

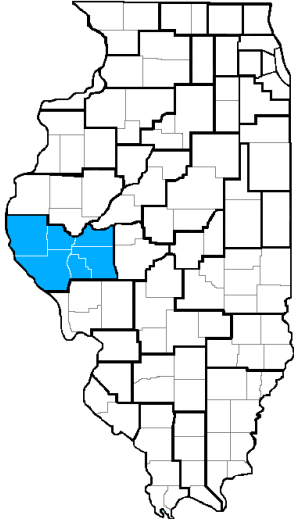
ACTION PLAN



Region 1

Adams, Brown, Cass, Morgan, Pike & Scott 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 1 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 would like to thank our community members for their support in developing our Regional Action Plan. It is our hope that the work contained within this Action Plan will lay a sustainable foundation for the ECEC community in Region 1, from which all stakeholders can work collaboratively to share ideas, resources, and best practices with the shared goal of improving educational, social, and emotional outcomes for all our children and families.

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 1 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.

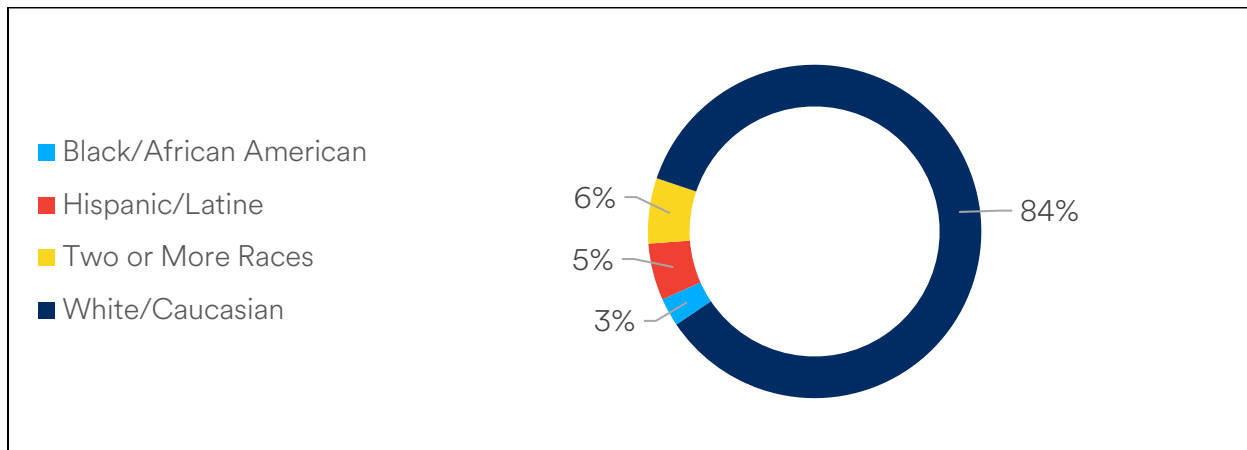
² See <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/nc-smart-goals-fact-sheet.pdf> for more information.

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 1

Region 1 is located in west-central Illinois and includes the counties of Adams, Brown, Cass, Morgan, Pike, and Scott. In 2022, the total population of the Region was 137,908; 9,271 were children birth through age five. While most of the children aged four and under in the Region are identified as white, there are pockets of racial diversity in communities throughout the Region (Figure 1). In Quincy, there is a small community who self-identify as Black or African American. In Beardstown (Cass County) there are communities of people who identify as Hispanic/Latine, many of whom are from Puerto Rico, Mexico, Cuba, Venezuela, the Dominican Republic, Honduras, and Guatemala. The Beardstown community is also home to a sizeable number of African immigrants from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Senegal, Togo, Burkina Faso, Benin, Chad, and Angola, as well as people from Myanmar, Micronesia, and South Korea.

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 5,268 slots in publicly funded, licensed, and license-exempt child care centers and homes for children birth through age five (Table 1). Currently, Region 1 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: Asian, 25 people; Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, 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	7	111
Head Start	Ages Three to Five	5	496
Preschool for All	Ages Three and Four	19	1,204
Preschool for All Expansion	Ages Three and Four	1	40
Licensed Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	13	1,586
Licensed Family Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	158	1,453
License-Exempt Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	11	378

Source: IECAM
Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

For additional data and information, please access Region 1’s Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment at: www.birthtofiveil.com/region1/#report.

Recommendation 1



Improve outreach to families to increase their awareness of available Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services in rural areas.

This recommendation is rooted in feedback from caregivers, parents, ECEC administrators and staff through focus groups, interviews, and Council meetings. Currently, Region 1 only has one formal Local Early Childhood Community Collaboration, located in Adams County, and one informal Collaboration operating in Brown County. The rest of the Region lacks a centralized group to provide resources and support to caregivers and parents.

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>Support the formation of three new Collaborations or subcommittees of current working groups in Region 1 that are specific to ECEC systems by June 30, 2024.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect and disseminate information on the current Collaboration landscape. • In counties with no existing infrastructure, identify stakeholders and community leaders to attend informational meetings about the possible formation of a group. • As groups are formed or begin the process of becoming formally recognized, assist in the identification of potential fiscal agents for groups pursuing Collaboration status with all potential groups having a fiscal agent by May 1, 2024. • Provide referral to Illinois Action for Children for the official recognition of the Collaboration no later than June 1, 2024. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will have Jamboard notes to record discussions. • We will have a list of potential fiscal partners to be included in Council meeting notes or community presentations. • We will be able to identify groups by name and group membership.
<p>Create a listing or database of resources by county with birth to five programs to be provided in an online format for families to access by September 30, 2024.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate six counties by status to determine what resources are in place and where resources are most needed. • Determine where to begin according to need. • Identify categories of resources for organizational purposes. • Collect resource information into a central location. • Determine how best to cross reference resources. • Create a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) sheet. • Create and distribute a link to the online guide for families to access the resource. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will have Jamboard notes to record discussions. • We will have an Excel spreadsheet to house this information. • We will have an FAQ sheet. • We will have a live link to the information.

