

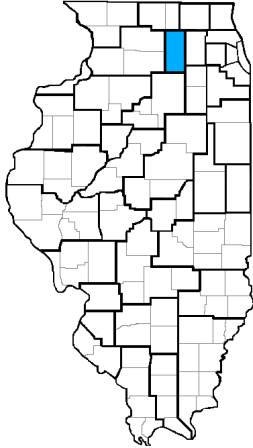
ACTION PLAN



Region 16

DeKalb County

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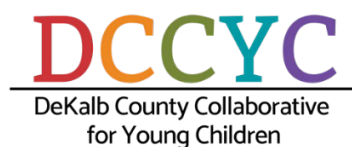


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Letter from Family & Action Council Members

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 16 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:

- DeKalb County Collaborative for Young Children and Basics DeKalb County

It is our hope that the Action Plan will continue the momentum of addressing the ECEC needs in our community. Our Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment highlighted a variety of areas in which our community must take action, and we hope this is the map to get us started.

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 16 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.

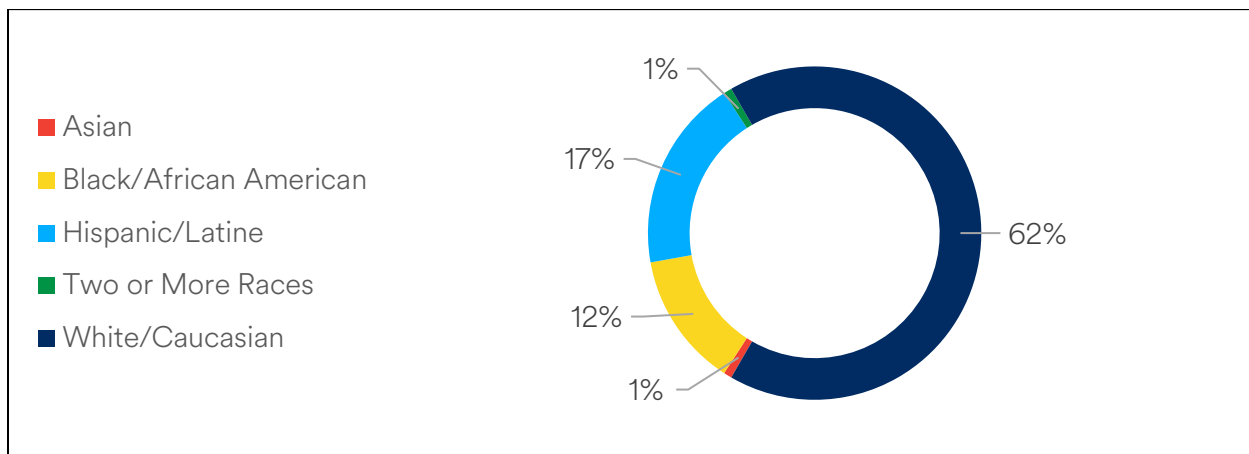
² See <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/nc-smart-goals-fact-sheet.pdf> for more information.

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 16

Region 16 is located in north-central Illinois and includes DeKalb County. In 2022, the total population of the Region was 111,039; 7,457 were children birth through age five. While the majority of the children in the Region identified as white, there are communities of racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse people throughout the Region (Figure 1). Approximately 13% of families in DeKalb County speak a language other than English at home, with Spanish being the most common. Many other languages are spoken, including but not limited to Arabic, Urdu, and Greek, especially in communities near Northern Illinois University.

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 2,799 slots in publicly funded, licensed, and license-exempt child care centers and homes for children birth through age five (Table 1). Currently, Region 16 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, 6 people; 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	150
Head Start	Ages Three to Five	1	91
Preschool for All	Ages Three and Four	3	380
Preschool for All Expansion	Ages Three and Four	1	40
Licensed Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	17	1,447
Licensed Family Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	38	381
License-Exempt Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	7	310

Source: IECAM

Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

For additional data and information, please access Region 16’s Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment at: www.birthtofiveil.com/region16/#report.

Recommendation 1



Support ongoing regional alignment of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) from birth to third grade and support ongoing regional efforts to increase the local ECEC workforce pipeline through Pathways to Play.

Currently, Region 16 is experiencing slot gaps of 80-90%; this means that most families of children birth to age five are unable to place their child in a publicly funded, licensed, or license-exempt child care center or home if they want or need care. Council members hope to address the workforce shortage, in part, by encouraging more students to consider careers in Early Childhood Education.

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 March 2024, collect a list of child care providers in DeKalb County willing to host a high school apprentice and/or have need for volunteers or part-time work from the retired community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a succinct survey to capture provider willingness to host apprentices and their need for part-time help. • Disseminate the survey to child care providers. • Create a contact list. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When a list of child care providers who are willing to host high school students and/or volunteers, as well as part-time employees, has been created.
By July 2024, create and implement an awareness campaign of volunteer and part-time work opportunities for retired Early Childhood educators in local programs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create materials to share opportunities. • Partner with local agencies to share information. • Share information in multiple forms through multiple streams. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When an awareness campaign has been launched for local opportunities to volunteer or work part-time with local child care providers.
By September 2024, secure a schedule to present to DeKalb County high schoolers on the career options available with an Early Childhood Education or Child Development degree.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure local high school partnerships to provide this career opportunity education to their students. • Create a presentation about ECEC careers. • Secure dates for presentations with high school partners. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When a presentation has been created and a calendar of presentation dates are secured.

