

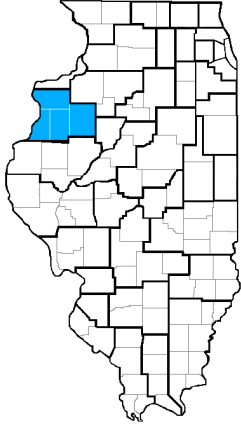
ACTION PLAN



Region 33

Henderson, Knox, Mercer & Warren 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 33 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 John Mabon, former Birth to Five Illinois: Region 33 Family & Community Engagement (FACE) Specialist, as he was instrumental in supporting the development of this Action Plan.

It is our hope that the Action Plan will aid the entire Region 33 ECEC community in providing services and information to families. Additionally, we hope families can seamlessly access information and services to further nurture the wellbeing of their children.

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 33 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.

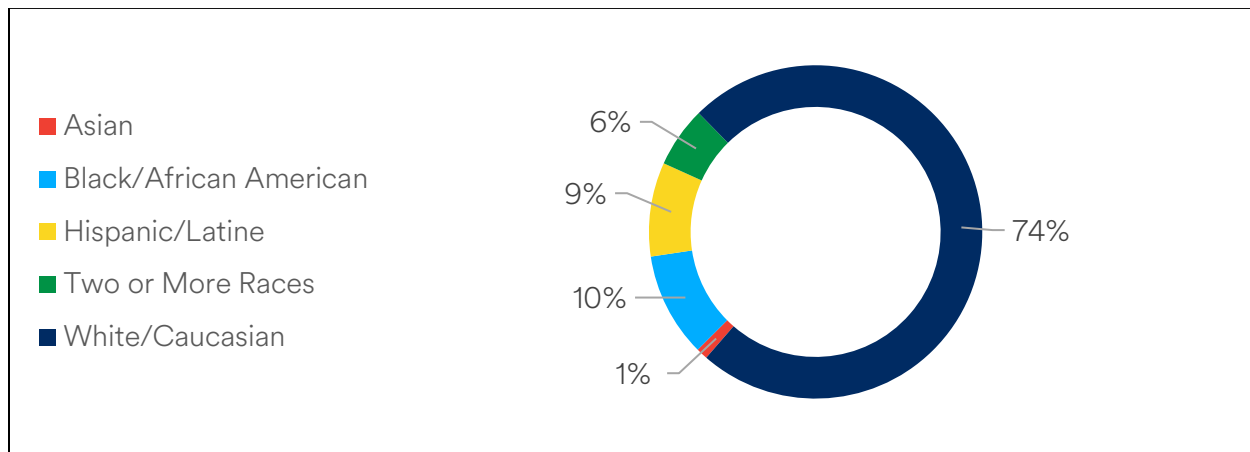
² See <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/nc-smart-goals-fact-sheet.pdf> for more information.

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 33

Region 33 is located in northwestern Illinois and includes the counties of Henderson, Knox, Mercer, and Warren. In 2022, the total population of the Region was 80,169; 5,385 were children birth through age five. While most of the children aged four and under are identified as white, racial and ethnic diversity is increasing throughout the Region, especially in higher population areas (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 2,320 slots in publicly funded, licensed, and license-exempt child care centers and homes for children birth through age five (Table 1). Currently, Region 33 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, 4 people; Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, 5 people; Other, 6 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	24
Head Start ⁴	Ages Three to Five	7	307
Preschool for All	Ages Three and Four	14	530
Preschool for All Expansion	Ages Three and Four	11	246
Licensed Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	8	496
Licensed Family Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	65	577
License-Exempt Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	2	140

Source: IECAM
Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

For additional data and information, please access Region 33’s Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment at: www.birthtofiveil.com/region33/#report.

Recommendation 1



Simplify access for families by creating a universal resource for information and communication.

This recommendation was made based on feedback from caregivers and families that they find it difficult to find information about available Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services and programs in the Region. Council members discussed the need for direct information dissemination, where resources and materials are sent to parents and caregivers, and passive

⁴ Data reflects 2022-2023 counts from IECAM. Community feedback indicates that there are now fewer Head Start programs and funded slots available in the Region.

information dissemination, where information is made available through multiple sources so caregivers can find it when they need or want it.

