

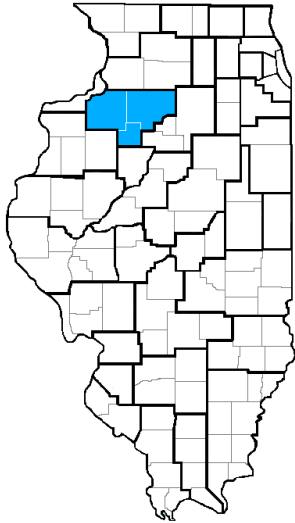
ACTION PLAN



Region 28

Bureau, Henry & Stark Counties

Regional Council Manager: Dianna Saelens (she/her)
Email: dsaelens@birthtofiveil.com
Phone Number: (309) 393-2536
Regional Website: www.birthtofiveil.com/region28



Family Council

Alexandria Ator
Amber Hegwood
Emily Rorem
Julia Massingill
Katelyn Camp
Katlyn Parsons
Lannie Newberry

Linnea Anderson Guither
Lorelei Blaucher
Nicki Sellon
Rachel Rumbold VanHollebeke
Stacy Widuch
Tara Gottwalt

Action Council

Amanda Brown
Angie Zarvell
Audrey Aden
Contina Hernblom
Jocelyn Salazar
Kelly Kessel
Leeann Tessier
Lindsey Woerle
Ruth Yarian
Sarah Mosier
Sarah Hoffert
Taylor Louscher

Table of Contents

Letter from Family & Action Council Members	3
Action Plan Development	4
How this Document is Designed	4
Region 28.....	5
Recommendation 1.....	6
Recommendation 2.....	8
Recommendation 3.....	10
Next Steps.....	12

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 28 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 specifically thank the following agencies for allowing Birth to Five Illinois: Region 28 to participate in meetings to gather the additional data needed to complete this Action Plan in a through manner:

- Geneseo Community School District Early Childhood Expansion Committee
- Henry County Housing Authority Program Coordinating Committee
- Henry/Stark County Human Services Committee
- Locally Interagency Council (LIC) 39
- Michael Levis, Community Engagement, Child Care Resource & Referral Agency (CCR&R) of Midwestern Illinois
- Skip-A-Long Community Services Board
- University of Illinois Extension Unit 7 Advisory Council

It is our hope that the Action Plan will bring awareness to the needs of rural communities in northwest Illinois and create equitable access to services and resources for families living in these communities. 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 28 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

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.

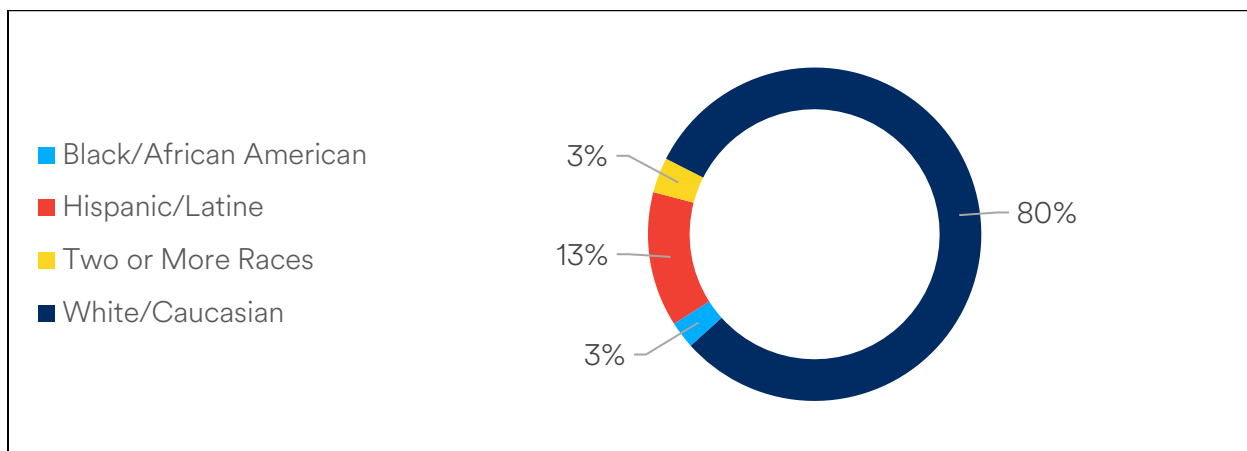
organizations and individuals were considered but are not listed, which allows Regional Teams and Councils to engage with community members in a collaborative manner.

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 28

Region 28 is located in northern Illinois and includes the counties of Bureau, Henry, and Stark. In 2022, the total population of the Region was 88,078; 5,446 were children birth through age five. While the majority of the children aged four and under in the Region are identified as white, there are some communities with neighbors who are Black/African American, Hispanic/Latine, and Asian (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 2,272 slots in publicly funded, licensed, and license-exempt child care centers and homes for children birth through age five (Table 1). Currently, Region 28 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, 10 people; Other, 26 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	1	6
Head Start	Ages Three to Five	4	135
Preschool for All	Ages Three and Four	15	845
Preschool for All Expansion	Ages Three and Four	0	0
Licensed Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	10	766
Licensed Family Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	49	459
License-Exempt Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	2	61

Source: IECAM

Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

For additional data and information, please access Region 28’s Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment at: www.birthtofiveil.com/region28/#report.

Recommendation 1



Implement systems that actively and routinely seek parent and provider input about barriers that exclude participation in current programming.

This recommendation was developed by Council members who recognize that not all parent, caregiver, and provider voices in the Region have been heard. With the continued implementation of new Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) programming, they want to continue listening and collecting stories of families and providers from Bureau, Henry, and Stark Counties.

