

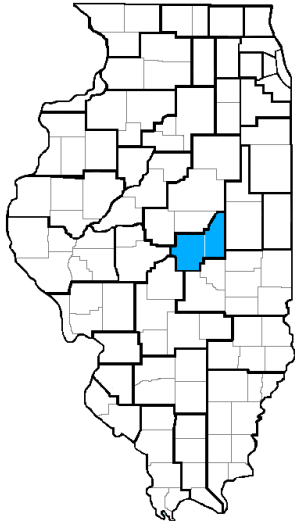
# ACTION PLAN



**Region 39**

Macon & Piatt 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 39 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:

- Courtney Kirk
- Rev. Jason Butterick & Les Ruffner from Prairie Avenue Church
- Rocki Wilkerson & Larry Peterson from Decatur Workforce Investment Solutions
- Sarah Smith from Regional Office of Education #39

It is our hope that the Action Plan will increase quality of ECEC, bring new awareness and knowledge of resources and child development to stakeholders, and create a solid plan to establish a crisis nursery in Decatur to support families.

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 39 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),<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK559239/> for more information.

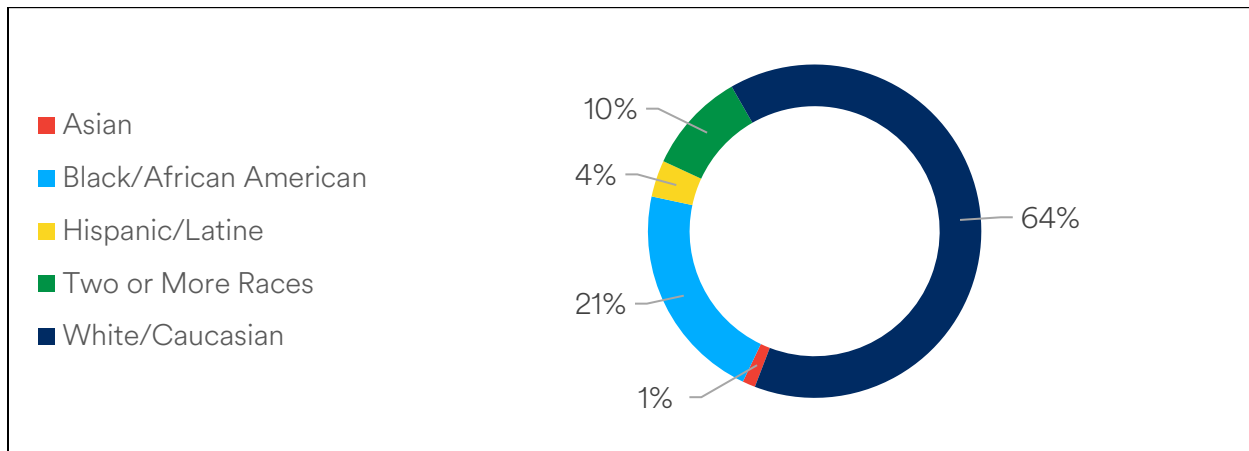
<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/nc-smart-goals-fact-sheet.pdf> for more information.

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 39

Region 39 is located in central Illinois and includes the counties of Macon and Piatt. In 2022, the total population of the Region was 121,200; 9,038 were children birth through age five. While most of the children aged four and under in the Region are identified as white, there are growing numbers of children age four and under who are identified as Black/African American, Two or More Races, Hispanic/Latine, and Asian. (Figure 1). Macon County’s population is more diverse in racial makeup than Piatt County, with most of the racially and ethnically diverse population living in Decatur.

Figure 1: Percentage of Children Aged Four and Under by Race/Ethnicity<sup>3</sup>



Source: IECAM  
Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

Across the Region, there are 3,670 slots in publicly funded, licensed, and license-exempt child care centers and homes for children birth through age five (Table 1). Currently, Region 39 does not have enough spots available for families who might want to enroll their young child in an ECEC program.

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<sup>3</sup> Other races/ethnicities have too small of numbers to be represented in the chart: Other, 23 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	146
Head Start	Ages Three to Five	2	206
Preschool for All	Ages Three and Four	12	944
Preschool for All Expansion	Ages Three and Four	1	120
Licensed Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	14	1,829
Licensed Family Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	36	345
License-Exempt Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	3	80

Source: IECAM

Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

For additional data and information, please access Region 39’s Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment at: [www.birthtofiveil.com/region39/#report](http://www.birthtofiveil.com/region39/#report).

## Recommendation 1



**Address the urgent need for a crisis nursery in Decatur by creating a comprehensive action plan.**

This recommendation was made based on feedback from families and providers during the Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment process. Due to the large child maltreatment numbers, it was decided by Region 39 Family and Action Council members to be a major need in our community. Macon County does not have a crisis nursery, and the closest is 45 miles away.

