Committee, the Early Head Start/Head Start Roundtable, Early Childhood Collaborations in the Region, Family Connects Chicago, Early Childhood Education and Care Community Based Organizations, Illinois Action for Children, and others.

Community partners shared the following lessons learned from their work:

- ECEC partners know that families want and need access to comprehensive services. Including basic information about other ECEC options such as child care, Early Intervention, Family Connects Chicago, and others within Chicago's ECEC system on the website is a good start, but convening folks by service area is also needed to increase collaboration and coordination of services and to help support enrollment efforts.

- Local partners continue to be interested in collaborating with additional ECEC partners to ensure all publicly funded programs are included in the centralized website and application.
- Not all families are able to, or prefer using, a digital website to learn about and complete ECEC program applications. Hearing this feedback from families, Chicago Early Learning was intentional about providing different access points for families, such as providing guidance and marketing materials to support programs providing in-person program/school support; some families prefer talking to people via the centralized hotline, so additional staff were added and operation hours were expanded to evenings and weekends; and lastly a master outreach/event calendar was created to coordinate parent ambassadors/outreach staff to saturate communities through canvassing, door-knocking, and staffing community events.

## Recommendation Implementation

Council members said they will know the Recommendation is fully implemented when families know where they can access information about ECEC resources, and they are able to do so digitally and in-person. Additionally, there will be more collaboration between families, providers, and organizations, and more children enrolled in programming across the Region.

Council members also predict that fully implementing this recommendation will reduce the frustration and confusion for families looking for child care and support services, referrals will increase and connect families earlier to critical services and high-quality educational supports, and families will be able to access services in their area that meet their needs. Additionally, more programs will be able to focus on programming, rather than recruitment.

## Recommendation 2



Create and advocate for comprehensive funding plans that will be shared with appropriate agencies with the goal of increasing programming for children birth to age three, increasing staff compensation, and increasing the number of ECEC Community Collaborations.

This recommendation was made because over many years, Region 1-A’s ECEC advocates have advocated for improving staff compensation and increasing programming for children birth to age three, especially as the costs to provide high-quality programming continue to rise. A lack of sustainable funding will continue to lead to issues of increased slot gaps, huge differences in staff compensation between the school district and Community Based Organizations (CBOs), and the continued practice of piecemeal funding for ECEC Collaborations. The need to coordinate and increase advocacy efforts at all levels of government will hopefully lead to a higher number of participants and increased awareness of the evolving challenges.

Given the recent announcements of Smart Start funding and a central ECEC State Agency, stakeholders see a window of opportunity to systematically address our Region’s inequities. Our Region’s ECEC Community Collaboration landscape plays a critical role in increasing families’ access to ECEC programs, which has led to a strong desire to adequately fund their efforts within a very siloed system.

## SMART Goals

<b>SMART Goals</b>	<b>What steps will be taken to meet the SMART goal?</b>	<b>How will you know when the SMART goal has been achieved?</b>
Throughout the remainder of FY24 and the entirety of FY25, ECEC agencies, CBOs, local Government officials, institutes of higher learning, and others will conduct quarterly meetings to review Chicago ECEC advocate’s funding priorities that result in increased awareness, advocacy opportunities, and application submissions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct a landscape analysis of existing policy tables to align to existing meeting cadence, organizer, lead(s), and meeting roles.</li> <li>• Create a communication and a stakeholder plan.</li> <li>• Create a survey to gather additional community feedback.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When the group has met four times and there is a documentation of information shared with local policy table.</li> </ul>
Throughout the remainder of FY24 and the entirety of FY25, CBOs will identify, train, and support individuals who wish to advocate for ECEC in the Region.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify training resources and partners.</li> <li>• Create a survey to gather community input on topics and interest.</li> <li>• Offer opportunities for advocacy at different levels, such as self, family, community, etc.</li> <li>• Create a training schedule to publicize.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When CBOs have provided two trainings to for individuals who wish to advocate for ECEC in the Region.</li> <li>• When individuals who have been trained have participated in two advocacy events.</li> </ul>

