

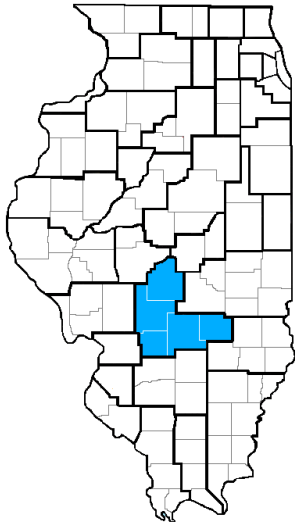
# ACTION PLAN



## Region 3

Bond, Christian, Effingham, Fayette & Montgomery Counties

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## Table of Contents

Letter from Family & Action Council Members .....	3
Action Plan Development .....	4
How this Document is Designed .....	4
Region 3.....	5
Recommendation 1.....	6
Recommendation 2.....	10
Next Steps.....	14

## 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 3 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 step, detailed in this Action Plan, to move the needle on several recommendations identified in our Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment.

It is our hope that the Action Plan will decrease neglect and abuse in the Region while increasing resources and advocacy for families. We hope that our Action Plan will be a helpful asset, and that it will be accepted so this work can move forward.

We want to thank our community members for their support in developing our Regional Action Plan. 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 3 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.

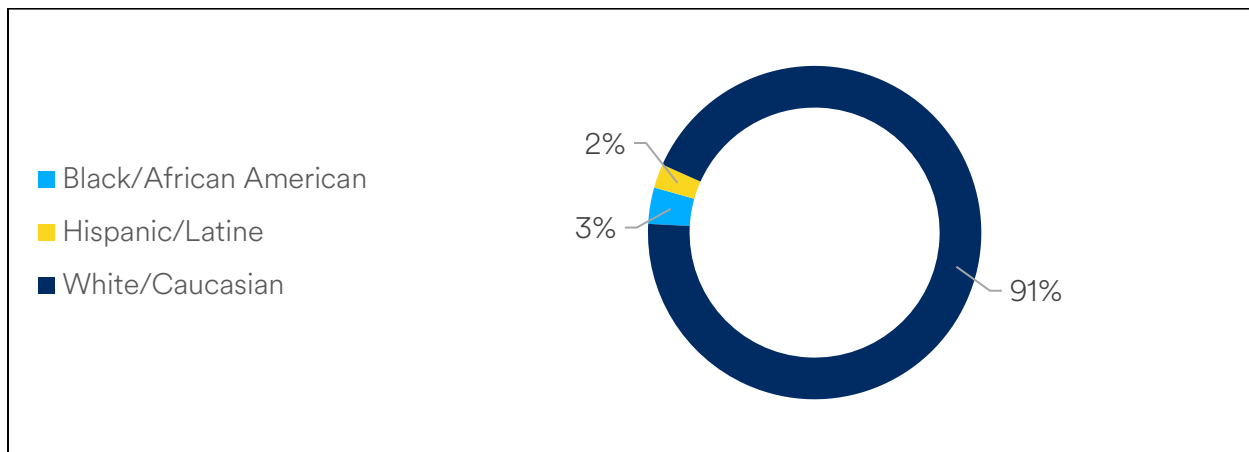
### Region 3

Region 3 is located in central Illinois and includes the counties of Bond, Christian, Effingham, Fayette, and Montgomery.

In 2022, the total population of the Region was 133,248; 8,586 were children birth through age five. While much of the Region is white, the percent of children identified as Hispanic or Latine, Black/African American, and Two or More Races has been gradually increasing since 2017 (Figure 1). The opposite is true of those who identify as Asian, showing a sharp decline since 2018.

Since 2017, Region 3 has more than doubled the number of languages, other than English, as the primary household language. The number of limited English-speaking households with Spanish as the primary language has grown by 37 households. The number of limited English-speaking households with a language other than English or Spanish has grown by 140 households. The data does not show in exactly which towns these individuals reside or what other languages are spoken.

