

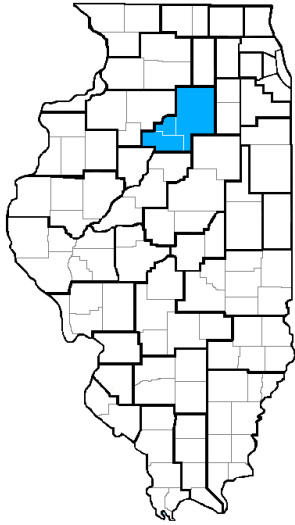
ACTION PLAN



Region 35

LaSalle, Marshall & Putnam 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 35 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:

- Chris Dvorak, Regional Office of Education #35, Regional Superintendent
- Ryan Meyers, Regional Office of Education #35, Assistant Regional Superintendent

It is our hope that this Action Plan will help families navigate affordable resources more easily. We also hope that it will lead to our community having a better understanding of the social determinants of health caused by the disconnect of resources for our families. Finally, we hope it will spur important discussions and partnerships that lead to fulfilled goals and lasting change to benefit caregivers of children birth to age five, as well as Region 35 as a whole.

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 35 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.

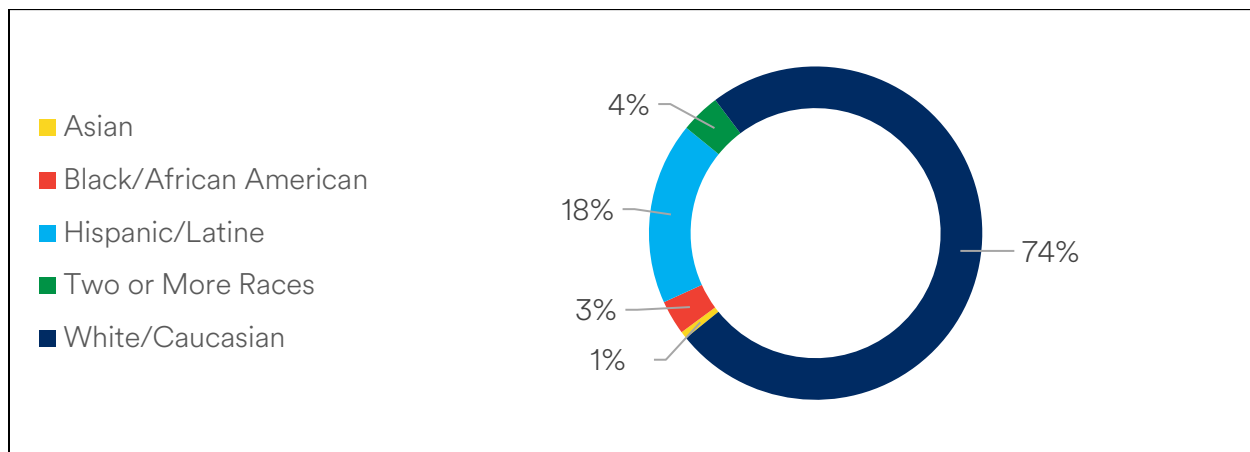
² See <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/nc-smart-goals-fact-sheet.pdf> for more information.

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 35

Region 35 is located in north-central Illinois and includes the counties of LaSalle, Marshall, and Putnam. In 2022, the total population of the Region was 116,934; 7,788 were children birth through age five. While most of the children in the Region age four and under are identified as white, there are some in the Region that identify as Hispanic/Latine, Black/African American, or have Two or More Races (Figure 1). There are small pockets of Hispanic/Latine communities throughout the Region, particularly in Mendota Township, Troy Grove Township, and the city of LaSalle.

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 2,329 slots in publicly funded, licensed, and license-exempt child care centers and homes for children birth through age five (Table 1). Currently, Region 35 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, 44 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	4	51
Head Start	Ages Three to Five	8	223
Preschool for All	Ages Three and Four	11	1,111
Preschool for All Expansion	Ages Three and Four	2	33
Licensed Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	10	636
Licensed Family Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	28	275
License-Exempt Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	0	0

Source: IECAM

Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

For additional data and information, please access Region 35's Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment at: www.birthtofiveil.com/region35/#report.

Recommendation 1



Recruit and retain the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) workforce.

This recommendation was made because the Region is lacking in half- and full-day center and home child care programs. All children birth to age five have extremely limited access; however, children from birth to age two are truly at a disadvantage, with only 69 slots available for over 1,500 children.

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?
Grow the advertisement of ECEC career options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reach out to at least three community colleges, universities, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When at least three community colleges,

<p>by changing the narrative in Region 35 by January 2025.</p>	<p>and/or vocational centers to see what they currently do to encourage enrollment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research and create talking points to explain the benefits of the career path, scholarships available, shared personal experiences of those currently in the field, family experiences that share the benefit of ECEC, and why the field is so important. • Identify resources, including grant opportunities, that can support those interested in pursuing a career in ECEC. • Create a marketing plan, including social media posts and visits to school districts. • Contact at least five Chambers of Commerce and provide them with information to share with their network(s). • Share the Illinois Cares for Kids website with all community partners listed in this goal. 	<p>universities, and vocational centers are contacted.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When data is collected. • When resources are identified. • When platforms are chosen. • When Chambers are given talking points to share with their members. • When the Illinois Cares for Kids website is shared with community partners.
<p>Produce a survey to assess employee needs/wants regarding ECEC services (this includes home child care, home visiting, and center-based child care) in Region 35 by February 2025.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a target list of employers. • Create and distribute a survey. • Interpret survey data. • Disseminate a list of available tax credits to community partners regarding the building of centers. • Investigate current available free-standing buildings that can be used for child care centers. • Create a list of community members and schools that should receive information about available buildings. • Compose an email with adequate information and contacts listed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When a list of employers is created. • When the survey is distributed. • When the data is analyzed. • When information about available tax credits is distributed to at least 20 school districts and Chamber of Commerce through events, presentations, and emails. • When a list of free-standing buildings is created. • When a list of who should receive the email regarding buildings is created. • When the email is composed.
<p>Promote the importance of Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Consultants (I/ECMHCs)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a list of I/ECMHCs available in Region 35 to share with the list of schools. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When a list of I/ECMHCs within Region 35 is created.