Risks & Barriers

Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation	Proposed Solutions to Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation
The capacity of child care providers to host apprentices, volunteers, and part-time workforce.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Illustrate the parallels between volunteers, apprenticeships, and employees regarding support and supervision for potential partners. • Assure potential partners that apprentices are properly prepared through Pathways to Play and/or high school curriculum on child development prior to placement. • Apprentices will provide feedback on their host site to their staff sponsor, teacher, or Pathways to Play employees.

<p>The willingness and capacity of high schools to partner in the implementation of apprenticeships as well as presentations about careers in ECEC.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate the connections to high schools and school districts between both 1) academic success and access to Early Childhood Education and 2) their need for Early Childhood Educators in expanded preschool programs as well as young elementary grades.
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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

While funding may be needed to support the development and distribution of marketing materials, host meetings, and other activities related to this recommendation, the Council members did not identify additional possible funding sources at this time.

Community

Council members identified that Pathways to Play is currently working on similar goals and recommendations. The program is new, and staff were unable to share lessons learned with Council members and Regional staff.

Recommendation Implementation

Council members said they will know this recommendation is fully implemented when there is an evident and strong workforce pipeline for ECEC programs between high schools, institutes of higher education, and ECEC employers.

They also predicted that by fully implementing the recommendation the number of vacancies in ECEC will diminish across the Region, particularly in the more populated areas of DeKalb and Sycamore.

Recommendation 2



Support the Birth to 8 Mental Health Coalition to conduct a stakeholder analysis and develop an implementation plan to address children’s social-emotional, behavioral health, and Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) inclusion needs over the next year.

This recommendation is based on feedback from interviews and focus groups that social-emotional, behavioral health, and learning are a concern among both ECEC professionals and parents/caregivers. There is a high level of need for support in classrooms and at home to address the social-emotional needs of young children that often manifest as challenging behaviors.

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 December 2024, create a comprehensive list of continuing education and professional development resources in the areas of mental health, behavioral health, and social-emotional development available to Early Childhood Educators in DeKalb County.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify sources of professional development and continuing education. • Identify resources and sessions offered that focus on mental health and related topics. • Compile a list of resources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When a comprehensive list of professional development and continuing education resources in the areas of mental health, behavioral health, and social-emotional development is created.
In FY24, create and disseminate a brief and succinct survey of Early Childhood Educators in DeKalb County about their professional development and support needs regarding Early Childhood mental health, behavioral health, and social-emotional development with at least fifty responses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify information to be gathered. • Create three to five questions to gather this information. • Disseminate the survey through various partners and channels. • Review responses with partners to begin curriculum planning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When at least fifty responses from Early Childhood Educators have been collected from a survey regarding mental health professional development and support needs.

Risks & Barriers

Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation	Proposed Solutions to Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation
Lack of participation from Early Childhood Educators in completing the survey.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep the survey brief. • Find an incentive for those that complete the survey. • Use trusted partners to disseminate the survey. • Ensure that there is flexibility in the mode, method, and language of the survey to make it more accessible to a wider variety of Early Childhood Educators.

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

While funding may be needed to support the development and distribution of marketing materials, host meetings, and other activities related to the recommendation, the Council members did not identify additional possible funding sources at this time.

Community

Council members identified that the Birth to 8 Mental Health Coalition is working to identify existing mental health resources in Region 16 that are available to individuals and families. One lesson they learned and shared with Council members and Regional staff is that it takes a significant amount of time to identify resources because there is no centralized location for access.

Recommendation Implementation

Council members said they will know the recommendation is fully implemented when sufficient mental health resources are available to families in Region 16 and Early Childhood Educators feel as though they have sufficient training to address challenging behaviors due to mental and/or behavioral health and social-emotional development in their classrooms.

Council members also predicted that by fully implementing the recommendation, children in the Region will experience more positive mental, behavioral, and academic outcomes.

Recommendation 3



Continue implementing Basics DeKalb County across the Region.

This recommendation is based on feedback from parents/caregivers who utilize the Basics DeKalb County program. Research about “The Basics” supports the feeling that it positively impacts children’s development and their caregivers’ confidence. Council and community members want to ensure the long-term sustainability and success of the program in the Region.

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 January 2024, host a work group discussion of the barriers to providing and expanding programming with Basics DeKalb County.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schedule a meeting time. Facilitate discussion to identify barriers to providing and expanding programming. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When a group discussion of the barriers to providing and expanding programming are discussed.
By March 2024, conduct a training with Birth to Five Illinois: Region 16 Family Council on the breadth of Basics DeKalb County.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adjust training to be relevant to Family Council members. Schedule training time. Conduct training. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When training has been offered to, and conducted with, Region 16 Family Council members.
By May 2024, identify a list of potential new partnerships for Basics DeKalb County along with strategies to strengthen existing partnerships with participation from community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify sectors not represented in Basics partnerships. Identify personal and organizational connections within the underrepresented sectors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When a list of potential new partnerships for Basics DeKalb County has been compiled.

parents/caregivers, Chambers of Commerce members, and service groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rank potential partners based on likelihood of their receptiveness. 	
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Risks & Barriers

There were no risks or barriers identified for this recommendation.

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

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

Community

Basics DeKalb County, which is housed in the DeKalb County Regional Office of Education, is the lead organization for this recommendation. One lesson they conveyed to Council members and Regional staff is that a personal connection and warm handoff are integral to creating new partnerships.

Recommendation Implementation

Council members said they will know the recommendation is fully implemented when Basics DeKalb County has strong partnerships in every sector and every town within Region 16. They also predicted that by fully implementing the recommendation there will be an increase in quality, as well as more developmentally appropriate interactions between caregivers and children and community members and children.

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 (INCCRRA).

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