

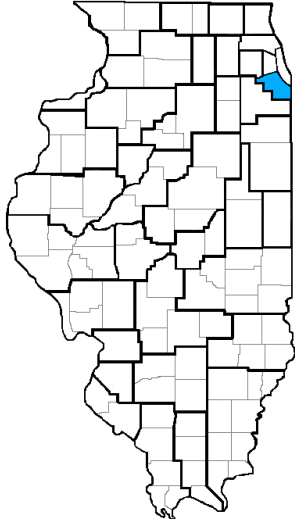
# ACTION PLAN



**Region 1-B-C**

Cook County (South)

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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-B-C 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:

- Dr. August Stockwell.
- The community members who engaged in meaningful conversations, providing essential feedback that helped to enrich and finalized this plan.

It is our hope that the Action Plan will heighten awareness about the need for extra resources for families with young learners and those engaged in their education. The Action Plan is anticipated to spark meaningful conversations and cultivate connections among community members, stakeholders, and collaborators. The overarching goal is to initiate a positive transformation in the ECEC landscape of the Region, helping children and families to achieve and sustain lifelong success. We also hope that it will establish resource systems that can be utilized for generations to follow.

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-B-C 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.

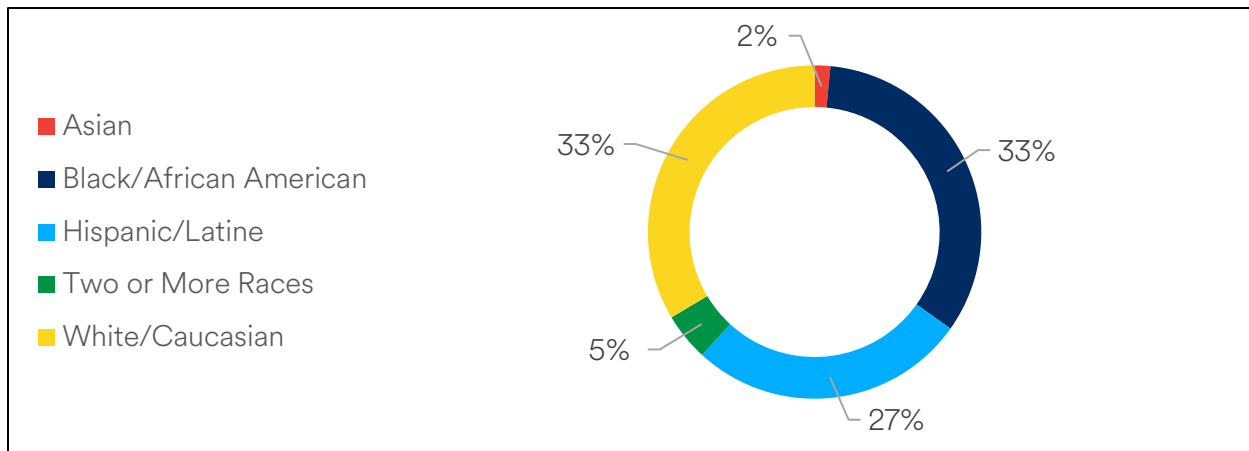
Action Plans will be reviewed in the summer with the community to discuss progress toward the SMART goals, potentially identify new goals and steps to meeting them, and talk about next steps for implementing the recommendations.

## Region 1-B-C

Region 1-B-C is located in northeastern Cook County and includes the southern, southwestern, and southern borders of the city of Chicago.

In 2022, the total population of the Region was 853,971; 57,664 were children birth through age five. The largest racial populations are white and Black/African American; the third largest is Hispanic/Latine (Figure 1). The Region has a growing population of Middle Eastern families, many of whom live in Palos Hills, and South American asylum who have been bussed from border states (such as Texas and Florida) to the area, with many being housed in Matteson and Harvey.

