

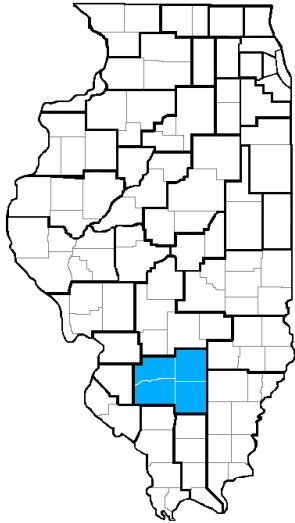
# ACTION PLAN



## Region 13

Clinton, Jefferson, Marion & Washington 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 13 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:

- Ashley Baldrige – Higher Education Navigator with Project CHILD
- Jill Wardlow and the Leadership Team for the Regional Office of Education (ROE) #13 Early Childhood Collaboration

It is our hope that the Action Plan will bring awareness to some of the issues that already exist in this Region, and we hope to get support and buy-in from people in the community to continue to push improvements forward. We hope that this plan will help bridge gaps and foster a sense of unity to help eliminate the feeling of isolation among families. With the implementation of this plan and future collaboration, we envision Region 13 to be a place where families can raise their children and have access to care and services they need without barriers and limitations. We hope to see a brighter future for the educators and service providers in the ECEC field where they can experience increased peace of mind and reduced stress in their jobs, fostering a more conducive environment for the care and education of young children.

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.

Birth to Five Illinois: Region 13 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.

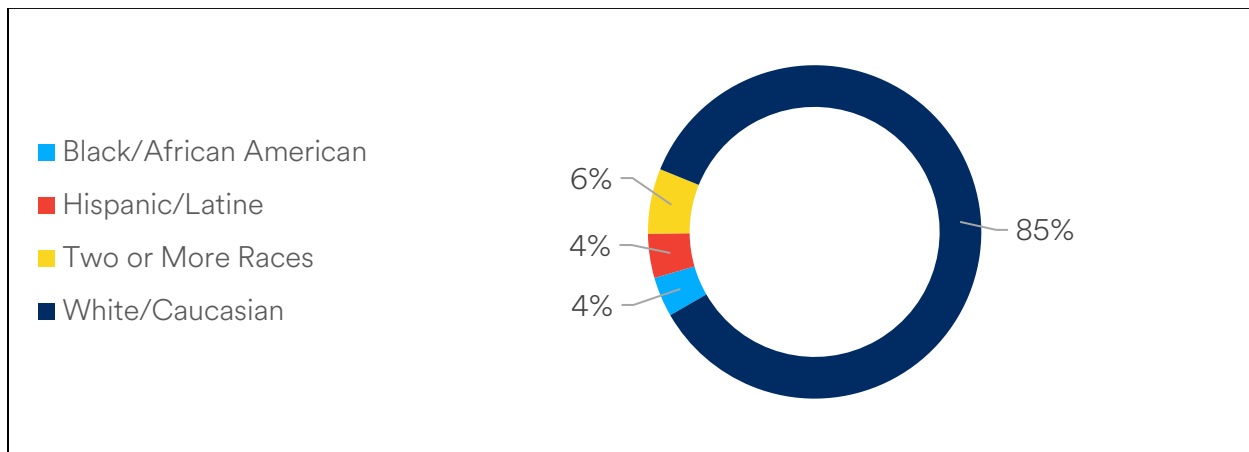
<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/nc-smart-goals-fact-sheet.pdf> for more information.

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 13

Region 13 is located in south-central Illinois and includes the counties of Clinton, Jefferson, Marion, and Washington. In 2022, the total population of the Region was 127,341; 9,261 were children birth through age five. While most of the children aged four and under in the Region are identified as white, there are growing numbers of those who identify as Two or More Races, Black/African American, and Hispanic/Latine (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 4,619 slots in publicly funded, licensed, and license-exempt child care centers and homes for children birth through age five (Table 1). Currently, Region 13 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, 3 people; Asian, 16 people; Other, 14 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	2	82
Head Start	Ages Three to Five	4	464
Preschool for All	Ages Three and Four	26	917
Preschool for All Expansion	Ages Three and Four	1	60
Licensed Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	27	1,951
Licensed Family Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	64	689
License-Exempt Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	13	456

Source: IECAM

Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

For additional data and information, please access Region 13’s Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment at: [www.birthtofiveil.com/region13/#report](http://www.birthtofiveil.com/region13/#report).

## Recommendation 1



**Expand Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services for children birth to age three in the entire Region, as there are currently only 100 slots for birth to three services across all four counties.**

This recommendation is based on feedback from caregivers who shared the challenges of accessing ECEC services for their children birth to age three. Data show that in 2020, there were 82 slots for Early Head Start and 18 for Prevention Initiative in Region 13, leaving over 2,000 children aged three and under without access to either program if their parents or caregivers wished to enroll them.

