

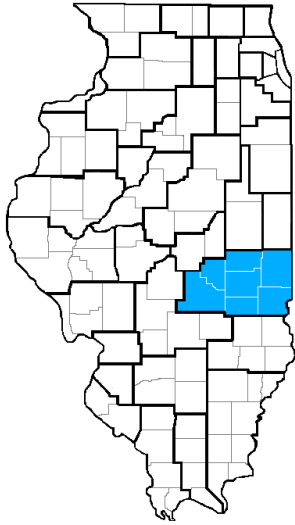
ACTION PLAN



Region 11

Clark, Coles, Cumberland, Douglas, Edgar, Moultrie & Shelby Counties

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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 11 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:

- Elise Belknap – Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant (Jamie Stevens Counseling LLC)
- Jennifer Mast – Neoga Preschool For All (PFA) Teacher
- Laura Williams – Arcola, Illinois Family Child Care Provider
- Lisa Flynn – Previous Region 11 Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant

It is our hope that the Action Plan will rally together and support the community as a whole, especially families, in working towards and achieving our goals to uplift ECEC providers and to support the mental health of young children in the Region.

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 11 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),¹ 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.² 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.

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

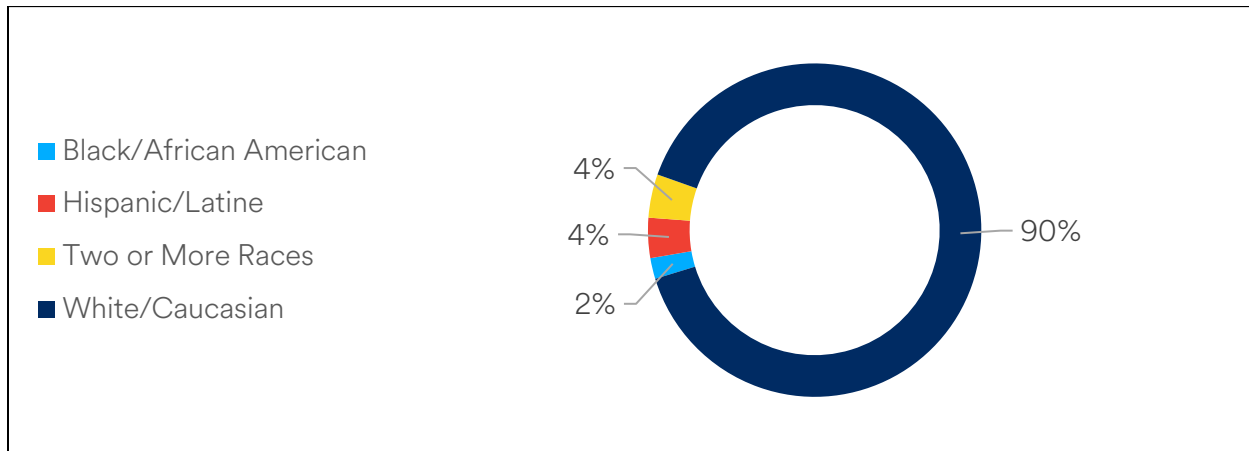
² See <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/nc-smart-goals-fact-sheet.pdf> for more information.

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 11

Region 11 is located in east-central Illinois and includes the counties of Clark, Coles, Cumberland, Douglas, Edgar, Moultrie, and Shelby. In 2022, the total population of the Region was 144,741; 9,542 were children birth through age five. While most children aged four and under are identified as white, there is a small and growing number of those who identify as Hispanic/Latine in Arcola, Arthur, Tuscola, and Villa Grove (all located in Douglas County). The Refugee Center shared that in recent years a small number Afghan refugees have also made Douglas County their home.

Figure 1: Percentage of Children Aged Four and Under by Race/Ethnicity³



Source: IECAM
Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

Across the Region, there are 3,814 slots in publicly funded, licensed, and license-exempt child care centers and homes for children birth through age five (Table 1). Currently, Region 11 does not have enough spots available for families who might want to enroll their young child in an ECEC program.

³ Other races/ethnicities have too small of numbers to be represented in the chart: American Indian and Alaska Native, 8 people; Asian, 16 people; Other, 5 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	0	0
Head Start	Ages Three to Five	12	241
Preschool for All	Ages Three and Four	23	1,346
Preschool for All Expansion	Ages Three and Four	3	121
Licensed Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	17	1,229
Licensed Family Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	77	747
License-Exempt Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	6	130

Source: IECAM

Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

For additional data and information, please access Region 11’s Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment at: www.birthtofiveil.com/region11/#report.