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 26,343 slots in publicly funded, licensed, and license-exempt child care centers and homes for children birth through age five (Table 1). Currently, Region 1-B-C 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, 27 people; Other, 254 people.

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

Program Type/Name	Ages Served	Number in Region	Capacity
Early Head Start	Ages Birth to Three	19	444
Head Start	Ages Three to Five	20	823
Preschool for All	Ages Three and Four	82	5,913
Preschool for All Expansion	Ages Three and Four	24	900
Licensed Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	163	15,003
Licensed Family Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	260	2,606
License-Exempt Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	9	654

Source: IECAM

Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

For additional data and information, please access Region 1-B-C's Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment at: [www.birthtofiveil.com/region1bc/#report](http://www.birthtofiveil.com/region1bc/#report).

## Recommendation 1



**Encourage programs to provide professional and educational development at little or no cost to staff.**

The recommendation to encourage programs to hire specialized staff and provide professional and education development at little or no cost to staff is grounded in the recognition that investing in Early Childhood and Care (ECEC) professionals is essential for the long-term success of the Region's children. This investment enhances the capabilities of individual professionals and strengthens the overall capacity of ECEC programs to provide quality care and education, ultimately benefiting our youngest learners and their families.

## 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>Within 18 months, create and share a resource list of upcoming free educational events for educators on trauma-informed care and social-emotional learning, with marketing emphasis in communities that have high suspension rates.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Locate at least five local professionals or organizations with expertise in trauma-informed care and social-emotional learning who offer training.</li> <li>• Establish partnerships with local schools, child care centers, and licensed-exempt child care providers in target areas.</li> <li>• Implement a robust promotional strategy to inform and encourage staff members to participate in the training sessions.</li> <li>• Collect feedback from participants to evaluate the effectiveness of the training sessions to make necessary improvements for future professional development initiatives.</li> <li>• Track participant attendance by zip code, feedback, and any notable outcomes from the training sessions. Prepare a comprehensive report highlighting the impact of the training initiatives by June 30, 2025.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Established partnerships with five local experts or organizations.</li> <li>• Regular and effective communication channels established between organizations, local schools, and/or child care providers.</li> <li>• When a robust promotional strategy effectively informs and encourages staff participation in the training sessions.</li> <li>• When participant feedback is analyzed to identify strengths, classroom improvements, and remaining gaps or needs.</li> <li>• When tracked attendance rates show that 50% of participants come from targeted areas.</li> <li>• Completed community surveys showing the positive impact of training.</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>
<p>Participants may not actively engage in the training sessions, leading to reduced effectiveness.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure to list training that includes interactive elements, case studies, and group activities to enhance participant engagement.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure the content is relevant, relatable, and directly applicable to the participants' roles.</li> </ul>
Community members or staff may be resistant or skeptical about the benefits of social-emotional learning (SEL) training.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct awareness campaigns to highlight the importance of SEL, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), and trauma-informed practices.</li> <li>• Share success stories and testimonials to build trust and credibility.</li> <li>• Host community meetings to highlight the need for ECEC staff to utilize the training list.</li> </ul>
Participants may face scheduling conflicts, impacting attendance at the training sessions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure trainings listed have flexible scheduling options, including evenings or weekends, to accommodate diverse participant schedules.</li> </ul>
Challenges may arise in accurately measuring the impact of the training on participants and the community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement pre-and post-training assessments to measure knowledge and skills gained.</li> <li>• Collect qualitative feedback through surveys and interviews.</li> <li>• Collaborate with local institutions to conduct long-term impact assessments.</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:

- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Specialists: Integrate DEI specialists to ensure that the trainings listed are inclusive, culturally sensitive, and address the unique needs of diverse communities.
- Evaluation and Assessment Experts: Include individuals with expertise in program evaluation and assessment to design meaningful metrics, collect data, and measure the impact of the trainings taken by ECEC staff.
- Illinois Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS), Illinois Network of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies (INCCRRA): Approval of professional development provider and training for Gateways credit.
- Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE): Approval of professional development provider and Continuing Professional Development Unit (CPDU) credit.
- Local government representatives: Collaborate with local government representatives to gain support, navigate potential policy barriers, and explore opportunities for funding or resources.