## SMART Goals

<b>SMART Goals</b>	<b>What steps will be taken to meet the SMART goal?</b>	<b>How will you know when the SMART goal has been achieved?</b>
Explore three crisis nurseries in neighboring towns to gain insights and gather information on their operations and best practices by March 2024.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify a working group and leader(s) to spearhead this effort.</li> <li>Create a list of crisis nurseries and contact info for each.</li> <li>Determine dates when group members are available.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Group members will have visited a minimum of three crisis nurseries in Illinois.</li> </ul>
Determine three possible funding avenues to support the establishment and sustainability of a crisis nursery (local, state, or federal) by July 2024.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Group members will discuss with other crisis nurseries how they are funded.</li> <li>Group members will talk with community members to collaborate for local fundraising.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Group members will have a list of three possible funding streams.</li> </ul>
Identify two potential locations that meet licensure requirements for establishing a crisis nursery by July 2024.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) licensing requirements for a crisis nursery.</li> <li>Identify a second possible location if the Prairie Avenue Church is not licensable.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Group members will have identified two locations in case the Prairie Avenue Church is not licensable.</li> </ul>
Seek out a suitable 501(c)(3) organization to serve as the grant holder for the crisis nursery initiative by July 2024.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Group members will talk with community members to determine an agency/church to hold grants.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Group members will identify two possible agencies/churches to function as the grant holder.</li> </ul>

## Risks & Barriers

<b>Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation</b>	<b>Proposed Solutions to Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation</b>
Lack of available funding to establish and sustain a Crisis Nursery.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Raise awareness of the mission of a Crisis Nursery, utilizing available data to demonstrate need.</li> </ul>
Finding quality staff to operate the crisis nursery.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Higher wages will recruit better quality staff.</li> </ul>
Renovation costs to make location licensable.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bring in DCFS licensing representative early to determine if the space is licensable.</li> </ul>

## **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 recommended that the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) and the Illinois Department of Children & Family Services (DCFS) should be engaged to discuss funding opportunities and licensing requirements.

## **Possible Funding Sources**

Council members identified local community agencies and hospitals, community foundations, the DCFS Crisis Nursery grant, the IDHS Grandparents grant, and local private donors as possible funding sources to support this recommendation.

## **Community**

Council members reported that there are already Crisis Nurseries in central Illinois; they shared information about funding, licensing, and staffing with Council members and Regional staff.

## **Recommendation Implementation**

Council members said they will know the recommendation is fully implemented when there is a comprehensive plan to establish a Crisis Nursery in Decatur. They also predict that by fully implementing the recommendation, parents and caregivers will have a resource they can utilize for short-term care to reduce their stress levels and provide a stable environment for families.



# Recommendation 2



Strengthen the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) workforce by offering easily accessible, affordable, and high-quality training, credentialing and professional development opportunities.

This recommendation was made based on insights gathered during the Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment process, where valuable feedback was obtained from families and providers. Community members emphasized that elevating the quality of care could be achieved by expanding professional development opportunities and enhancing awareness of financial resources within the community.

## SMART Goals

<b>SMART Goals</b>	<b>What steps will be taken to meet the SMART goal?</b>	<b>How will you know when the SMART goal has been achieved?</b>
<p>By December 2024, implement initiatives aimed at enhancing the number and quality of training opportunities, with a specific focus on fundamental aspects like health and safety protocols.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with Richland Community College (RCC) to incorporate health and safety basics into classes beyond Health class.</li> <li>• Home Visiting agencies will collaborate to create safety training for Home Visitors and Parent Liaisons.</li> <li>• Child Care Resource Service (CCRS) will offer training in Decatur and increase awareness of trainings via their newsletter.</li> <li>• Regional Office of Education (ROE) #39 and RCC will collaborate on providing social-emotional trainings in the community.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There will be an increase in health and safety training in RCC classes.</li> <li>• There will be at least one safety training provided for all Home Visitors in our community.</li> <li>• CCRS will include information about training in their newsletters.</li> <li>• There will be at least one new social emotional training provided by RCC and the ROE.</li> </ul>
<p>By March 2024, establish a centralized hub or system dedicated to sharing information and distributing flyers related</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A Facebook page and a Google calendar will be created to act as an information hub for Early Childhood Educator’s professional development opportunities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When a Facebook page and Google calendar are created and shared with Early Childhood Educators.</li> </ul>

to resources and upcoming events, local training sessions, and opportunities for financial assistance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community members will act as administrators to the systems and share the availability of the resource with area schools, agencies providing ECEC services, and child care centers.</li> </ul>	
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### Risks & Barriers

<b>Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation</b>	<b>Proposed Solutions to Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation</b>
Sharing training information with Early Childhood Educators.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Council members will establish connections with local high schools to distribute valuable information with those interested in the ECEC field.</li> </ul>
Providing health and safety training.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create opportunities to spotlight and commend staff members via social media who excel in implementing exemplary health and safety practices.</li> <li>Equip agencies with attention-grabbing tools, such as impactful flyers and posters, strategically designed to convey the importance of these practices.</li> <li>Provide Center Directors and leadership with mentoring strategies to guide and inspire their staff towards improving health and safety techniques.</li> <li>Provide professional development opportunities online and in-person to empower ECEC professionals with the knowledge and skills needed for successful implementation.</li> </ul>

### 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 the need to engage CCRS, ROE #39, and Child & Family Connections (CFC) #19 to request that they provide training and share information with providers.

