

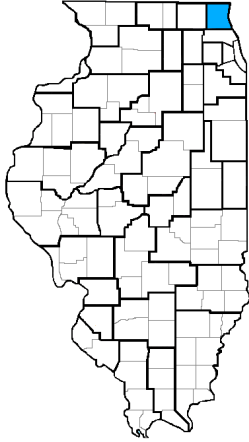
ACTION PLAN



Region 34

Lake County

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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 34 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. Our heartfelt gratitude goes out to the remarkable individuals and organizations that have played an essential role in the development of our Action Plan:

- College of Lake County
- iGrow Lake County
- Lake County Regional Office of Education (ROE)
- YWCA Metropolitan Chicago

Our Council hopes this Action Plan serves as an essential tool for promoting equitable access to ECEC opportunities in our community and that every child seeking ECEC services can enroll or participate. Additionally, our Action Plan prioritizes streamlining the process for parents and families to locate ECEC organizations and services by providing comprehensive information and contact details to enhance awareness and prevent duplication of efforts within the community. We hope this Action Plan establishes a more accessible, organized, and efficient system that supports families and ensures all children benefit from quality ECEC.

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.

Birth to Five Illinois: Region 34 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.

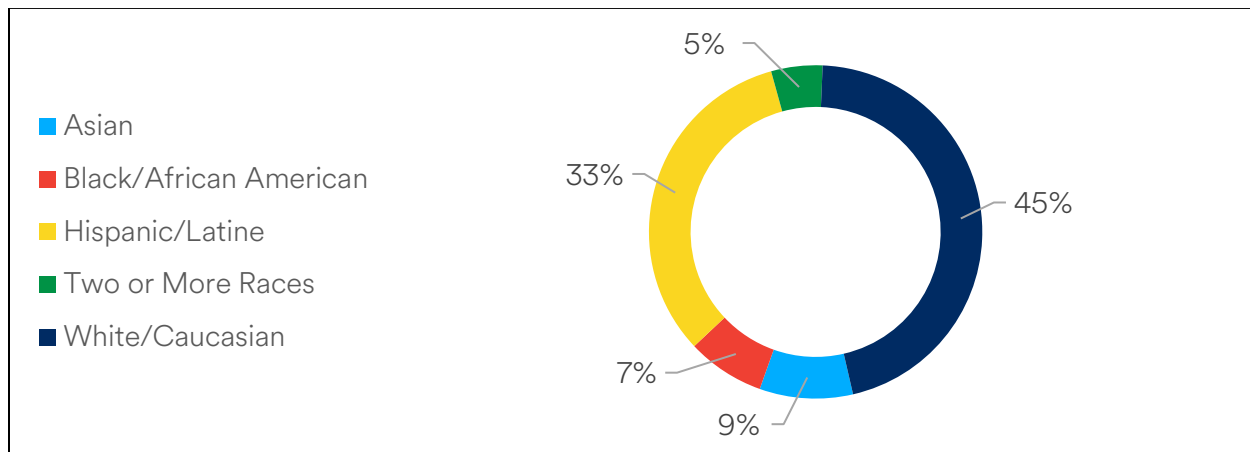
² See <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/nc-smart-goals-fact-sheet.pdf> for more information.

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 34

Region 34 is located in northeastern Illinois and includes Lake County. In 2022, the total population of the Region was 741,774; 49,511 were children birth through age five. While most children in the Region are identified as white, there is a significant number of children who are identified as Hispanic/Latine, Asian, Black/African American, and Two or More Races in the Region (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 21,188 slots in publicly funded, licensed, and license-exempt child care centers and homes for children birth through age five (Table 1). Currently, Region 34 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, 35 people; Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, 5; Other, 186 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	70
Head Start	Ages Three to Five	5	299
Preschool for All	Ages Three and Four	29	2,894
Preschool for All Expansion	Ages Three and Four	2	155
Licensed Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	126	12,802
Licensed Family Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	367	4,101
License-Exempt Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	15	867

Source: IECAM

Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

For additional data and information, please access Region 34’s Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment at: www.birthtofiveil.com/region34/#report.

