

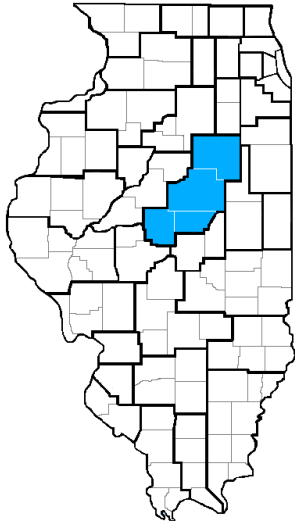
ACTION PLAN



Region 17

DeWitt, Livingston, Logan & McLean Counties

Regional Council Manager: Carol Weisheit (she/her/ella)
Email: cweisheit@birthtofiveil.com
Phone Number: (309) 270-5408
Regional Website: www.birthtofiveil.com/region17



Family Council

Alesia Smith
Aline Cazarez
Ashley Giebelhausen
Becky Rader
Clymeshia Nelson

Hannah Dunham
Jacqueline Sweat
Kelly Rhodes
Maria Teresa Cornejo

Action Council

Ashley Dowd
Dawn Wickenhauser
Debra Honegger
Erin Wiese-Reichert
Judy Engelbrecht
Kadi Juris
Kathleen Lorenz
Kris Pennington
Krissy Conklen

Lakeesha Smith
Lisa Hood
Maureen Sollars
Melissa Breeden
Miranda Lin
Molly Allen
Pam Womack
Samina Yousuf

Table of Contents

Letter from Family & Action Council Members	3
Action Plan Development	4
How this Document is Designed	4
Region 17.....	5
Recommendation 1.....	6
Recommendation 2.....	8
Recommendation 3.....	11
Next Steps.....	13

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 17 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:

- Child Care Resource and Referral Staff, Service Delivery Area (SDA) 9 & 13
- McLean County YWCA

It is our hope that this Action Plan will help provide resources and services for children birth to age five and their families, helping them succeed in school and life. We also hope that it will raise awareness about the importance of a well-trained workforce and the impact on a child’s early development.

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 17 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.

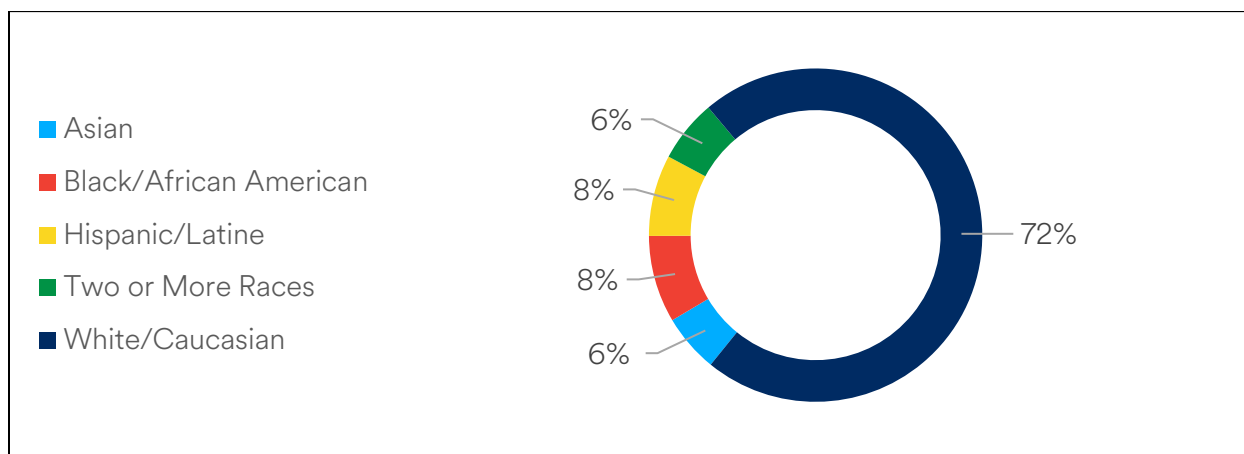
² See <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/nc-smart-goals-fact-sheet.pdf> for more information.