## 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>By November 2024, increase public awareness about comprehensive and accessible birth to three services throughout the Region and educate families on available programs and their requirements.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gather information on Early Head Start/Prevention Initiative programs, including services, program features, eligibility criteria, and unique characteristics.</li> <li>• Select a target audience to market to and create a list of advertisement strategies (e.g., radio, TV, news, billboards, etc.).</li> <li>• Create and disseminate educational literature on the benefits and importance of birth to three programs, including program-specific eligibility criteria, program services, and unique characteristics.</li> <li>• Research and utilize existing materials, if available.</li> <li>• Meet with a minimum of 10 professionals per county in the Region and provide information about available programs to share with families.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When all program coordinators and/or directors confirm that the information collected through surveys and interviews accurately represents the programs they serve.</li> <li>• When a list of marketing pathways has been developed.</li> <li>• When all educational materials have been created and distributed as per the predetermined plan, and there are no pending distributions.</li> <li>• When scheduled meetings have been hosted, providing a platform for professionals to learn about the programs, ask questions, and discuss how to pass the information on to families effectively.</li> </ul>

## Risks & Barriers

Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation	Proposed Solutions to Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation
<p>If the programs and services are not accessible for families, especially those in priority populations, the additional slots will not be well utilized by families in the Region.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educate and advertise what birth to three services are, including the eligibility criteria for enrollment in these programs.</li> <li>• Ensure outreach efforts reach the whole community instead of one specific group of people.</li> </ul>
<p>Adding programs and additional slots will result in the need for more staff. It may be difficult to staff additional slots and programs during the workforce crisis this Region is facing.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partner with multiple organizations to conduct screenings and Child Find referrals to these programs.</li> <li>• Cast a wider net with job fairs and job postings, and host informational sessions related to positions and benefits.</li> </ul>
<p>Educating families may not result in enrollment in programs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that services are meeting families where they are with flexible schedules and alternative arrangements.</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 discussed how the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) and the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) should be engaged further to encourage an increase in funding opportunities, especially for programs that serve children from birth to age three.

## **Possible Funding Sources**

Council members noted that there are multiple state-sponsored funding sources for Early Head Start, Prevention Initiative, Home Visiting, and Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) programs. However, 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:

- Bond, Clinton, Marion, Washington, and Franklin (BCMWF) Early Head Start
- Child Family Connections #21 Early Intervention
- Dr. Andy Hall School
- Regional Office of Education #13
- Spero Family Services Home Visiting Program

Community members from these groups shared key lessons with Council members and Regional staff. First, they discussed how groups wanting to expand services and/or add slots for birth to three services must have information and data collected far in advance of a Request for Proposal (RFP). Second, they are never sure when additional funding will become available, making it difficult to plan for service expansion. Third, organizations can blend funding from different sources to help meet program needs. Lastly, they are unsure of how successful child/family find attempts have been, making it difficult to refine the process to improve it.

## **Recommendation Implementation**

Council members said they will know the recommendation is fully implemented when families with young children are able to access and use more services, supported by a Family Advocate or



Home Visitor, and when educators and health professionals in the Region provide feedback that children are better prepared for Kindergarten and meeting social-emotional and other developmental milestones. Finally, there will also be additional services for children birth to age three for families who are not currently eligible for services due to eligibility restrictions.

Council members also predict that by fully implementing the recommendation:

- A minimum of 350 birth to three slots will be available to families across the Region.
- Data from children using services will be collected to facilitate a seamless transition into the school system, helping to address issues such as information gaps and delayed service access.
- Family advocates will be in place to help families and caregivers find the resources needed for young children.
- Parents and caregivers will have more parental education opportunities and resources at their fingertips.

## Recommendation 2



**Locally, efforts are needed to increase quality by promoting and sharing information about the State’s current workforce initiatives, furthering the education of current staff, and expanding the workforce in the early stages of career development.**

This recommendation was created based on feedback from Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) professionals that said Early Childhood programs have discussed shortages in staff, a lack of qualified applicants, and difficulties with potential employers seeking appropriate credentials and/or licenses.