Risks & Barriers

Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation	Proposed Solutions to Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation
<p>Rural community partners face time constraints and may see new initiatives like the establishment of a Local Early Childhood Community Collaboration as a burden.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide concrete examples of relatively short term, attainable goals for fledgling groups or committees to choose from that will be instrumental in establishing purpose and importance. • Meetings of startup groups or committees will be encouraged to take place before the dinner and sporting event hours that drive rural culture and to provide hybrid meeting options.
<p>Lack of awareness about Early Childhood development may make ECEC initiatives seem less urgent.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying and educating key stakeholders and empowering them to talk about this concept in school board, town hall, civic club, and city council meetings is one avenue for spreading awareness among those with influence and power. • Agencies/organizations with current guides will be contacted in the information gathering process to explain what our goals and intended outcomes are to avoid any confusion or appearance of duplication of services.
<p>Financial concerns and limited social capital hinder the adoption of new Collaborations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All discussions with stakeholders should include a brief mention of funding, an explanation that Collaborations do not require a lot of capital and should note that projects can be appraised for community capacity and potential outside funding through grants or state-funded initiatives. • Where possible, local grant making entities such as the Tracy Family Foundation, United Way groups, and other community non-profit groups will be invited to any informational gatherings relative to these activities.
<p>Existing service providers may perceive ECEC Collaborations as competition, hindering cooperation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All efforts to partner with existing Local Interagency Councils (LICs) will be made. Administrators will be invited to startup meetings to be transparent in our intentions and to potentially establish subcommittees within existing LICs that are dedicated to ECEC systems.
<p>Timely disbursement of resource guides will be a challenge because there is not currently an app or website/platform to house this information.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The resource guide will initially be a spreadsheet that is updated regularly by Council members and shared in view only; a link to the resource guide will be shared and added to already existing websites in the field for quick access for families.

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 activities related to the recommendation, the 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: Adams County All Our Kids (AOK) Network, Parents and Children Together (PACT) and Urban League Head Starts, Cass County Health Department, Jacksonville One Stop, and the Jacksonville School District 117 Early Years Program.

Community partners shared the following lessons learned with Council members and Regional staff:

- Ensure the focus of the Local Early Childhood Community Collaboration is narrow, otherwise the group may become overwhelmed with requests for support.
- Ensure that resource guides are equitably disseminated, accessible in multiple languages, accurate, and updated consistently.

Recommendation Implementation

Council members said they will know the recommendation is fully implemented when at least four Collaborations are listed on the We Connect Database for Region 1 counties and when the resource guide can be distributed to community members.

They also predict that by fully implementing the recommendation, community members will have a deeper understanding of the needs of families and caregivers of children birth to age five and will have capacity to begin addressing those needs. Additionally, families of young children will have access to resources specific to the needs in their county.

Recommendation 2



Increase Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services for children ages birth to three.

This recommendation was made based on data that show that there is a lack of slots available in programs for children birth to age three in the Region, leading to a lack of developmental screenings and Kindergarten readiness. Council members identified this as the area of greatest needs in the Regional ECEC landscape.

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?
Using the collaborative efforts of the Regional Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies (CCR&Rs) and institutions of higher education, conduct three hybrid events to educate prospective center- and home-based providers on the licensing processes in targeted areas of highest need within Region 1 by September 30, 2024.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine and conduct outreach to contacts at both community colleges. • Determine and conduct outreach to contacts at local CCR&Rs. • Locate facilities for hosting meetings (hope to use colleges). • Set dates/times. • Create marketing materials. • Disseminate marketing materials. • Host meetings. • Conduct exit interviews. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will have contact names/information from representatives at both CCR&Rs and commitments to assist at events. • We will have facilities denoted on marketing materials. • We will create emails/social media posts/fliers for dissemination. • We will have a record of participants and their answers.

Risks & Barriers

Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation	Proposed Solutions to Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation
Attendance at meetings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In addition to marketing to the community, target the Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity (ECACE) scholarship students currently enrolled at John Wood

	<p>Community College and Lincoln Land Community College to boost attendance.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings will be held in a hybrid model, with one meeting location on the eastern side of the Region, and one on the western side for equitable access. • Meetings will be held at various times to accommodate a variety of schedules.
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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 activities related to the recommendation, the Council members did not identify additional possible funding sources at this time.

Community

Council members noted that West Central Childcare Connections, a Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) Agency in western Region 1, recently offered something similar but canceled the meeting series due to low or no attendance. The lessons they shared with Council members and Regional staff were to offer meetings online, at varied times, and to target specific audiences to boost attendance.

Recommendation Implementation

Council members said they will know the recommendation is fully implemented when three events have been held and the information has been provided to ECACE Scholarship Program members at both Regional community colleges.

They also predict that by fully implementing the recommendation, CCR&Rs and Regional community colleges will have a model about how to collaborate and disseminate information to Early Childhood Education (ECE) students, and that ECE students and professionals will be more knowledgeable about the CCR&R. Additionally, more community members will have information and resources for their own use and to disseminate to colleagues.

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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