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 4,467 slots in publicly funded, licensed, and license-exempt child care centers and homes for children birth through age five (Table 1). Currently, Region 3 does not

<sup>3</sup> Other races/ethnicities have too small of numbers to be represented in the chart: Asian, 21 people; American Indian and Alaska Native, 2 people; Other, 1 person; Two or More Races, 211 people.



have enough spots available for families who might want to enroll their young child in an ECEC program.

*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	5	110
Head Start	Ages Three to Five	6	209
Preschool for All	Ages Three and Four	19	1,143
Preschool for All Expansion	Ages Three and Four	3	100
Licensed Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	23	1,989
Licensed Family Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	71	747
License-Exempt Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	4	169

Source: IECAM  
Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

For additional data and information, please access Region 3’s Early Childhood Needs Assessment at: [www.birthtofiveil.com/region3/#report](http://www.birthtofiveil.com/region3/#report).

## Recommendation 1



### **Mental health and trauma-informed care training and professional development for the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) workforce.**

This recommendation was made after research and community input revealed that due to the increasing number of children who experience trauma in Early Childhood and the increased percentage of children in programs with an Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) or with an Individual Education Plan (IEP), teachers and caregivers need in-depth education to help them support these students and their families. Additionally, with the Region’s average doubling the state average of children experiencing abuse and living in alternative care, there is also a need for staff and teachers to have trauma-informed care (TIC) or trauma-informed approaches (TIA) in their professional development.

## 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>Compile a comprehensive list of mental health and trauma-informed providers available in the Region, identified by county, city, and program, by November 2024.</p>	<p>Research and document information to identify available providers of mental health and trauma-informed services for ECEC.</p>	<p>When a complete, comprehensive list of providers is developed by county, city, and program.</p>
<p>Identify and document a comprehensive list of mental health and trauma-informed professional development opportunities available in the Region, identifying by county, city, and program by December 2024.</p>	<p>Identify and document information to identify available providers of mental health and trauma-informed professional development opportunities for ECEC.</p>	<p>When a complete, comprehensive list of professional development opportunities is developed by county, city, and program.</p>
<p>Identify and collaborate with local Chambers of Commerce, colleges, and community centers to provide venues for mental health and trauma-informed professional development in FY25.</p>	<p>Collaborate with local entities to identify buildings or rooms that could be used as professional development venues for future use.</p>	<p>When complete, a comprehensive list is available to all mental health and trauma-informed professional development providers to use for professional development purposes.</p>
<p>Throughout the remainder of FY24 and all of FY25, collaborate with community partners to create a research hub for ECEC providers and parents/caregivers to connect them to trauma-informed services, resources, and supports.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Utilize existing networks to identify resources, collaborate with medical providers, health departments, community centers, and through a town hall to identify all resources in our Region.</li> <li>• Use documented resources to create a website and printed book for programs and families in the Region.</li> <li>• Utilize existing networks, collaborate with programs, and employ outreach strategies to identify and engage with key partners and resources effectively.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When a complete, comprehensive list of resources is developed by the county and city and a partnership has been established to update these resources within a timely manner when required.</li> <li>• A fully functioning website has been established and a resource book has been designed and printed with financial support from key partners in the Region.</li> <li>• Will be completed after the one-year initial introduction to the Region but will be actively maintained by key stakeholders in the Region thereafter.</li> </ul>