Recommendation 1



Increase awareness of Early Childhood mental health services, accessibility to mental health training for Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) professionals, and the number of mental health and behavioral coaches for ECEC services.

This recommendation is based on feedback from caregivers who reported being unaware of mental and behavioral health resources for their children, and from ECEC providers who reported not having the training necessary to support the social-emotional and behavioral needs of their students.

SMART Goals

SMART Goals	What steps will be taken to meet the SMART goal?	How will you know when the SMART goal has been achieved?
<p>Between October 2024 and January 2026, partner with community agencies/organizations to raise awareness about the importance of Early Childhood mental health resources and staff in ECEC programs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create and disseminate a pre-survey about ECEC mental health. • Create an awareness/marketing campaign plan. • Spread awareness through social media, interviews with TV and radio stations, college classes, flyers, and events. • Create a post-survey regarding ECEC mental health. • Disseminate post-survey. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When pre- and post-surveys are created. • When pre- and post-surveys are disseminated. • When a marketing plan to raise awareness is created. • When six local agencies share the awareness campaign materials on social media. • When at least four interviews are completed. • When at least three presentations are given to college-level classes. • When at least two community awareness events are held. • When flyers are distributed to 50 agencies/organizations.
<p>By the end of FY25, meet with higher education administrators to share information about the need for mental health courses and training for ECEC professionals.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create resources about mental health and Early Childhood to share with administrators. • Create a pre-survey for professionals regarding their knowledge/usage of ECEC mental health supports. • Ask the Child Care Resource & Referral Agency (CCR&R) to share the survey with providers. • Coordinate a meeting with officials at Lakeland College and Eastern Illinois University (EIU) regarding the need for ECEC mental health classes. • Create a post-survey regarding ECEC mental health knowledge and usage by/for the ECEC workforce. • Share post-survey results with the CCR&R. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When resources are created. • When pre- and post-surveys are created. • When pre- and post-surveys are disseminated. • When a meeting is held with higher education administrators.

<p>By the end of FY25, meet with school district administrators to discuss the need for Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Consultants (I/ECMHCs).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Host a roundtable discussion with community stakeholders about the need to hire additional I/ECMHCs. • Connect roundtable participants with higher education navigators. • Discuss collaborating together to create job fairs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When roundtable discussion with a minimum of one representative from the Regional Office of Education #11, Superintendents, Eastern Illinois Area Special Education (EIASE), CCR&R, and Caregiver Connections is held. • When higher education navigators are connected with roundtable participants. • When a discussion about I/ECMHC job fair is held.
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Risks & Barriers

Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation	Proposed Solutions to Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation
Funding will likely be needed to support personnel, training, and curriculum.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look for grants, state support, and/or community funding to support the cost of personnel, training, and curriculum.
There is a stigma related to mental health and seeking support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find mentors for teachers so they are supported as they seek help. • Change the title of roles to those that have less stigma.
Unsure if training is available.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with Eastern Illinois University (EIU) to create or increase the number of training courses available.
Community buy-in and collaboration.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create an awareness campaign to promote the value of mental and behavioral health supports. • Change the way information is shared with schools to alleviate costs associated with tests and services.
Interventions and screenings typically begin in Kindergarten.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise community awareness of the importance of Early Childhood mental health. • Urge healthcare professionals to share information and resources at an earlier age.

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:

- Caregiver Connections: Increase funding for I/ECMH Consultants.
- Elected officials: Share information to increase awareness and help identify potential funding sources.

Possible Funding Sources

Council members identified local non-profits, community organization grants, and state-level grants as potential funding sources to support this recommendation.

Community

Council members noted that there are no community groups currently working on similar goals and recommendations.

Recommendation Implementation

Council members said they will know the recommendation is fully implemented when each ECEC program has access to mental health resources and staff and utilizes it when necessary. There will also be an increase in community awareness regarding Early Childhood mental health.

They also predict that by fully implementing the recommendation there will be a decrease in behavioral needs among young children, and an increase in educational attainment and mental well-being among youth in the Region. Additionally, there will be fewer Early Childhood professionals leaving their positions and more staff available to support ECEC mental health needs.