### 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 that RCC, CCRS, and ROE #39 are currently working on similar goals and recommendations. In discussions with community members, they shared that there are trainings available; however, the obstacle is getting staff to implement the strategies in the classroom. For example, everyone knows how important it is to wash hands, but even after required health and safety training, there are still issues with teachers not washing hands.

## Recommendation Implementation

Council members said they will know the recommendation is fully implemented when there is a social media page to share ECEC information, an increase in health and safety trainings for Early Childhood Education staff, and more ECEC community members will be utilizing grants, scholarships, and trainings.

They also predict that by fully implementing the recommendation, there will be an increase the awareness of opportunities (such as training, grants, scholarships, classes) among ECEC staff, more community organizations collaborating to support ECEC professionals, and fewer incidences of Home Visitors practicing in unsafe environments.

## Recommendation 3



**Develop effective methods to communicate with all families and build awareness of community programs and Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services, as well as expand existing programs to meet families' needs.**

This recommendation was made based on feedback from families and providers during the Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment process. This proactive approach ensures families will be aware of the available resources and child development best practices to be able to fully support their children.

## SMART Goals

<b>SMART Goals</b>	<b>What steps will be taken to meet the SMART goal?</b>	<b>How will you know when the SMART goal has been achieved?</b>
<p>By March 2024, collaborate with child care centers, schools, churches, and community clubs to promote awareness of 211 and Macon County Resource Guide information, fostering a broader and more effective outreach within the community.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a list of schools, child care centers, churches, and community clubs.</li> <li>• Gather 211 flyers and cards from United Way.</li> <li>• Get a Resource Guide from the Macon County Health Department.</li> <li>• Distribute resource information to those on the lists.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each organization on the list has received information about 211.</li> </ul>
<p>By December 2024, work in partnership with Decatur Public Transit (DPT) to strategically distribute child development information, ensuring its visibility and accessibility on bus stops and within buses, maximizing outreach to the community.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with DPT to identify places and ways to share child development information.</li> <li>• Work with Richland Community College (RCC) to create child development flyers, activities, and posters.</li> <li>• Add flyers, activities, and posters to designate locations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There will be child development information at bus stops and on buses.</li> </ul>
<p>By June 2024, collaborate with Early Intervention to compile a carefully vetted list of online developmental resources, strategically sharing this valuable information through social media channels, and with educators, directors, and pediatricians to ensure widespread access for families.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with Millikin nursing students and RCC ECE students to create a list.</li> <li>• Contact Child and Family Connections (CFC) #19 in Decatur to understand how best to distribute the list.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When there is a vetted list to distribute to families of children on Early Intervention waitlists.</li> </ul>

## Risks & Barriers

Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation	Proposed Solutions to Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation
Community members will not remember the Resource Guide or 211 information when they need it.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Send out reminder emails to community members and consistently post on social media about the availability of the resources.</li> </ul>
Parents and caregivers not recognizing they are their children’s first teacher.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create straight forward messaging on flyers and billboards of the importance of Early Childhood Education and family engagement.</li> </ul>
Not all families utilize the Decatur Public Transit.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create a social media poll to see where families go and share the developmental activities and information at those locations.</li> </ul>
How to share the list with families that are not on Early Intervention waitlists.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Distribute the list where families are (libraries, WIC clinic, pediatrician offices, etc.)</li> </ul>

## 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 recommended that CFC #19, which houses Early Intervention services, be asked to share vetted list of resources with families.

## Possible Funding Sources

Council members identified the cities of Decatur and Monticello, as well as United Way and the Macon County Health Department as possible funding sources to support this recommendation.

## Community

Council members reported that the United Way and Macon County Health Department are currently working on similar goals and recommendations. These entities shared with Council members that while information about 211 and the Macon County Resource Guide is shared, people forget about these resources when they are in crisis mode. To combat this hurdle, the resources should be shared on an ongoing basis to keep them “top of mind”.

## Recommendation Implementation

Council members said they will know the recommendation is fully implemented when organizations have received 211 information and Macon County Resource Guides, when child development information is advertised on buses and at bus stops, and once a vetted list of resources is available for families of children on Early Intervention waitlists. Council member also predict that by fully implementing the recommendation, parents and caregivers will have a better understanding of their role as teachers for their children, a better awareness of community resources, and children will be more prepared for begin school.

## 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](http://www.birthtofiveil.com).



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