

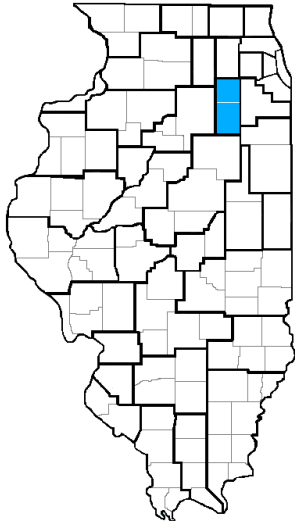
ACTION PLAN



Region 24

Grundy & Kendall 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 24 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 the community members for their support and for trusting us with their children and families, as we could not have completed the Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment and the Action Plan without each of you.

It is our hope that this Action Plan will ignite immediate, actionable movement to build strong collaborations and provide quality services for more children. We hope that it will address root causes and provide support and resources to family and community, to increase funding and facilities for affordable ECEC for all young learners in the state of Illinois.

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 24 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.

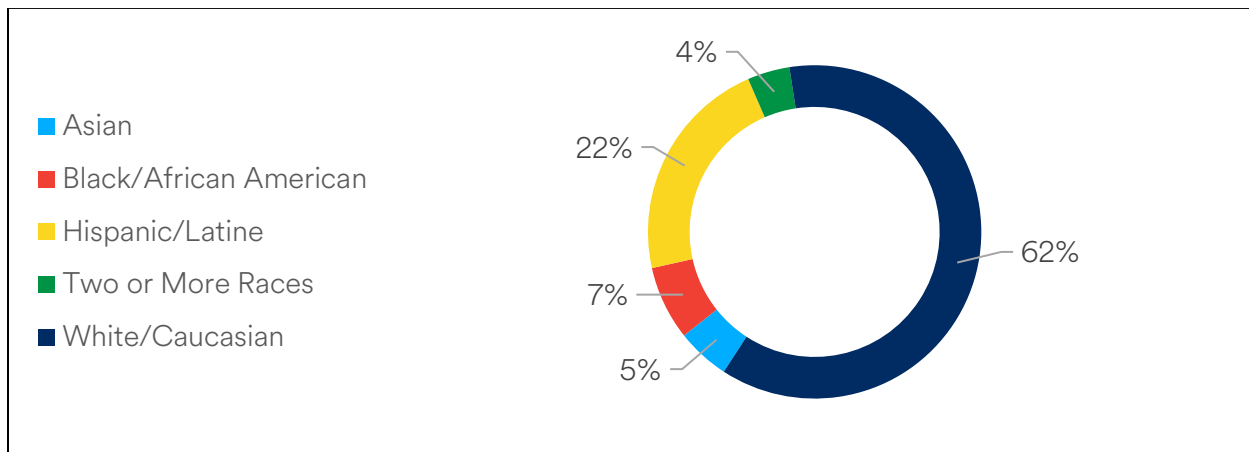
² See <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/nc-smart-goals-fact-sheet.pdf> for more information.

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 24

Region 24 is located in north-central Illinois and includes the counties of Grundy and Kendall. In 2022, the total population of the Region was 199,007; 15,010 were children birth through age five. While the majority of the children in the Region are identified as white, there is racial and ethnic diversity spread throughout the Region. However, there are few to no identifiable communities concentrated based on race or ethnicity.

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 4,941 slots in publicly funded, licensed, and license-exempt child care centers and homes for children birth through age five (Table 1). Currently, Region 24 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, 2 people; Other, 13 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	0	0
Head Start	Ages Three to Five	2	37
Preschool for All	Ages Three and Four	13	1,023
Preschool for All Expansion	Ages Three and Four	1	40
Licensed Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	30	3,292
Licensed Family Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	45	478
License-Exempt Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	5	81

Source: IECAM
Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

For additional data and information, please access Region 24’s Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment at: www.birthtofiveil.com/region24/#report.

Recommendation 1



Build partnerships among school districts and the Region’s local universities and community colleges to help create a pipeline of qualified Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) educators through Mentorship Cohorts.

This recommendation is rooted in feedback from ECEC professionals who said they, or professionals entering the field, would benefit from hands-on experience through a mentorship program that addresses classroom management and 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?
Between November 2023 and January 2024, collaborate with six local school districts and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a list of local community colleges and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> List of universities/colleges completed.