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 17

Region 17 is located in central Illinois and includes the counties of DeWitt, Livingston, Logan, and McLean. In 2022, the total population of the Region was 253,674; 16,593 were children birth through age five. While most children in the Region age four and under are identified as white, there are steadily growing community of those who identify as Hispanic/Latine and Black/African American in Bloomington-Normal (McLean County), Pontiac (Livingston County), Lincoln (Logan County), and Clinton (DeWitt County) (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 7,610 slots in publicly funded, licensed, and license-exempt child care centers and homes for children birth through age five (Table 1). Currently, Region 17 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, 14 people; Other, 29 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	7	291
Head Start	Ages Three to Five	8	303
Preschool for All	Ages Three and Four	21	1,504
Preschool for All Expansion	Ages Three and Four	2	80
Licensed Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	30	3,592
Licensed Family Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	119	1,186
License-Exempt Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	18	654

Source: IECAM

Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

For additional data and information, please access Region 17’s Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment at: www.birthtofiveil.com/region17/#report.

Recommendation 1



Bring awareness to the lack of a living wage for Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) staff with comparable non-ECEC fields with similar educational and training achievements.

This recommendation was created based on feedback from Council and community members regarding the lack of awareness about the job opportunities available in the ECEC field.

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 the end of December 2024 demonstrate the existing discrepancy between the salary of three non-ECEC fields with	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Generate a list of non-ECEC fields to investigate through search engines and track for eight weeks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When data on non-ECEC positions has been collected. When data has been input into a spreadsheet.

similar job qualifications and education to ECEC jobs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Utilize salary information from the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies (INCCRRA) and the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) for ECEC positions. Create data set with information. 	
By the end of December 2024 identify and document at least one opportunity per program type for ECEC teachers to increase their salary (i.e., Smart Start Grants).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Compile a list of opportunities for ECEC salary increases in Illinois. Disseminate the opportunities to ECEC providers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When at least one opportunity for ECEC salary increase has been identified. When opportunities have been disseminated to ECEC providers.

Risks & Barriers

Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation	Proposed Solutions to Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation
Some people may not support higher wages for those working in ECEC.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify the economic impact of teacher shortages due to not having well-paid staff.
Support from for-profit child care programs and/or child care owners may be low.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to engage with for-profit programs and child care owners about the importance and impact of higher pay.

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 activities related to the recommendation, the Council members did not identify additional possible funding sources at this time.

Community

Council members noted that the local Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) Agency, the Economic Development Council (EDC) Regional Committee on Child Care, and teachers unions are working on similar or related goals and recommendations.

Community partners shared that to be successful in this endeavor, it will necessitate collaboration between groups. Birth to Five Illinois will be instrumental in providing information and input as these problems are addressed.

Recommendation Implementation

Council members said they will know the recommendation is fully implemented when there is a resource which identifies the salary differential between non-ECEC programs and ECEC programs with comparable educational backgrounds. They also predicted that by fully implementing the recommendation more attention will be drawn to the differentials in pay in comparable fields.

Recommendation 2



Collaborate with community partners to develop a public awareness campaign to focus on the importance of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) and a well-trained workforce.

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?
Create an eight-month campaign to raise awareness of the programs available in Region 17 and the impact of ECEC services on children and families, making social media	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Identify stakeholders including an independent study student from a local college/university to help develop social media posts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">When there are three to four social media posts per week.When one town hall has been hosted in each county of the Region.