Recommendation 1



Increase Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) slots across all publicly funded program options, including child care centers, home-based programs, and Prevention Initiative programs.

The recommendation to increase ECEC slots in all program options was made to ensure all families who wish to enroll their child in a program have access to a spot. According to the Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment conducted in 2023 by Birth to Five Illinois, 66% of children birth to age five do not have access to an ECEC program in the Region, indicating that many families who may wish for their child to attend an ECEC program are unable to do so. The goal is to provide equal and equitable opportunities for all children, so all children can receive the education and support they need to enter Kindergarten “ready to learn”.

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>Throughout the remainder of FY24 and all of FY25 establish, organize, and host a minimum of four informational sessions in Lake County, each attended by at least 10 participants to educate and empower individuals on the steps and requirements to open their own child care facility, with a focus on quality and compliance, to provide comprehensive insights into the various paths and programs that can lead to a rewarding teaching career.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborate with local experts to design the layout and process of the sessions. • Develop marketing plan, promotional and meeting materials. • Set up an online registration system to manage and confirm attendance. • Create agendas that include Q&A, group discussions, and time for networking. • Develop a mechanism for feedback on improvements. • Track the number of child care facilities opened as a result of these meetings. • Create a platform for the group to have ongoing support and collaboration. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Event dates, times, and locations are determined. • Attendance at events is determined by speakers. • Promotional information is created and shared with networks via social media. • Agendas are confirmed. • Topics, speakers, and time limitations are confirmed. • Evaluation forms are created. • A mechanism to track the number of child care facilities that have opened as a result of meetings is established. • Group emails and social network groups are established for continued engagement.
<p>During FY24 and FY25, support the local Regional Office of Education (ROE) with Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) Request for Proposal (RFP) grant proposal.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify child care deserts within the Region. • Understand ISBE RFP grant requirements. • Develop a support plan with the ROE. • Provide technical assistance. • Facilitate communication between the ROE and local programs. • Evaluate the process and document lessons learned. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When a grant proposal has been completed and submitted.

Risks & Barriers

Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation	Proposed Solutions to Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation
<p>Funding to hold events and provide training.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure funding through local, regional, and state agencies, with a specific focus on engaging the local community and private foundations for financial support.

<p>There are several considerations in event planning, including finding space that is affordable and appropriate, predicting the number of attendees, language considerations, accommodations, and child care needs, among others.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share information with all community partners and agencies to enhance awareness and encourage widespread participation. • Partner with community organization for an in-person space. • Provide a hybrid option for working families or families with limited transportation, especially for evening meetings. • Record meetings and make them accessible for 30 days after each session to accommodate those who may not be able to attend in real time. • Implement a rotation strategy for in-person meetings, ensuring sessions are held throughout the county to provide equitable access for all participants. • Work with local school districts and College of Lake County to engage students interested in education, offering opportunities for workforce training and apprenticeships. • Encourage pre-registration for sessions to facilitate accurate planning and coordination. • Have information/sessions available in other languages, specifically Spanish. • Consider providing information sessions during weekends, particularly on Saturday mornings.
<p>Ensuring that new programs are high-quality, that there are enough staff to support new programs, and that owners understand the financial side of running their business.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore collaboration with fully vetted staffing agencies, which provide substitutes for programs. • Collaborate with the YWCA Metropolitan Chicago for assistance with quality improvement grants. • Collaborate with the YWCA Metropolitan Chicago and College of Lake County to promote awareness of their educational assistance opportunities and flexible programs.

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 hold events, provide translation and interpretation services, support the development of tools and resources, engage community members and partners,

develop and distribute 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 identified three community partners who are currently working on similar or related goals and recommendations: College of Lake County, iGrow Lake County, Together for Childhood Network, and the YWCA of Metropolitan Chicago.

They shared the following lessons with Council members and Regional staff:

- Ensure that information sessions are accessible to a broad audience.
- Have a resource listing funding options available for anyone interested in opening a child care facility.
- If meetings are held in the evening, food and/or refreshments should be provided.
- Keep participants informed about any changes or updates in regulations, requirements, or available resources.
- Provide child care during meetings so caregivers can focus on the presentation.