<p>eight higher education institutions to develop a Mentorship Cohort to increase and support the ECEC workforce.</p>	<p>universities in Grundy and Kendall counties.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outline logistics of the Mentorship Cohort. • Define and streamline mentorship definitions among facilities in the Region. • Define equity and what it looks like according to the mission, vision, and values of Birth to Five Illinois. • Contact each listed university or community college to coordinate/ introduce the Mentorship Cohort outline to the ECE department and establish a point of contact. • Create a list of ECEC sites and contact each site listed to introduce the Mentorship Cohort outline and establish a contact person for each site. • Create a qualification description and ask each site to create an internal pool of qualified Mentors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentorship Cohort outline completed. • Definition of mentorship created and consistent among all participating facilities in the Region. • Equity defined and streamlined in accordance with Birth to Five Illinois mission, vision, and values. • Universities/community colleges listed have been contacted and a point of contact has been established. • List of ECEC sites completed and all listed sites have been contacted. • Qualification description for a Mentor Supervisor completed and a pool of Mentor Supervisors has been created.
<p>By February 1, 2024, establish three to five ECEC Mentorship Cohort sites and one or more higher education partnerships.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentor Agreement created and sent to all participating mentors to sign. • Host Mentor Orientation meeting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All participating mentors signed the Mentor Agreement. • All mentors attended a Mentor Orientation Meeting.

Risks & Barriers

Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation	Proposed Solutions to Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation
<p>Unable to find ECEC programs and mentors who are interested in participating.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bring awareness and resources for other career options within the ECEC field outside of teaching.
<p>If stipend is approved for participants, it may disqualify some from Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) services due to being counted as income.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer a variety of incentive options such as gift cards, monetary compensation, time off or time flexibility, free memberships in the community, or

	the use of college campus facilities to alleviate any assistance disqualifications.
Making the program sustainable long-term.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentors receive support through team group/individual reflective supervision.

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 noted that the Quality Specialist and Infant Toddler Specialist at their local Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) Agency should be engaged further about collaborating with mentors to provide support with classroom management strategies and developmentally appropriate activities and practices.

Possible Funding Sources

While funding may be needed for stipends or incentives, to hold events, engage community members and partners, develop and distribute of marketing materials, and other activities related to the recommendation, the Council members did not identify additional possible funding sources at this time.

Community

There are several universities throughout the state of Illinois that have implemented mentorship programs to encourage returning ECEC professionals to complete a degree program. Additionally, several local schools and/or child care facilities have adopted this model to provide support to staff. One lesson that community partners relayed to Council members and Regional staff is that a mentorship program is valuable because it creates accountability partners and provides stability to the workforce.

Recommendation Implementation

Council members said they will know the recommendation is fully implemented when three to five Early Childhood Education mentorship sites have been established and are being supported by at least one local community college and/or university program, with ECEC professionals meeting with mentors on a regular basis.

They also predict that by fully implementing the recommendation there will be an

increase in paraprofessionals obtaining higher-level credentials such as an associate or bachelor’s degree, creating further stability in the ECEC workforce, and ECEC programs will see a decrease in staff turnover within a year of implementation.

Recommendation 2



Provide no-cost child care for teachers currently employed in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) programs.

This recommendation was created based on feedback from ECEC professionals who discussed how low wages and benefits left them unable to access ECEC programs and services. One Early Childhood professional said, “It appears that we make a good living based on our income but, with all the expenses that it requires to live...we cannot afford to send our children to a high-quality child care 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?
<p>Between December 2023 and February 2024, collaborate with at least 10 child care facilities within the Region to establish awareness of this recommendation and develop a pool of facilities that are willing to aid in no-cost child care for ECEC educators.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact child care facilities from the list in Recommendation 1. • Create a list of benefits for centers to implement free child care for their staff. • Collect data on how many employees are using the current employee discount at each facility if applicable. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When 10 child care facilities have been contacted to establish their interest in the pool of facilities willing to aid in no-cost child care.

Risks & Barriers

Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation	Proposed Solutions to Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation
Funding for no-cost child care for ECEC professionals could impact funding for those who utilize the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) outside the ECEC field.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address income guidelines, as the median income in both counties exceeds eligibility criteria. For example, increasing the income eligibility guidelines to match county-specific median income.
Creating a program that is sustainable long-term but is also able to meet the changing needs of ECEC professionals and families.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement regular evaluation of the process, steps, and outcomes by using multiple stakeholders like boards, focus groups, parents/caregivers, and agencies that use data to drive the process.

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 noted that the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), which administers CCAP, should be engaged further about expanding eligibility to all ECEC professionals, regardless of income.

Possible Funding Sources

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

Community

Council members noted that several companies, such as Publix Super Market, Google, and Men’s Warehouse, and hospitals across the country offer onsite, free child care to employees. Their main reasons for offering this service are staff retention (onsite options mean staff are not forced to search for child care that aligns with their schedule), support for staff’s financial stability (since care is free), and to open more child care slots so children are not on a waitlist.

Recommendation Implementation

Council members said they will know the recommendation is fully implemented when at least 10 child care facilities within Region 24 have established an employee child care incentive as a means of rebuilding the ECEC workforce while helping families maintain financial stability.

They also predict that by fully implementing the recommendation there will be an increase in the number of children attending child care services in the area, which will create an increase in working parents and/or caregivers returning to the ECEC field as opposed to offering Family Child Care services within their homes.

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).

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