## 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 November 2025, achieve an improvement in overall workforce quality and an increase in the number of early career professionals entering the ECEC workforce as reported by ECEC providers in the Region during monthly meetings by actively promoting and sharing information about existing programs, providing continuous education, and training opportunities for current staff, and increasing interest in the field during the early stages of career development.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify individuals who actively engage in disseminating information to potential candidates who are looking for opportunities in the ECEC field.</li> <li>• Schedule meetings with these individuals to discuss their barriers and share with them information about workforce initiatives, upcoming programs that could benefit their work, and perspectives of families and providers in the area.</li> <li>• Build positive relationships with ECEC providers and individuals to share information on an ongoing basis.</li> <li>• Launch a public awareness campaign to educate the public about the need for more teachers and adequate compensation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When a list of individuals is created.</li> <li>• When meetings are held once per month with a minimum of 50% of participant attendance.</li> <li>• When providers communicate and give feedback monthly.</li> <li>• When a public awareness campaign is launched through various media outlets.</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>
Educating current staff might be challenging with the current staffing shortage.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share information with Higher Education Navigators, students, and the community.</li> </ul>
Colleges tend to have their own rules which make it difficult for people to navigate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Solicit support from college directors.</li> </ul>
High schoolers and others are not eligible for the current scholarships without prior experience in the ECEC field.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Navigators can present information to local high schools to share information and eligibility criteria for scholarships and offer their services to those who want to participate.</li> </ul>
There is a general lack of awareness of the Higher Education Navigators and the services they can provide.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schools, child care centers, the Regional Office of Education (ROE), Head Start, and other community partners could host presentations from the Higher Education Navigators to present information to their</li> </ul>

	staff about opportunities to increase credits, credentials, and/or licensure.
People in the field have indicated that there is difficulty obtaining teacher licensure due to the difficulty of the content area tests that are required by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage ISBE to examine the licensure requirements and content area tests to ensure they are a valid assessment for the field of study.</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 discussed engaging with the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) to advocate for the continued funding of the Higher Educator Navigator positions and with ISBE to talk about content area tests for teachers and alternatives to obtaining licensure.

## Possible Funding Sources

Council members noted that there are multiple state-sponsored funding sources for Higher Education Navigators, as well as Smart Start Workforce Compensation grants and professional development grants. However, 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:

- Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) Higher Education Navigators and Professional Development
- Illinois Association for Infant Mental Health (ILAIMH)
- Kaskaskia College
- Rend Lake College
- Southern Illinois Coalition for Children and Families
- Southern Illinois Early Childhood Action Team (SIECAT)

Community members shared that key that community partners doing this type of work should leverage funding from different sources in order to help organizations get more support.

## Recommendation Implementation

Council members said they will know the recommendation is fully implemented when there is a large pool of highly qualified applicants for ECEC positions, and those who want to switch careers are able to take advantage of scholarships that support the change.

They also predict that by fully implementing the recommendation there will be higher job satisfaction among ECEC providers, higher numbers of ECEC staff recruited and retained by programs, fewer calls to the Department of Children & Family Services (DCFS), and more focus on providing training opportunities to ECEC staff.

## Recommendation 3



The Regional Office of Education #13 Early Childhood Collaboration should continue its work to become a Coordinated Intake and family navigation system.

This recommendation is based on feedback from families and caregivers who said they are unaware of all the available Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) programs and services in the Region. ECEC professionals and community partners discussed how challenging it has been to break down silos between programs and services and build a collaboration.

## 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?
By November 2025, establish a collaborative system with the Regional Office of Education to optimize the referral process, design a family intake system, and ensure seamless and prompt sharing of referrals with	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collaborate with Jill Wardlow and the Regional Office of Education to establish a set of objectives for their collaborative efforts.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>When the mission, vision, and goals of the Collaboration are made public, and Memorandum of Understanding are established with all Collaboration partners.</li> </ul>

<p>collaborative partners, while actively engaging 80% of eligible individuals and providers in the Integrated Referral and Intake System (IRIS) system, and raising public awareness about the Collaboration's mission and vision, resulting in a 15% increase in effective referrals and participation and a 20% growth in public engagement in collaborative efforts.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage individuals and providers, urging them to join and participate in the IRIS system. This would involve promoting awareness about the system.</li> <li>• Market and share information about the collaboration with the public to engage them in the work and inform them of the mission and vision.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When community partners and service providers buy into the IRIS membership and accept referrals from the Collaboration.</li> <li>• When families in the Region begin to utilize the IRIS system.</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>
Getting buy-in from community partners that have been siloed for a long time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share information about the Collaboration and its goals.</li> </ul>
Parents and families may not realize that the Collaboration exists.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use parent educators from the new grant to help with information sharing and relationship building.</li> </ul>
Funding will be needed to sustain IRIS long-term.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get buy-in from current partners for the first couple of years before implementing a membership fee.</li> </ul>

### 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 noted that there are grants for both Early Childhood Collaborations from Birth to Five Illinois and to support IRIS from Illinois Action for Children.

## Community

Council members identified the Southern Illinois Coalition for Children and Families is currently working on similar goals/recommendations. In discussions with community members, they called for information sharing between Collaborations to support the work they each are doing.

## Recommendation Implementation

Council members said they will know the recommendation is fully implemented when families are connected to the resources they need, community partners are collaborating more often, and when IRIS has been established.

They also predict that by fully implementing the recommendation, there will be a “front door” to the services families need, less frustration on the part of families looking for services, and a one-stop shop for families and caregivers that eases the process of finding resources.

## 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.birhtofiveil.com](http://www.birhtofiveil.com).





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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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