

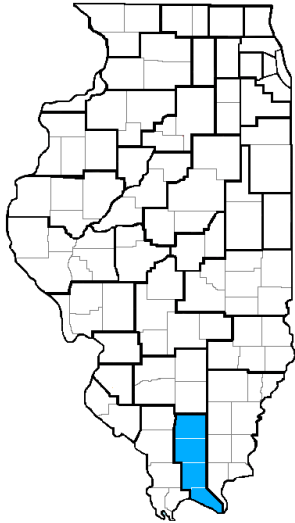
# ACTION PLAN



## **Region 21**

Franklin, Johnson, Massac & Williamson 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 21 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 at John A. Logan College
- Johnson County Cabinet for Children and Youth
- Southern Illinois Coalition for Children and Families Workforce Committee

It is our hope that the Action Plan will get helpful information regarding the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) into the hands of families. We also hope that it will increase ECEC workforce retention, keeping people inspired and connected.

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 21 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.

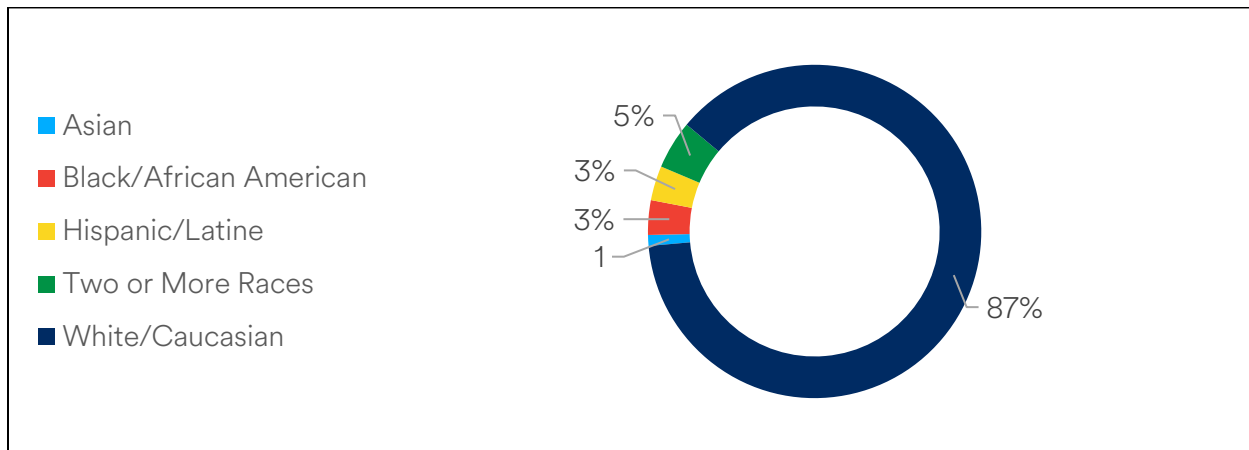
Action Plans will be reviewed in the summer with the community to discuss progress toward the SMART goals, potentially identify new goals and steps to meeting them, and talk about next steps for implementing the recommendations.

## Region 21

Region 21 is located in south-central Illinois and includes the counties of Franklin, Johnson, Massac, and Williamson.

In 2022, the total population of the Region was 132,307; 8,805 were children birth through age five. While the majority of the children in the Region are identified as white, there are small but growing communities of people from other racial/ethnic groups; notably, those who identify as Black/African American and Hispanic/Latine (Figure 1). Most children are concentrated in a few towns across the Region. Those who live in one of the 27 rural villages or unincorporated areas have limited access to resources and are forced to commute to one of the larger towns to find child care programs and services.

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 4,209 slots in publicly funded, licensed, and license-exempt child care centers and homes for children birth through age five (Table 1). Currently, Region 21 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: 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	4	135
Head Start	Ages Three to Five	7	384
Preschool for All	Ages Three and Four	23	1,301
Preschool for All Expansion	Ages Three and Four	0	0
Licensed Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	17	1,708
Licensed Family Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	47	544
License-Exempt Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	4	137

Source: IECAM  
Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

For additional data and information, please access Region 21’s Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment at: [www.birthtofiveil.com/region21/#report](http://www.birthtofiveil.com/region21/#report).

## Recommendation 1



Expand on our Child Care Resource and Referral Agency’s (CCR&R’s) current efforts to promote the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) by partnering to distribute promotional materials; share information; and educate families, community stakeholders, and employers about the program, its eligibility criteria, and the changing policies that make the program more accessible to families.

This recommendation was made to make CCAP more accessible to families by educating people about the program and its eligibility criteria to increase the overall utilization of the CCAP program in Region 21. Community members lack awareness of the CCAP program, their eligibility, and recent policy changes that allow more people to qualify.

## 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 June 2024, collaborate with community partners, ECEC providers, and the business sector to host a CCAP Awareness Month with a focus on reducing the stigma of receiving assistance/normalizing the process.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Select the month for the campaign.</li> <li>• Prepare and gather materials to share on social media with an emphasis of normalizing the process.</li> <li>• Council members will use contacts to assist in distribution of materials for the campaign.</li> </ul>	<p>Result: Distribute a toolkit and a plan of options for employers to embed the information into their daily work.</p>
<p>Between February and October 2024, collaborate with CCR&amp;R to support community stakeholders in embedding CCAP dissemination into daily work.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborate with CCR&amp;R with our efforts to maximize resources and avoid duplication of efforts.</li> <li>• Develop a list of businesses, schools, ECEC providers, healthcare officials, etc. that we will reach out to.</li> <li>• Develop a toolkit.</li> <li>• Distribute material to those lists with an intentional plan of how they can embed the material into their daily work.</li> </ul>	<p>Result: List of businesses, schools, providers, healthcare officials, etc., and have material and a plan for distribution.</p>
<p>Collaborate with Connect 4 Success to increase awareness of CCAP to schools, higher education institutions, businesses, ECEC providers, Local Early Childhood Collaborations, and healthcare institutions. This will be an ongoing effort through October 2024.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attend Connect 4 Success meetings each month to share resources with collaborative partners.</li> <li>• Collaborate with schools, higher education institutions, businesses, ECEC providers, Local Early Childhood Collaborations, and healthcare institutions to share resources.</li> <li>• Council members use contacts to help extend outreach and distribution.</li> </ul>	<p>Result: Our communities will have a better understanding of CCAP, resulting in an increase of usage of the program in Region 21.</p>

