

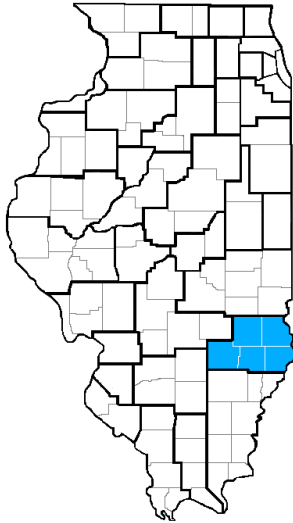
ACTION PLAN



Region 12

Clay, Crawford, Jasper, Lawrence & Richland 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 12 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:

- Project CHILD Child Care Resource and Referral Agency staff
- Jeremy Brush, Regional Superintendent of Schools

It is our hope that this Action Plan will create a Region-wide environment where families, caregivers, providers, medical practitioners, therapists, and the community can come together to learn and support our youngest neighbors.

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 12 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.

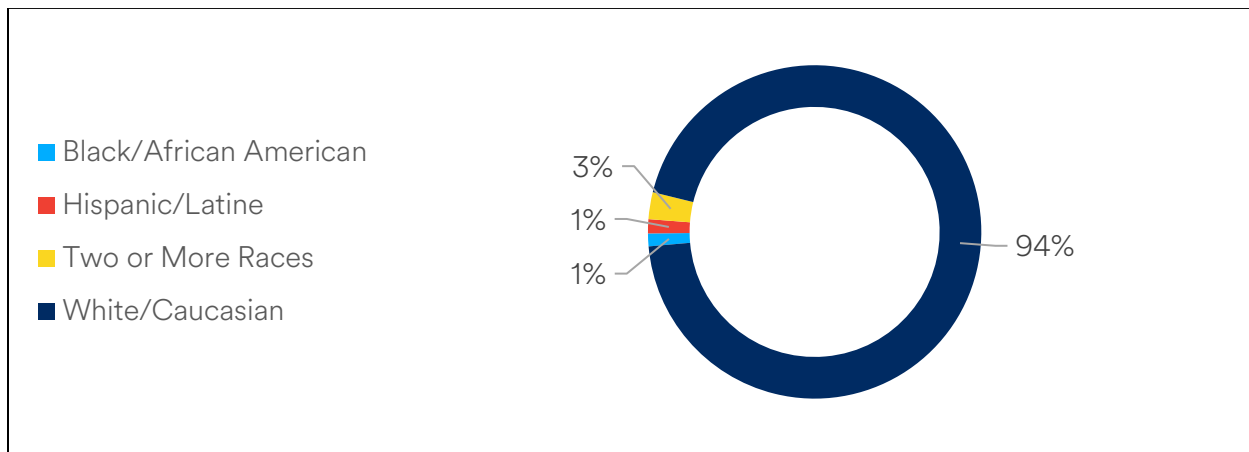
² See <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/nc-smart-goals-fact-sheet.pdf> for more information.

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 12

Region 12 is located in southeastern Illinois and includes the counties of Clay, Crawford, Jasper, Lawrence, and Richland. In 2022, the total population of the Region was 73,711; 4,897 were children birth through age five. While most of the children aged four and under are identified as white, there are small and growing numbers of children the same age who are identified as Two or More Races, Black/African American, and Hispanic/Latine (Figure 1).

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 2,132 slots in publicly funded, licensed, and license-exempt child care centers and homes for children birth through age five (Table 1). Currently, Region 12 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, 3; Asian, 1; 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	1	10
Head Start	Ages Three to Five	8	164
Preschool for All	Ages Three and Four	16	1,000
Preschool for All Expansion	Ages Three and Four	0	0
Licensed Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	7	541
Licensed Family Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	45	427
License-Exempt Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	0	0

Source: IECAM

Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

For additional data and information, please access Region 12’s Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment at: www.birthtofiveil.com/region12/#report.

Recommendation 1



Increase awareness of varied Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) opportunities including special education services, child care, home visiting, and other models of care and support.

This recommendation is based on feedback from providers and caregivers who discussed how difficult it is to find child care or preschool programs with specialized educational needs, especially for children who need social and emotional supports. Overall, there is a lack of ECEC program and service options for families in the Region, leaving parents/caregivers unable to work or attend school.