## Possible Funding Sources

While additional funding will be needed to create, print, and distribute marketing and outreach materials; develop and maintain a digital platform; and include training, data collection and evaluation services, outreach, and other activities, the Council members did not identify additional possible funding sources at this time.

## Community

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

- Carol Robertson Center
- Centers for New Horizons
- Good Shephard Center
- Governors State
- Illinois Action for Children
- Moraine Valley Community College
- Partnership for Reliance
- Prairie State College
- South Suburban College
- StarNet Region 6

These agencies and organizations are important partners in this work because they likely understand what professional development is already available, and who needs more professional development opportunities made available to them. They can also provide insights into the mental health needs of the communities with whom they are already engaging.

## Recommendation Implementation

Council members said they will know the recommendation is fully implemented when there is an established, sustainable ongoing system of professional development that is accessible and available to all ECEC professionals. There will be documented processes, data and feedback from community partners collected and analyzed at regular intervals, participation by most of the targeted community partners, and increased community awareness of, and engagement with, the available professional development opportunities.

Council members also predicted that by fully implementing the recommendation:

- Staff members will gain a deeper understanding of social-emotional learning, the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), and trauma-informed practices, leading to improved competencies in addressing the social and emotional needs of students.
- School culture will improve and become more positive, fostering better relationships among staff, students, and parents leading to a more supportive learning environment, a decrease in suspension rates, as well as higher academic performance, attendance, and overall student satisfaction.
- The establishment of an ongoing system for updates ensures that staff members continue to receive support and training in SEL practices, contributing to the long-term sustainability and effectiveness of the program.

- New knowledge and skills will be transferred to key individuals within the community, increasing community engagement and collaboration, creating a multiplier effect, and enabling the continuation of the program without external support.
- Stronger partnerships will be fostered between schools, local government, community organizations, and experts.

## Recommendation 2



**Optimize community partnerships and Community Collaborations to develop unified mechanisms to inform families across the Region about resources and Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) programs.**

This recommendation was made to address gaps in awareness and resource accessibility for families with young children; it is crucial to enhance community awareness of available ECEC programs. Enhanced awareness of ECEC programs at the regional level can empower ECEC advocates, remove barriers to access, build trust, and foster a comprehensive community-centered approach.

### 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>By December 2024 build an ECEC resource website inclusive of all ECEC programs and services in the Region, to raise awareness of ECEC programs in the Region and provide community members an easily accessible place to find programs, services, and eligibility requirements</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify community members and organizations who are passionate about ECEC and have influence within different segments of the Region.</li> <li>• Develop a centralized online platform or physical resource website that serves as a one-stop-shop for information on ECEC</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When a systematic process has been employed to identify community members and organizations genuinely passionate about ECEC.</li> <li>• A digital platform has been developed and launched.</li> <li>• Confirm that the information is accurate, up-to-date, and easily understandable for the target audience.</li> </ul>

