

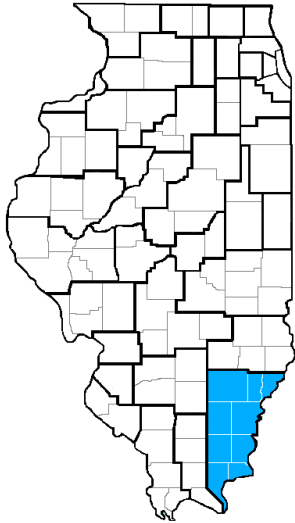
ACTION PLAN



Region 20

Edwards, Gallatin, Hamilton, Hardin, Pope, Saline, Wabash, Wayne & White 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 20 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:

- Lori Longueville, Southern Illinois Coalition for Children and Families (SICCF)
- Community Resource and Referral Directory Exploratory Committee
- Child Care Resource & Referral Agency (CCR&R) at John A Logan College
- Project CHILD

It is our hope that the Action Plan will enable centralized resources to be created and maintained so families will be able to find affordable resources more easily. We also hope that it will increase awareness and guide families and caregivers in the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) process, to ease the financial burdens they face.

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 20 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.

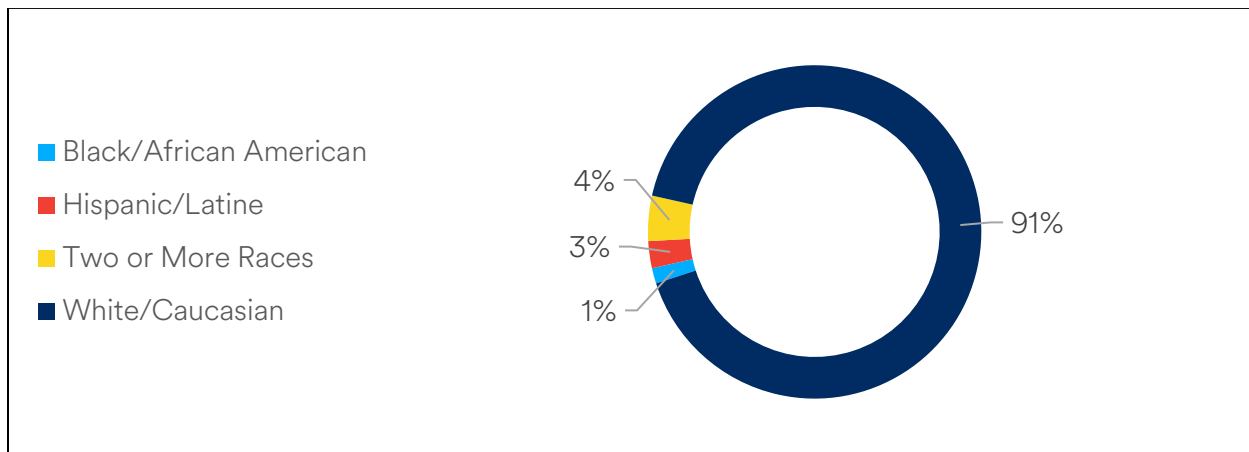
² See <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/nc-smart-goals-fact-sheet.pdf> for more information.

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 20

Region 20 is located in southeastern Illinois and includes the counties of Edwards, Gallatin, Hamilton, Hardin, Pope, Saline, Wabash, Wayne, and White. In 2022, the total population of the Region was 90,823; 5,972 were children birth through age five. While the majority of the children in the Region age four and under are identified as white, Pope and Saline Counties have pockets of those who identify as Hispanic/Latine and Two or More Races.

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 2,814 slots in publicly funded, licensed, and license-exempt child care centers and homes for children birth through age five (Table 1). Currently, Region 20 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, 22 people; Asian, 21 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	6	278
Head Start	Ages Three to Five	5	216
Preschool for All	Ages Three and Four	18	913
Preschool for All Expansion	Ages Three and Four	2	75
Licensed Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	15	1,111
Licensed Family Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	21	211
License-Exempt Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	1	10

Source: IECAM

Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

For additional data and information, please access Region 20's Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment at: www.birthtofiveil.com/region20/#report.

Recommendation 1



Develop a centralized resource for families to gain awareness of the available Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) programs and resources in the Region to increase usage of available programs.

This recommendation is based on feedback from Council and community members who discussed how difficult it is for parents and caregivers to know what ECEC resources are available in the Region, as well as how to access these resources.

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 the end of FY24, Birth to Five Illinois will work with community partners to create a comprehensive list of ECEC programs in Region 20.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet with the Southern Illinois Coalition to review their current listings. • Work with Project CHILD to create a list for additional three counties (Edwards, Wabash, Wayne). • Dedicate a person from each county to look over the resource list to make sure their county is correctly represented. • Compile listings into one comprehensive list for the entire Region that is sharable. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When a document is created.
<p>By the end of FY24, the Southern Illinois Coalition for Children and Families will create a document version of programs/resources for distribution to families and caregivers in the Region. Examples of resources are housing and shelter, food assistance, clothing, financial help, employment health, and transportation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Combine available lists of resources from community partners. • Ensure the list is accurate by contacting/researching if the resources still exist. • Dedicate a person from each county to review the resource list to make sure their area is correctly represented. • Create a QR code for ease of access to the document. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When a document is created.
<p>By the end of December 2024, Birth to Five Illinois will collaborate with the Community Resource and Referral Directory Exploratory Committee on which website developer to use.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Birth to Five Illinois: Region 20 staff will inform the Councils about each web developer. • Once a web developer is chosen, a price will be announced to give ideas on fundraising and grants. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When information about web developer has been collected and disseminated.