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?
Between January 2024 and November 2024, increase awareness of ECEC programs and supports for providers and families using workshops, roundtable discussions, social media, flyers, and participation in community events.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer one workshop in each of the Region’s counties for prospective licensed home child care providers. • Create a system for sharing information on funding and workforce-building opportunities with existing and potential providers. • Share information on special education support organizations offered to all families prior to developmental screenings. • Host roundtable discussion to talk through opportunities for benefits. • Attend community events to share information on services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After workshops and roundtable discussions have been completed. • When tracking of new referral sources by special education support organizations shows an increase in referrals by screening entities. • When there is an increase in ECEC providers and related agencies/organizations at community events.
Between January 2024 and January 2026, at least one additional school district will offer Gateways Level 1 credentials to eligible students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore which districts have the resources to offer the Gateways Level 1 Credential. • Enlist and connect agencies/organizations to assist districts in attaining funding support. • Advocate for districts and the Regional Office of Education #12 to support teachers who choose to take the training. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When districts have evaluated their ability to offer the Level 1 Credential. • When districts have been connected to organizations to support the credential process financially and through shared information. • When one teacher has attended training to offer the classes. • When the Gateways Level 1 credential is offered for eligible students.

Risks & Barriers

Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation	Proposed Solutions to Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation
Lack of buy-in from agencies, organizations, or communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilize social media posts to increase community event participation and raise awareness of the needs families have, as well as the services available to them.
Increase in demand for services due to the events.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As the demand for services increases, community providers may be able to expand to offer support.

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:

- Birth to Five Illinois: Share funding and workforce-building opportunities.
- County Health Departments: Share information with community partners.
- Department of Children & Family Services (DCFS): Offer informational sessions and support to prospective child care providers and share information with community partners about events and training.
- Family Matters Parent Training and Information Center: Share information with community partners about trainings and events.
- Region 12 School Districts: Evaluate their ability to offer the Gateways Credential Level 1.
- South Eastern Special Education: Share information with staff members and discuss capacity for accepting referrals.
- STAR NET: Share information with community partners.

Possible Funding Sources

While funding may be needed to support the training costs related to Level 1 Credentials and other activities related to the recommendation, the Council members did not identify additional possible funding sources at this time.

Community

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

Recommendation Implementation

Council members said they will know the recommendation is fully implemented when children have access to inclusive, affordable, and engaging ECEC programming that meets their needs and the needs of their families. They also predict that by fully implementing the recommendation, children will have appropriate support and better success in the classrooms, creating a space more conducive to learning for all students. Families with adequate support will have the tools necessary to get the services their children need.

Recommendation 2



Increase the availability of, and access to, training on child development, advocacy, trauma-informed care, and related topics for parents, caregivers, Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) providers, medical professionals, and the community.

This recommendation is based on feedback from ECEC providers during focus groups, interviews, and Council meetings that there is a need for training related to the abovementioned topics so they can offer better supports to families and children, especially those with specialized learning needs.

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 November 2023 and December 2024, find and offer training to parents, caregivers, ECEC providers, medical professionals, and the community.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborate with community college partners to offer for-credit classes for Early Childhood associate degrees and noncredit educational opportunities for families and community members for free or at low cost. • Offer training and informational sessions locally and virtually across the Region. • ECEC-specific professional development will be offered to district ECEC staff and other providers. • Dual credit will be available for students in qualified child care-focused classes, along with Gateways Level 1 credentials and college credit. • ECEC providers and support agencies will have a presence at community events to share information on child development- 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least one class and one educational opportunity has been offered by a local community college partner. • At least one training and one informational session has been offered. • At least one ECEC professional development session has been offered. • At least one class focusing on child care will be made available for students. • At least two ECEC providers have collaborated to host a community event about child development-related topics. • At least one information session has been offered to medical professionals.

	<p>related topics with families and community members.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information about child development, available services and their referral processes, and training opportunities will be shared with medical professionals. 	
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Risks & Barriers

Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation	Proposed Solutions to Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation
Workforce turnover within agencies and organizations may create a need for ongoing training and location-specific training.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create opportunities for group training to take the onus off program owners/directors. Record trainings which can be viewed on one's own timeline.
Many people in the Region do not live close to a university or community college campus.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a list of virtual college classes, including Bachelor level classes, and encourage regional campuses to offer courses virtually. Empower parents/guardians/caregivers to find professionals familiar with child development.

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 discussed the need to engage with the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) to ask if they could partner with organizations providing trainings and classes due to their vital role in providing current and nuanced information about licensing for child care centers and homes. While other organizations can provide insight into the licensing process, DCFS is the authority, and having them involved will help eliminate any misinformation from being unintentionally spread.

Possible Funding Sources

While funding may be needed to support activities related to the recommendation, the Council members did not identify additional possible funding sources at this time.

Community

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

Recommendation Implementation

Council members said they will know the recommendation is fully implemented when classes and training for families, caregivers, community members, and ECEC professionals are being offered at the local community college or university in-person virtually. Additionally, child and family-focused organizations and agencies will have a greater presence at community events and on social media.

They also predict that by fully implementing the recommendation, families, ECEC providers, and the community will have a shared understanding of child development.

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.



Birth to Five Illinois is funded by the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) and the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) and is a department of the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (INCCRRRA).

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