Recommendation 2



Expand support programs and develop continuation incentives for current Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) staff.

This recommendation is rooted in feedback from ECEC professionals, collected through focus groups, interviews, and Council meetings. They report seeing an increase in challenging behaviors in young children, as well as low wages, few benefits, limited support, and high rates of turnover amongst staff in programs.

SMART Goals

SMART Goals	What steps will be taken to meet the SMART goal?	How will you know when the SMART goal has been achieved?
<p>Between September 2024 and February 2026, partner with two community agencies/ organizations to collect data regarding turnover rates and supports for Region 11’s ECEC workforce.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigate current offboarding and appreciation surveys provided by the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies (INCCRRA). • Meet with the local Child Care Resource & Referral Agency (CCR&R) to start planning for the creation or distribution of surveys, including an offboarding survey and a support/appreciation survey. • Create and distribute surveys in an online and paper format. • Identify recurring themes in the data and share with community members. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When INCCRRA surveys have been investigated. • When a meeting is held with the CCR&R to plan survey creation and distribution. • When a survey is created in an online format and paper copy. • When the survey is distributed. • When at least 40% of ECEC programs in Region 11 have responded. • When themes in the data have been identified and shared with community members.
<p>By the end of FY25, meet with three programs providing support to ECEC workforce to share information about the need for expansion of support programs for current ECEC workforce supports.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Host a roundtable with Great Start administrators to understand utilization and benefits for programs and discuss provider concerns. • Meet with local programs providing support to ECEC programs in Region 11. • Share survey results with programs. • Schedule meetings with local churches that provide support for K-12 education. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When roundtable with Great Start administrators is held. • When meetings are held with at least three programs in Birth to Five Illinois: Region 11. • When information regarding survey results specific to programs has been shared. • When a meeting is held with local churches. • When the community is informed about the importance

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share the importance of supporting ECEC professionals. 	of supporting ECEC professionals.
By the end of FY25, meet with five local businesses to discuss a new local support program for existing ECEC programs in Region 11.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formalize business sponsorship/adopt program outline. • Schedule a meeting with community organizations to share ECEC sponsorship program idea. • Host meetings with community organizations to share information on the business sponsorship/adoption program. • Follow up with community organizations interested in beginning an ECEC sponsorship program to begin the planning process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When the business sponsorship program is created. • When a meeting is scheduled with community organizations in at least three counties. • When information about the business sponsorship program is shared with at least three community organizations. • When at least three community organizations have been consulted about the business sponsorship program and providing with marketing and on-the-ground support.
By the end of FY25, host an appreciation event for Region 11 providers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilize survey results to decide on the type of appreciation event. • Send out an availability survey to providers in Region 11. • Schedule an Annual Appreciation Event for Region 11 ECEC providers. • Send out invitations. • Host an Annual Appreciation Event for Region 11 providers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When a survey is disseminated. • When invitations are sent out. • When the Annual Appreciation Event hosted.

Risks & Barriers

Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation	Proposed Solutions to Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation
Funding and community support to implement the recommendation long-term.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply for Rural Community Building and ECEC grants. • Start with small pilot program and build capacity over time.

Additional Engagement with State Organizations, Agencies & Individuals

Council members and Regional staff identified additional community 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.

Possible Funding Sources

Council members identified that local business sponsorships, community donations, as well as community, state, and philanthropic grants may be possible sources of funding to support this recommendation.

Community

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

- Moultrie County Kids: Held an Appreciation Dinner for ECEC professionals in Moultrie County.
- CCR&R: Provides peer-to-peer support through Center Director Meetings.
- Arcola KID Foundation: Founded to help retain current ECEC workforce and recruit new professionals to the field.
- Shelby County Early Childhood Community Planning Group: Created to retain current ECEC workforce and recruit new professionals to field.

In discussions with community members, they noted key lessons from working on similar goals and recommendations: first, focus on appreciation of ECEC staff and not the challenges they are facing; second, collaborate with ECEC professionals to understand what appreciation looks like to them and the best date/time of day to hold events.

Recommendation Implementation

Council members said they will know the recommendation is fully implemented when the turnover rate for ECEC programs decreases, post-survey results show an increase in support, and ECEC professionals report increased job satisfaction.

They also predict that by fully implementing the recommendation there will be more people pursuing careers in ECEC, and caregivers will have better experiences with ECEC providers.

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.



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