Risks & Barriers

Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation	Proposed Solutions to Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation
How to measure if parents/caregivers are receiving this information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use analytics, such as clicks on a page, to track the number of visitors. • Postcards/brochures will be placed at medical offices, agency offices, libraries, laundromats, Chambers of Commerce, and places in each community where families go.
How to measure if the programs in the Region have experienced an increase in interest/usage.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use forms and/or surveys to measure change in interest. • Share information with Region 20 Councils, Southern Illinois Coalition for Children and Families, Project CHILD, the Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) at John A Logan College, and any agency that has joined the project to increase interest/usage. • Use the number of app logins to measure interest and usage.
Cost of production of the website and app.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Print physical copies of the postcard and brochure. • Confirm initial start-up costs for a website developer and website maintenance/upkeep. • Calculate operating costs such as postage, time for updating information on the website, and mileage to distribute the postcard and brochure.
It takes time to update and maintain information on the website and app.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update the information for each of the nine counties to ensure correct information for families about ECEC programs and resources in the counties. • Maintain the information on the website and app to ensure it is current and accurate.

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 that ECEC programs housed in Regional school districts and CCR&R staff should be further engaged and asked for support in updating, distributing, organizing the resource, as well as leading collaboration among community stakeholders.

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 reported that Southern Illinois Coalition for Children and Families (SICCF) is currently working on similar goals and recommendations. SICCF shared that they are in the process of discussing the costs for building, maintaining, and updating information on the website, and how to make it a long-term, sustainable resource that families can rely on.

Recommendation Implementation

Council members said they will know the recommendation is fully implemented when the developer of the resources is able to provide data and analytics about what links and pages are being utilized.

They also predict that by fully implementing the recommendation, families will have an easier time finding resources and about events through the website or app.

Recommendation 2



Increase the usage of the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) by promoting it to families and caregivers.

This recommendation is based on feedback from providers and caregivers that there is a lack of awareness about CCAP, including how to apply for the program.

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 2025, promote the CCAP program/process and refer families in the community to Child Care Resource & Referral agency (CCR&R) and Project CHILD.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gather correct information on CCAP and the application process. • Meet with community members. • Create social media posts for community partners to share. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When information on the current CCAP application process is documented. • When meetings with community members are held and there is an established plan for how information will be shared. • When posts are shared regarding CCAP by 10 community partners.
By the end of December 2025, share the most current Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) CCAP flyers with child care centers and family child care homes to ensure caregivers and parents are receiving the most current information about the program.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gather correct information on CCAP and the process. • Take flyers to centers, homes, libraries, schools, and other places where parents and caregivers typically gather. • Create social media posts for community partners to share. • Set up meetings for all community members to attend. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When flyers are delivered to the targeted centers, homes, libraries, schools, and other places where parents and caregivers typically gather. • When the posts are shared by 10 community partners. • When scheduled meetings are held.
By the end of FY24, collaborate with Regional Chambers of Commerce to send out information, including CCAP qualification guidelines, to share and distribute to their employees.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify Chambers in Region 20. • Set up meetings. • Gather email distribution lists from meetings. • Create an email to share with Chamber members from the attendance/distribution list referenced above. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When Chambers are contacted. • When meetings with Chambers are held. • When Chambers have shared distribution emails. • When emails to Chamber members are sent.

Risks & Barriers

Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation	Proposed Solutions to Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation
Information can frequently change, and it will need to be kept up to date.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designate someone who can reach out when information is updated to ensure information is accurate.
Disseminating information out there in a timely fashion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up monthly meetings to keep track of when information should be distributed.
Cost of printing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distribute materials digitally through a QR code or link to minimize printing expenses.

Cost of advertising.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partner with Chambers of Commerce and community organizations to distribute information.
Availability of meeting with local Chambers of Commerce.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinate with existing Chamber meeting times for presentations.

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 Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) to discuss the need for simplifying the CCAP application process for both families and providers.

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 there is currently a committee at IDHS that is currently working on similar goals and recommendations. Their work is ongoing and lessons about the work have not been shared with Council members or Regional staff.

Recommendation Implementation

Council members said they will know the recommendation is fully implemented when there is an increased awareness among families and providers about CCAP, the process for applying for CCAP is easier, and the number of CCAP applications from families and caregivers increases.

They also predict that by fully implementing the recommendation, more families and caregivers will have affordable access to high-quality child care, which could potentially create a waitlist for CCAP.

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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