## Risks, Barriers & Solutions

Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation	Proposed Solutions to Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation
Identifying a limited number of qualified individuals to provide necessary training and experience needed for professional development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give all programs access to a trauma-informed curriculum to use with fidelity.</li> <li>• Qualification includes credentials and experience.</li> <li>• Use data tracking to see what data is changing to show improvement.</li> </ul>
Limited funding options.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create formal Collaborations to open more grant options with education on resources.</li> <li>• School districts become responsible for providing services to children with IEPs.</li> <li>• Hold fundraisers to elevate the issues in our Region and bring in funds.</li> <li>• Inquire about private funding options.</li> </ul>
Insufficient resources are available within the Region, so we must search outside of it to get the support needed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Search for accessible resources outside the Region.</li> </ul>
Website barriers lead to inaccessible training.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hold live screen recordings tutorials for support getting to trainings, websites, etc.</li> <li>• Bring qualitative data to those who are designing the website.</li> <li>• Ensure all professional development is in one place by category.</li> </ul>
Insufficient participation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give government sites the option to view the “hub”.</li> <li>• Present information in a way that focuses on proof it will help (data, stories, etc.).</li> <li>• Provide optional ways of participation in professional development or training.</li> <li>• Administration makes goals and professional development days a priority.</li> <li>• Provide incentives for those participating.</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 identified the following statewide organizations, agencies, and/or individuals who should be engaged further to help support the SMART goals and/or recommendation:



- Caregiver Connections: Professional development and new training.
- Illinois Association for Infant Mental Health Consultation: Hosting and/or developing education videos.
- Illinois Children’s Mental Health Partnership: Resources and webinars.
- Illinois Department of Children & Family Services (DCFS): Professional Development.
- Illinois Network of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies (INCCRRA): Utilizing the Gateways website to implement professional development focused on Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (I/ECMHC) and trauma-informed professional development. Additionally, support navigation to the website.
- State Agencies: Funding allocated for trauma-informed professional development.

## Possible Funding Sources

Council members identified potential sources of funding that might help support the implementation of the recommendation: the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) and other community stakeholders, such as Effingham Regional Growth Alliance, Greenville Women’s Alliance, and local Chambers of Commerce.

## Community

There are other community partners working on related goals and recommendations in the Region: Bond County Health Department, Child Care Resource & Referral Agency (CCR&R), and Caregiver Connections. Bond County Health Department, for example, received a grant to provide Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and mental and behavioral health training for all teachers in the county, from preschool through grade 12. They are contracting through Prairie Counseling to provide the training and giving teachers gift card incentives if they complete the series.

CCR&R Navigators provide support and training for home-based providers and parents in the CCR&R program and provide professional development for all ECEC providers. Additionally, Caregiver Connections provides a list of mental and behavioral health providers, as well as professional development opportunities for providers.

In talking with these community partners, they noted two lessons they have learned as they work toward this recommendation. First, on demand training is important for scheduling and addressing time constraints people experience due to work, school, family, etc. Second, they said incentives work well to entice people to sign up for, and complete, training and classes.

Council members noted that child care, preschool, and school administrators especially need to be ready to make mental and behavioral health and trauma-informed training a priority, because focusing on social and emotional health will support room management and improve academics.

## Recommendation Implementation

By implementing this recommendation, Council members believe there will be access to deeper mental health and trauma-informed care professional development available and required for all ECEC providers. Additionally, if funding is allocated specifically to help fill this need at a state level, we can support children during the most important time for brain development.

Council members predict the following outcomes if the recommendation is fully implemented:

- Alleviation of stress within the home environment.
- Improved school readiness and increased likelihood of future academic success.
- Increased Kindergarten Individualized Development Survey (KIDS) scores.
- Increased opportunity to practice emotional regulation in a safe social environment.
- Increased self-efficacy among teachers and staff.
- Increased self-esteem among children.
- Lower expulsion rates, which provide a more equitable environment for learning.
- Lower teacher and staff burnout.
- Minimized trauma for children in education and care settings.
- Mitigation of educational disparities, contributing to more equitable opportunities for all children, regardless of mental or behavioral health.
- Reduced educational disparities.
- Decreased burden on I/ECMHC providers.