	<p>programs and related resources.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure the resource website is easily accessible, user-friendly, and provides comprehensive information on program offerings, eligibility, and application processes.</li> <li>• Create an optional post-survey, offered to website traffic to evaluate the effectiveness of the ECEC website's efforts to raise ECEC awareness in the Region.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Survey results have been analyzed for patterns or trends.</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>
Lack of financial resources may hinder the planning, promotion, and execution of the development and maintenance of the ECEC resource website.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seek diverse funding sources, including grants, sponsorships, partnerships with local businesses or organizations, and community fundraising initiatives.</li> <li>• Develop a detailed budget that includes website development costs.</li> </ul>
If there is a lack of interest or engagement from the community the resource website may not be utilized as intended.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct targeted marketing and outreach campaigns using various channels, such as social media, local newspapers, and community bulletin boards.</li> <li>• Collaborate with community influencers or leaders and leverage existing community networks and organizations to enhance outreach efforts.</li> </ul>
Reliance on technology for communication and information dissemination may pose challenges if there are digital access disparities within the community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure events and the resource website are accessible through multiple channels, including online and offline options.</li> <li>• Provide assistance or workshops to help community members navigate digital platforms.</li> <li>• Consider partnering with local community centers or libraries to provide physical access points for information.</li> </ul>
Despite the goal of raising awareness, there may be challenges in effectively conveying information about ECEC programs, eligibility criteria, and benefits to the target audience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a comprehensive communication strategy that includes clear and culturally sensitive messaging.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Utilize various communication channels and collaborate with local schools, community organizations, and child care providers to disseminate information.</li> </ul>
Community members and stakeholders may have competing priorities, making it challenging for them to prioritize engagement with the resource website.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communicate the benefits and positive outcomes that the ECEC resource website can bring to the community.</li> <li>Leverage community advocates and influencers identified in the initial steps to champion the importance of the ECEC resource website.</li> </ul>
In a diverse community, cultural differences may impact the effectiveness of communication and community engagement strategies. It is important to ensure cultural sensitivity in the planning process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct cultural competency training for website developers, collaborators, and communication teams.</li> <li>Seek input from community leaders and members to ensure that the website and messaging are culturally appropriate and inclusive.</li> </ul>
If the resource website involves collecting and storing personal information, there may be concerns about data privacy and the need to comply with relevant regulations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement robust data protection measures, such as encryption and secure storage systems.</li> <li>Communicate data privacy policies to participants and ensure their consent.</li> <li>Regularly review and update data security protocols to comply with evolving regulations.</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:

- Elected officials: Support outreach and awareness raising and identify potential funding supports.
- Illinois Cares for Kids: Provide data and technical support.
- Illinois Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS): Spread awareness of events to communities they serve and assist with identifying vendors and information providers.
- Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), Women, Infant, and Children (WIC): Spread awareness of events to communities they serve, provide screenings, and assist with identifying vendors and information providers.

- Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE): Assist with building connections between organizations and community partners and raise awareness of events amongst school districts.
- StarNET Region VI: Build event awareness and outreach to community partners.

The following providers were identified as organizations or agencies that could potentially assist with outreach and awareness raising:

- Child and Family Connections #12
- Easter Seals
- Regional Office of Education
- Start Early

## Possible Funding Sources

While funding may be needed to support the development and maintenance of a digital platform, hold events, provide translation and interpretation services, develop tools and resources, engage community members and partners, collect and evaluate data, develop and distribute marketing materials, and other activities related to the recommendation, the Council members did not identify additional possible funding sources at this time.

## Community

Council members identified community groups who have been and are currently working on similar goals and recommendations: Good Shepard Center and Oak Lawn School District 123. Three important lessons shared with Council members and the Regional Team were:

- Organizations currently involved in this work have found that engaging the community and highlighting the advantages of children attending ECEC programs can pose challenges in certain socioeconomic groups.
- Tasks involving technological understanding can pose challenges for certain community members.
- Communities have expressed a need for resources to be in a centralized place and seek information about available ECEC services.

## Recommendation Implementation

Council members said they will know the recommendation is fully implemented when there is a completed and functional ECEC resource website, there is a comprehensive reporting system in place, community interest in ECEC resources has increased, there is an increased awareness of ECEC resources, and survey milestones have been achieved.

Council members also predicted that by fully implementing the recommendation, parents and caregivers will be more empowered to make decisions about the ECEC programs, services, and supports their children need or want, community engagement will increase, there will be more support for educational initiatives by local organizations, schools, and community stakeholders, and there will be more sustainable funding and long-term utilization of ECEC programs, services, and supports.

## 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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