for teachers and staff through a list shared within Region 35 by February 2025.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a list of schools within Region 35 that need information about I/ECMHCs. • Investigate the options for funding the I/ECMHCs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When the information about I/ECMHCs is shared with at least 10 school districts. • When funding options are investigated.
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Risks & Barriers

Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation	Proposed Solutions to Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation
How to encourage the industry to change their current practices to include on their website, in conversations, and with their counselors/staff.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share information and data from colleges and university to change the narrative around ECEC careers.
How to encourage employers to distribute survey to employees and encourage buy-in about the survey.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share ways to distribute the survey to employees to encourage buy-in from employees and employers. • Discuss the importance of the survey with employers and how the results can benefit them.
The cost of funding an I/ECMHC.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigate funding supports to help hire I/ECMHCs.
Understanding the boundary lines on which colleges to contact, since many have students attending colleges across the State.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborate with community partners to make a group decision regarding boundary lines.

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 discussed engaging the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) further to understand what financial supports exist for those who wish to purchase a building, as well as what the state offers in terms of funding for new child care programs, overall.

Possible Funding Sources

Council members identified that local governments may offer help in purchasing new buildings, but other private philanthropic investors and grants, as well as IBSE grants, should be investigated as possible funding sources to support this recommendation.

Community

Council members identified the Illinois Valley Community College (IVCC), as well as several community members, are currently working on similar goals and recommendations. They noted that IVCC has seen an increase in enrollment in the Early Childhood Education program since they began offering the Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity (ECACE) scholarship. Community members offered to share their experience of opening a child care center and what they learn from the process. Other community members affirmed the value that Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Consultants (I/ECMHCs) add to programs and stressed the need to add more across the Region.

Recommendation Implementation

Council members said they will know the recommendation is fully implemented when there is an increase in the number of people entering and remaining in the ECEC field in the Region, there are greater numbers of home child care providers and ECEC classrooms, more mental health supports are offered to ECEC staff, and there is more awareness of what programs offer mental health supports to staff.

Council members also predict that by fully implementing this recommendation, ECEC professionals will feel more supported, employers will see an increase in employees, children will have access to what their families wish for them, there will be an increase in retention rates for ECEC employees, children will be better prepared for Kindergarten, and there will be a stronger relationship between child care providers and families.

Recommendation 2



Build a Coordinated Intake program for communities to easily access resources.

This recommendation was made because there is not a resource available that encompasses all available resources to families within 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?
<p>By May 2025, launch a Coordinated Intake System or Padlet (or other options available) in LaSalle, Marshall, and Putnam County businesses and groups.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore all options available for families and available resources in the Region. • The data intake system will be shared with local resources, such as the Illinois Department of Human Services, Health Department, professionals in the health field, Regional Office of Education #35, school districts, local businesses, and local non for profits, etc. to share their resource specifics within the chosen program. • Enroll businesses and groups into the system. • Upkeep the system so it is relevant and current. • Publicly share through events and provide ample information to allow for easy access for families. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When options are explored. • When the data intake system is shared. • When businesses are enrolled. • When the system is updated regularly to remain current. • When the system is shared with families.

Risks & Barriers

Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation	Proposed Solutions to Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation
<p>The buy-in for resources or provide resources to find the time to put their data in the Padlet/intake system.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buy-in can be supported if reminders are used to help with the upkeep of intake system information. • Create QR code or use tablet to sign providers up at events and meetings.
<p>Getting the system set up and ensuring the upkeep of each of the resources.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a cadenced reminder to all participating businesses and groups to keep the system up to date.
<p>Marketing so families, providers, and community leaders in the Region know the system exists.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use social networking to market the intake system. • Hold marketing and informational sessions.
<p>Education about the system to ensure it is being utilized correctly and with fidelity.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide recorded or paper instructions to support learning and usage of the system.
<p>The overall cost of creating and maintaining the information system.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider utilizing a less expensive system such as Padlet, and research funding options to support the system. • Research viable options for funding that take sustainability into account.

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 discussed that the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), Illinois Department of Children & Family Services (DCFS), Child & Family Connections (CFC), and Tri-County Opportunities Council be further engaged to get input on how to confirm if a resource is available and how to support the dissemination of resources.

Possible Funding Sources

While funding may be needed to support the activities related to the recommendation, the Council members did not identify additional possible funding sources at this time.

Community

Council members identified that the Regional Office of Education (ROE) #35 is currently working on similar goals and recommendations. In discussions with community members, they shared that a data intake system will not only provide information about community resources, but also will allow families to easily search for the resources and services they need. It could also provide the option for families and caregivers to make appointments or use a map to see the location of the services closest to them.

Recommendation Implementation

Council members said they will know the recommendation is fully implemented when families are aware of the resource and are utilizing it to find the ECEC services and programs they and their children need.

They also predict that by fully implementing the recommendation, there will be an increase in usage of local resources, a decrease in the ECEC slot gap, and families will be healthier, happier, and have less stress.

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.



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