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?
In FY24, conduct at least one informational session in each of the counties about starting a child care business and discuss the perceived barriers to opening or expanding a child care business.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet with the Child Care Resource & Referral Agency (CCR&R) and Home Child Care Network about starting a child care business and scheduling information sessions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When at least one informational session is held. • When there is an increased number of Preschool For All/Prevention Initiative and licensed child care applications in the Region.
In FY24, host meetings with each of the school districts that the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) has identified as “child care deserts” to gauge their understanding of Preschool For All services and discuss the perceived barriers the districts are experiencing related to the expansion of preschool programming.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schedule meetings with school district administrators. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When at least one meeting is held with school districts in ISBE-designated child care deserts. • When data about barriers is collected.
In FY24, through the use of surveys and listening sessions, obtain parent and provider feedback on the awareness of resources that support children and families in the Region, and ways to raise the awareness of available services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete surveys and listening sessions with parents and providers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When data about awareness and access to resources in the Region is collected.

Risks & Barriers

Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation	Proposed Solutions to Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation
Time and resources needed to complete the goals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pool and distribute existing resources created by community agencies.
Willingness of parents and providers to share their experiences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage parents and providers in feedback opportunities at events they are already attending in the community.
No formalized Early Childhood Collaborations exist in the Region to assist with the coordination and sustainability of the work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early Childhood agencies servicing the Region must make a conscious effort of keeping others informed of service offerings and family engagement opportunities.

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 development and distribution of marketing materials 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 there are no community groups who are currently working on similar goals and recommendations. However, Birth to Five Illinois: Region 28 staff reported that data collection activities tied to events families are already attending has led to higher rates of participation. They will use this information as outreach efforts are developed in the future.

Recommendation Implementation

Council members said they will know this recommendation is fully implemented when families have greater awareness and access to educational support services in the Region. They also predict that by fully implementing the recommendation, there will be a decrease in the slot gap across the Region and programs will see increased enrollment.

Recommendation 2



Develop community-level Collaborations to enhance Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) service offerings for children and families.

This recommendation was made because there is no formalized Local Early Childhood Community Collaboration in the Region.

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?
In FY24, work with Early Childhood service agencies to develop and distribute marketing materials about accessing and affording services offerings in the community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and distribute marketing materials for services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When marketing materials are distributed to the community.
In FY24, Birth to Five Illinois staff will partner with community agencies to host quarterly family engagement and educational opportunities in underserved communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Compile and analyze data on feedback sessions. Work with service agencies to organize, schedule, and market informational sessions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When quarterly meetings are held.
In FY24, Birth to Five Illinois staff and Action Council members will facilitate discussions with community entities about creating service “hubs” in underserved communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluate available space in communities. Evaluate ability of service agencies to utilize available space to provide services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When new service locations are implemented in underserved communities.

Risks & Barriers

Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation	Proposed Solutions to Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation
Engaging agencies in collaborative practices when they are accustomed to working in silos.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage ECEC service agencies in networking opportunities.

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 development and distribution of marketing materials and other activities related to the recommendation, the Council members did not identify additional possible funding sources at this time.

Community

Council members reported that there are no community groups who are currently working on similar goals and recommendations.

Recommendation Implementation

Council members said they will know this recommendation is fully implemented when there is increased access to ECEC services in underserved communities in the Region. They also predict that by fully implementing the recommendation, there will be increased enrollment and participation for ECEC offerings in the Region.

Recommendation 3



Improve agency-level awareness of marketing and funding opportunities to expand service support for families in underserved communities.

This recommendation was made because not all counties in the Region have a formalized way of sharing social service program offerings.

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?
In FY24, Birth to Five Illinois staff and Action Council members will participate in community meetings related to the development and sharing of community resource guides.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation in ongoing community social service meetings to assist with coordination. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When community resource guides are created.
In FY24, Birth to Five Illinois staff will collaborate with Action Council members and community entities, as opportunities arise, to increase awareness of grant opportunities that enhance service offerings in underserved communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation in community social service meetings. • Grant writing training for social service providers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When a system is developed for the sustained sharing of grant opportunities. • When there are increased participation rates in grant opportunities.

Risks & Barriers

Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation	Proposed Solutions to Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation
Not all communities have established social service collaborations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each county is represented by a Community Action Agency, Health Department, and Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) office. For communities without social service Collaborations, a conscious effort must be made to ensure these agencies are kept informed of resource offerings and grant opportunities.
Many social service agencies have expressed being unfamiliar with the grant writing processes and how to organize community engagement opportunities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Birth to Five Illinois staff and Council members will share training opportunities as they come available and facilitate mentoring and modeling opportunities within the Region.

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 development and distribution of Community Resource Guides and other activities related to the recommendation, the Council members did not identify additional possible funding sources at this time.

Community

Council members report that Illinois Representative Weaver, Illinois Representative Spain, and Illinois Senator Anderson are hosting office hours in the Region to increase access to services in underserved communities. In discussions with the Representatives and Senator, they said that maintaining a presence in communities alleviates barriers to engagement and promotes equity.

Recommendation Implementation

Council members said they will know the recommendation is fully implemented when there is an increase in access to community support service offerings in underserved communities in the Region. They also predict that by fully implementing the recommendation, there will be increased enrollment and participation in community support service offerings in the Region.

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: Patty Brito on Unsplash, page 5: kate_sept2004 from Getty Images Signature via Canva Pro, page 8: FatCamera from Getty Images Signature via Canva Pro, page 10: yohoprashant from Pixabay via Canva Pro, page 12: enigma_images from Getty Images Signature via Canva Pro.