<p>posts, holding town halls, conducting news interviews on radio/TV, and collaborating with Council members and ECEC stakeholders.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define the content about the importance of ECEC on a child’s development. • Generate the list of programs in Region 17 to post on social media and discuss at town halls and news interviews. • Compile a list of community partners to help disseminate social media posts. • Identify contacts to help host a town hall in each county. • Determine the news outlets for radio/TV interviews. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When two news interviews have been completed. • When at least four stakeholders have shared Birth to Five Illinois social media posts about the impact of ECEC services on children and families.
---	---	--

Risks & Barriers

Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation	Proposed Solutions to Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation
<p>Creating enough social media posts that people remain interested in learning more.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be mindful of what the content is and the impact on someone without an ECEC background.
<p>The COVID-19 pandemic shone a bright light on the importance of ECEC but support for the field and its workers has diminished.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on the impact of quality care on a child’s development.
<p>Many have a distorted view of ECEC workers and their role in a child’s education and development.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the term “brain builders” to emphasize the important role ECEC professionals play in a child’s education and 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 recommended that the Illinois Association for the Education of Young Children (AEYC), the Illinois Chapter of American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Early Childhood, as well as State Senators and Representatives should be engaged further and asked to help disseminate

information through social media and other channels. Additionally, they recommended that staff at the Illinois Early Childhood Asset Map (IECAM) be asked for additional data regarding areas lacking in ECEC program and services.

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 the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies (INCCRRA) is currently working on similar or related goals and recommendations.

Community partners shared that the importance of collaboration with others who are working on similar projects is imperative. When like-minded groups with a common goal work together, these issues can be solved and addressed at the local level.

Recommendation Implementation

Council members said they will know the recommendation is fully implemented when engagement with Birth to Five Illinois social media pages/sites has increased by at least 10%, the number of monthly newsletter subscribers has increased, and community partners are regularly posting on social media about the importance of ECEC programs for children and their families.

Council members also predict that by fully implementing this recommendation there will be more awareness and advocacy across the Region about the importance of ECEC programs and services on a child's development and about working in the ECEC field. More caregivers will have information about what ECEC programs and services are available, and more community members will be aware of the current Early Childhood workforce shortage. Additionally, Council members predict there will be an increase in people applying to ECEC jobs and more staff will take advantage of state-funded scholarships which support their wage and professional development.

Recommendation 3



Build partnerships with community partners to help identify transportation barriers families face in rural areas.

This recommendation is rooted in feedback from parents and caregivers who discussed the lack of available transportation to their children’s programs, especially when a child needs transportation to receive services during the work day.

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 the end of FY 24, identify the County Board Chair for each county to discuss the landscape of transportation infrastructure.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask each County Board how to collaborate to address transportation concerns within their communities. • Gather information from each County Board to create a spreadsheet. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting is set and completed. • Spreadsheet is developed.
By the end of FY24, identify the state legislators in the Region to discuss the landscape of the transportation infrastructure.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop an information document to share with legislators about barriers families face when transporting their children to/from programs. • Ask each state legislator for information about possible plans to address transportation barriers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings are held and data is collected.
Throughout FY25 identify community partners who can support or expand transportation services to/from a child’s program.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document information from community partners in a spreadsheet. • Contact Show Bus and document the parameters around funding and ridership usage for minors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information is documented from community partners.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At community meetings or conversations with community partners, discuss the transportation needs of families to see how they can support this need. 	
--	---	--

Risks & Barriers

Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation	Proposed Solutions to Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation
Gaining access to County Board Chairs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify the correct person connect us to the County Board Chair.
There have already been attempts to remedy transportation challenges.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Document what has been tried.

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 activities related to the recommendation, the Council members did not identify additional possible funding sources at this time.

Community

Council members discussed how schools are currently working on similar goals and recommendations. However, they reported one of the biggest challenges they have had is recruiting and retaining drivers.

Recommendation Implementation

Council members said they will know the recommendation is fully implemented when the County Board is engaged with community partners to address gaps in transportation.

They also predict that by fully implementing the recommendation community members will be more aware of the issues people face in the Region regarding transportation, and there may be an increase in collaboration amongst community partners to find a solution.

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).

Photo credit: Cover: Keira Burton on Pexels, page 6: kate_sept2004 from Getty Images Signature via Canva Pro, page 8: FatCamera from Getty Images Signature via Canva Pro, page 11: yohoprashant from Pixabay via Canva Pro, page 13: enigma_images from Getty Images Signature via Canva Pro.