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 December 31, 2024, Birth to Five Illinois: Region 33 will create and launch a universal resource for families to access ECEC information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify what information families want/need. • Study other universal resources and make recommendations for adoption. • Develop a marketing plan and materials that allow for both passive and direct information dissemination. • Collaborate with community stakeholders to create, contribute to, and maintain one universal resource. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When options from related websites have been discussed with community partners. • When Joint Councils approve the dissemination of marketing materials. • When the universal resource is created with input from ECEC providers and families. • When the universal resource is made available to families in the Region.

Risks & Barriers

Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation	Proposed Solutions to Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation
A lack of buy-in from agencies and people in the ECEC community due to fears of loss of control and loss of resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a shared vision for what a universal resource is with community partners.
A lack of support from key stakeholders that control communication and dissemination of information to families.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage collaborative problem-solving, where no one cares who gets the credit.
Misunderstanding by providers and families about what a universal resource is.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared responsibility for communication with community partners.

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 identified community groups who have been, and are currently, working on similar goals and recommendations: the local Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) agency, Regional Office of Education #33, and the Illinois Department of Children & Family Services (DCFS) Sunshine website.

In discussions with community members, they noted key lessons from working on similar goals and recommendations. First, there is a need for both direct and passive communication with community members. Second, that demographics of the Region require information to be provided in ways that agencies are not used to using. Resources need to be offered in more languages and made available in both digital and hard copy to reach communities that may not have access to the internet.

Recommendation Implementation

Council members said they will know the recommendation is fully implemented when all agreed upon direct and passive information sources are made available to Region 33 families.

They also predict that by fully implementing the recommendation, there will be an increase in enrollment in ECEC programs, as well as lower stress levels for families, caregivers, and ECEC providers.

Recommendation 2



Continue to support home-based providers through information and resources.

This recommendation was made based on feedback from Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) providers who discussed the need to streamline and simplify policy and funding information for home-based child care providers.

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 December 1, 2024, connect 75% of Region 33's ECEC providers and organizations with the universal "one-stop shop" resource hub.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gather data on the specific needs and challenges of home-based providers. This group will work to find specific gaps in service for the home-based providers. Identify relevant, accurate, and needed resources available to providers by June of 2024. Ensure providers have access to a universal "one-stop shop" for information and resources by disseminating a digital and non-digital universal link to all agencies in Region 33. Sustain data collection from providers to ensure real time accuracy in the universal resource. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When meetings and discussions have taken place. When a provider page has been created. When there are multiple platforms where providers can find the resources they need, both for themselves and their families.

Risks & Barriers

Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation	Proposed Solutions to Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation
Finding and contacting home-based child care providers who have not pursued licensing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop targeted marketing to reach them. Request assistance from the Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) agency to reach out to home-based providers.
Willing participation by, and sustainability of connection with, unlicensed home-based child care providers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide incentives for participants. Investigate how to make relationships mutually beneficial for home-based providers and community partners. Plan for intentional contact with providers in various ways.
Where to host the information hub for resources and information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with community partners to use their existing websites.

<p>Accuracy of information, since home-based child care providers who have not pursued licensing are not listed anywhere.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create resources using multiple sources.
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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.

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 identified community groups who have been and are currently working on similar goals and recommendations: CCR&R, City of Galesburg, Home Child Care Network, Mercer County Better Together, Regional Office of Education #33, The Village Early Childhood Collaboration, and the YMCA.

Community members shared one key lesson from working on similar goals and recommendations: Illinois' system for people attempting licensure is not a simple process for those who speak a language other than English or whose first language is not English. Often, they are required to translate their own paperwork and trainings.

Recommendation Implementation

Council members said they will know the recommendation is fully implemented when data about the contact and engagement opportunities with the home-based providers has been compiled.

They also predict that by fully implementing this recommendation, home-based child care providers will be able to access information when they need it and in a language that is familiar.

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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