## Risks & Barriers

<b>Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation</b>	<b>Proposed Solutions to Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation</b>
Buy-in from community members who may not understand or believe there is an urgent funding need.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorporate community feedback from Every Child Ready Chicago (ECRC) listening sessions to elevate need.</li> </ul>
Not knowing the difference between the current cost of funding for programming aimed at children birth to three versus children ages three to five.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research true cost per child (based on the actual needs of children and families) with the intent of lessening the cost for families.</li> </ul>
Perceived competition between funding ECEC workforce and staff versus funding essential resources for programs (such as winter gear, diaper/potty training supplies, clothing, etc.).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish/formalize ECRC policy table and include organizations that are providing essential supplies to ECEC programs such as local members from the Illinois Diaper Coalition.</li> </ul>
Language barriers for apprenticeships, those in the workforce.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Replicate and scale up ECEC workforce cohort models that offer language support such as ECEC program at St. Augustine College and the Grow Your Own program at Chicago Commons.</li> </ul>
Being able to fully and sustainably fund ECEC Collaborations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct cost-modeling research to document the true cost of operating an ECEC Community Collaboration.</li> <li>• Identify and partner with ECEC advocate(s) to formalize a local and/or state budget allocation request.</li> </ul>
Ensuring families can qualify for multiple funding streams to satisfy co-pays for CBOs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Move barrier of funding for families vs. program needs to operate (need to collect co-pay). We are currently asking the end user (families) to change vs. programs to change.</li> </ul>
Tracking spending against budget allocations, especially as populations and needs change in the Region.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy changes for mom/pop programs resulting in more equitable funding to address needs.</li> </ul>

## Additional Engagement with State Organizations, Agencies & Individuals

Council members and Regional staff identified additional community and state-level organizations, agencies, and individuals and what role they might need to play in implementing the Action Plan SMART goals and/or Recommendation. Local organizations, agencies, and individuals are still being contacted and their specific role is being defined at this time, so they have not been listed as a part of the Action Plan. However, Council members and Regional staff identified the following statewide organizations, agencies, and/or individuals who should be engaged further to help support the SMART goals and/or recommendation:

- Quality Alliance Group: Establish a communication plan to share advocacy priorities and engagement opportunities at the local level.

## Possible Funding Sources

The Council members identified additional possible funding sources to support this recommendation:

- Birth to Five Illinois Collaboration Grant
- Private, philanthropic funding

## Community

Council members identified community groups who have been and are currently working on similar goals and recommendations:

- Chicago Mayor's Office
- Chicago United for Equity
- City Colleges of Chicago
- Early Childhood Workforce Partnership
- Erikson Institute
- Every Child Ready Chicago
- Illinois Action for Children
- Illinois Action for Children Navigators
- Illinois Department of Human Services
- Illinois Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity Advisory Board

Valuable lessons from these experiences include the importance of flexibility to adapt to changing needs, the promotion of diversity and inclusion, and active community participation in decision-making. Additionally, it should be noted that City Colleges of Chicago's Truman College is developing a one-stop stop early learning workforce hub to provide stakeholders with comprehensive support. It is just being launched, so no learning is currently available.

## Recommendation Implementation

Council members said they will know the Recommendation is fully implemented when workforce challenges have been minimized and job vacancies have decreased significantly, enrollment in programming has increased, and a data collection plan that involves staff evaluations, community feedback, and benchmarks has been implemented to track outcomes. Other Council members said that full implementation will include more families who are involved with programs and primed for advocacy, and when funding is sustainable and accessible for more families.

They also predicted that by fully implementing the recommendation will result in the following:

- Child care will be more stable, affordable, and accessible for more children and their families.
- More families will place their children in the system because it will create trust and communication about the programs and the assistance for which they qualify regardless of immigration status.
- More programming for children birth to age three could significantly improve early access to education through cognitive and social-emotional supports, and better prepare them for a lifetime of learning.
- It will be easier to recruit and retain high-quality ECEC staff.
- ECEC staff will feel heard and valued, and more people will be encouraged to enter the field.
- Expanded, stronger ECEC Collaborations will be able to offer better resources and more expertise.
- Elected officials will be more knowledgeable about the needs and successes of ECEC.
- Budget increase requests will be met due to the increased understanding of the needs and challenges of ECEC.

## Next Steps



Birth to Five Illinois Regions will continue to use the CQI process and meet with stakeholders this summer to discuss the community’s progress on implementation and continue bringing stakeholders together.

As pieces of the Action Plan are implemented, stakeholders will be encouraged to build on those efforts and develop new SMART goals to expand access to ECEC services, programs, and supports, and continue this important work in making Illinois the best state in the nation for families raising young children, with the nation’s best Early Childhood Education and Care system.

For more information on Birth to Five Illinois, please visit: [www.birthtofiveil.com](http://www.birthtofiveil.com).



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