## Risks & Barriers

Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation	Proposed Solutions to Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation
Consistent embedding of information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make the process easy for them to embed into their daily routine (examples: HR orientation video clips, electronic newsletters, annual employee file updates, etc.)</li> </ul>
Ensuring information is up to date and people know where to go to access it.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish a contact person for all CCAP inquiries.</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

The Council members did not identify additional possible funding sources to support this recommendation.

## Community

Council members identified community groups who have been and are currently working on similar goals and recommendations: Child Care Resource & Referral at John A. Logan Community College, Birth to Five Illinois: Region 20, and Birth to Five Illinois: Region 30. In discussions with community members, they noted key lessons from working on similar goals and recommendations:

- Collaboration is key, even outside of the Region.
- Get the message to people in relatable terms.
- Share specific messages, graphics, and a plan as to how to embed this information into their daily work. Make it easy for employers to use.



## Recommendation Implementation

Council members said they will know the Recommendation is fully implemented when each targeted employer has a toolkit and a plan of options as to how to integrate and embed the information into their daily work, and there will be more information out in the community at places of business.

They also predicted that by fully implementing the recommendation, more children will have stable child care, allowing families to work without barriers.

## Recommendation 2



**Work to increase workforce and program quality by promoting and sharing information about the State’s current workforce initiatives, educate the public about the need for more teachers, and advocate for increased public dollars that support adequate compensation.**

The Region has a wide range of program options (center based, home based, half-day programs, full-day programs, licensed child care and family child care centers) but there is an urgent need to attract and retain teachers and providers to address this shortage and ensure all students have access to a high-quality education. However, Early Childhood Education and Care programs in the Region are experiencing a workforce shortage; data shows that low wages, a lack of students entering the field, and a higher number of professionals leaving the field are contributing to challenges with the Early Childhood workforce. Currently, the state has several workforce initiatives targeted to assist with this initiative and public and program feedback indicates they are not aware of these programs.

## 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>
By October 2024, educate the public about all opportunities for tuition assistance (Gateways to Opportunity Scholarship, Workforce Investment Opportunity Act, Early Childhood Assess Consortium for Equity, Pell/Map).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a list of available tuition-based workforce opportunities.</li> <li>• Educate ourselves and our Councils by gathering materials about available opportunities.</li> <li>• Collaborate with the CCR&amp;R in efforts towards their annual ECE Career Expo.</li> <li>• Participate in the Career Expo with a focus on distribution of these materials.</li> </ul>	Result: Distribute a toolkit of resources to all organizations/agencies on this list.
Between February and October 2024, collaborate and support to assist with the completion and expansion of the Southern Illinois Coalition for Children and Families Workforce Committee Goals. Also, share Illinois Cares for Kids Resources about Becoming a Provider, Home Visitor, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get a list of current goals.</li> <li>• Attend Workforce Committee monthly meetings as a collaboration partner.</li> <li>• Assist in getting information to high school education clubs about ECE.</li> </ul>	Result: Established Collaboration and support of and with the Southern Illinois Coalition for Children and Families (SICCF) Workforce Committee.
Between February and October 2024, educate providers who are at the licensed level of quality about workforce initiative benefits available as providers increase their quality rating.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gather a list of providers at licensed level of quality.</li> <li>• Reach out to Gateways/Workforce Initiative partners to gather helpful information to share.</li> <li>• Share the information.</li> </ul>	Result: Providers are going to have access and knowledge about current workforce initiatives.

## Risks & Barriers

<b>Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation</b>	<b>Proposed Solutions to Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation</b>
Money is not a motivator for everyone.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Find out what motivates and what is important (recognition, workplace culture, money, etc.).</li> </ul>

Work ethics and priorities have changed from generation to generation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Willingness and ability to adapt to new generations.</li> <li>• Workplace culture education.</li> </ul>
Qualified teachers do not always have a degree.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monthly employment resources.</li> <li>• Child Development Associate (CDA) programs acknowledging Early Childhood and allowing them to be teacher qualified out of high school.</li> </ul>
Workforce retention is not addressed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share the current workforce initiatives that are available to help increase program quality and staff pay.</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

The Council members did not identify additional possible funding sources to support this recommendation.

## Community

Council members identified community groups who have been and are currently working on similar goals and recommendations: Southern Illinois Coalition for Children and Families (SICCF) Workforce Committee, future teacher groups at high schools, and private schools. In discussions with community members, they noted two key lessons from working on similar goals and recommendations. First, ensure information is presented in an organized way with specific graphics and messaging to make it easy to embed in the daily work of employees. Second, it is important to be inclusive of all provider types whenever possible.

## Recommendation Implementation

Council members said they will know the recommendation is fully implemented when each organization being targeted will have a toolkit and a plan of options as to how to integrate and embed the information into their daily work.

They also predicted that by fully implementing the recommendation, more educators entering the field (and currently in the field) will take advantage of available opportunities, and the Region will have more emerging teachers “in the pipeline”.

## 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](http://www.birthtofiveil.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 (INCCRR).

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