Recommendation Implementation

Council members said they will know the recommendation is fully implemented when more child care programs have been established, there is an established way of documenting the impact and quality of new programming, there is increased community support of ECEC programs, and caregivers feel more empowered to advocate for new and better services for their children.

They also predict that by fully implementing the recommendation there will be more ECEC professionals entering the workforce, the Region will see new ECEC services established on a more regular basis, the economy will grow as more caregivers enter the workforce, more children will enter Kindergarten with the learning and skills necessary to succeed, and caregivers will feel more supported and informed about student growth outcomes.

Recommendation 2



Create a centralized hub for Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) resources and services.

This recommendation is rooted in feedback from caregivers and providers and involves establishing an online centralized hub to simplify the process for caregivers and families interested in finding ECEC resources and services. By offering comprehensive information and contact details, the hub will increase awareness of existing programs, categorizing them as publicly or privately funded to provide clarity on available resources. This centralization will make the process of identifying program locations and gathering feedback from parents and providers easier, which will support ongoing improvements in the ECEC sector.

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>Within the next 12-18 months, establish a centralized online hub that compiles all ECEC programs and services in Region 34.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a timeline for the completion of steps and goal. • Establish a project team to lead development and determine features of the hub. • Engage with providers to ensure information is accurate and current. • Create a comprehensive resource database. • Develop the hub. • Launch and monitor feedback from community partners and caregivers. • Develop plan to market and promote hub. • Provide training and support on how to use hub. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deadlines to complete the hub are established. • Project team is identified. • Hub plans, including feature development, platform provider, and developer identification, have been created. • Active provider participation is confirmed. • A comprehensive list of ECEC programs and services has been created. • The online hub has been created and is ready for review to gather feedback on accessibility. • The hub is launched for public use. • Training sessions have been held.

Risks & Barriers

Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation	Proposed Solutions to Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation
<p>Providers frequently open, close, and change operating hours, available services, and enrollment numbers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure when a child is enrolled at a provider their information is updated in various databases,

	<p>including informing the centralized hub website for consistency.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receive updated information from Gateways to Opportunity (via the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (INCCRRA)) to maintain accurate and current data. • Encourage decision-makers to update enrollment information during Smart Start and Quality Improvement meetings to ensure real-time data accuracy. • Collaborate with Elgin Partnership for Early Learning (EPEL) to review their initiatives and how they implemented their website.
Caregivers and providers may not have access to the internet or feel comfortable using it to find ECEC resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite child care directors to share testimonials about their experiences getting started and the assistance they received.
Many people are already familiar with services such as 211 and may be reluctant to rely on a new resource.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leverage “Moms Together” networks and collaborate with school districts to effectively disseminate information about the centralized hub. • Promote relationship-building awareness to foster collaboration among stakeholders. • Collaborate with various community organizations and agencies, including Boys and Girls Club, clinics, park districts, and libraries to disseminate information about hub, especially at events and festivals.
Staff with proficiency in languages other than English need to be identified to assist caregivers and providers with language support needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the presence of bilingual staff for effective communication. • Make info available in multiple languages with a user-friendly filter for accessibility.

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 the several organizations, agencies, and individuals to engage and ask to share or promote the hub once it has been developed, including Mayor’s Offices, public libraries, park districts, Kids Above All, Little Lake County, Mother’s Trust, Mano Y Mano, and others.

Possible Funding Sources

While funding may be needed to support the development and maintenance of a digital platform, the development and distribution of marketing materials, the engagement of 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 identified one community group that is working on similar goals and recommendations: Elgin Partnership for Early Learning (EPEL). One valuable lesson they shared was to utilize a website provider such as Word Press that has customizable templates to make it easier to update and edit information.

Recommendation Implementation

Council members said they will know the recommendation is fully implemented when there is a digital platform with information about ECEC programs and service is accessible to all caregivers and providers in the Region. They will consider it successful when there is positive feedback from the community and analytics of the website show user engagement from across the Region.

Council members also predict that by fully implementing the recommendation there will be an increase in referrals to ECEC programs and families will feel like there is “no wrong door” to access ECEC programs, services, and resources.

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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