## Recommendation 2



**Increase the number of slots that support inclusion and expand on services to create a more equitable Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) system.**

This recommendation was made based on the feedback of families and community members and in response to data that there are not enough slots for preschool or child care in Region 3. To better meet the needs of families, the slots that provide ECEC for children who require extra services, such as support for children with disabilities and developmental delays, rural child care, transportation, and wrap around care, along with programs and families utilizing the Child Care

Assistance Program (CCAP), should be prioritized. Equity and inclusion from the beginning of life will provide more stability and opportunities for children.

“We only have one option for child care, but the center doesn’t open when I need it to, so I have to drop my child off at his grandparents’ and they take him before they go to work. Some days they must pick him up, too, because the center is closing, or school is getting out early before I can get off work and get him.” - Community Member

## 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>
Create an outreach and engagement strategy to increase awareness of licensing process for home-based providers through the Child Care Resource & Referral Agency (CCR&R) by September 2024.	Collaborate with the CCR&R to utilize available resources and establish a strategy to provide accessible information to those who seek to increase slots in our Region through home-based providers.	When a structured plan is in place, and we are seeing engagement from the community.
Identify and create a comprehensive list of local resources that can help in obtaining Department of Children & Family Services (DCFS) licensing requirements by September 2024.	Compile a list of comprehensive standards that DCFS uses in licensing. Research, identify, and create a list of resources entities can utilize in obtaining licensing.	A comprehensive list of resources will be available for those interested in obtaining licensing.
Collaborate with Chambers of Commerce and Economic Development in each town to increase awareness and provide support with data and information for adding slots in our Region through funding and grants in FY25.	Collaborate with Chambers of Commerce and Economic Development offices to provide potential funding sources such as government grants, private foundations, corporate sponsorships, and individual donors that align with our objectives.	Host collaborative meetings providing information on potential funding sources and avenues that align with our objectives.
Research the Child Care Access Means Parents In School (CCAMPIS) program to determine if a campaign would be warranted to promote support at local higher education institutions by December 2024.	Research requirements and information about the CCAMPIS program and promote to higher education institutions that would qualify.	Information has been distributed to all institutions that qualify.
Utilize materials created by INCCRRA to promote CCAP	Collaborate with INCCRRA to utilize their campaign materials for our Region.	This will be an ongoing promotion where we are contributing

across our Region by October 2024.		materials and sharing social media posts.
Collaborate with ECEC partners to actively engage them and provide support for applying for ISBE block grants and the writing of these grants by the end of FY25.	Engage ECEC providers through meetings, workshops, and town halls to establish collaborative efforts in applying for ISBE block grants to increase the number of slots.	The completion of an outreach campaign created to promote attendance at 4-6 town halls and workshops. Hosting these outreach sessions with active participation of ECEC providers in our Region.

## Risks, Barriers & Solutions

<b>Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation</b>	<b>Proposed Solutions to Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation</b>
Funding options available or grant requirements for inclusive slots.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore funding across all sectors so alternative financing options are identified.</li> </ul>
Data distortion for having the actual data for number of slots in the Region and number of children using more than one slot.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide the ability for feedback that allows for reporting of data inconsistencies or errors.</li> </ul>
Insufficient participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include authentic engagement objectives as part of the campaign to bring in potential participants.</li> </ul>
Program models that are not adaptable or inclusive to support our goal.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with program models to stay within compliance and still provide for all families.</li> <li>• Look at blending and braiding grants to meet the needs of all children.</li> <li>• Direct those not qualified or finding themselves in need of additional training to the professional development resource list.</li> </ul>
The time and requirements needed to apply for grants.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborate for grant writing information.</li> </ul>
The staffing crisis is a barrier to opening more slots.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adding more slots enables more people to enter the workforce.</li> <li>• Support those interested in child care or preschool with training opportunities</li> </ul>
Facilities available to open new programs or expand slots in current programs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communities work together to identify open buildings.</li> <li>• Collaborate with licensed home-based providers to support more slots with grant opportunities.</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 identified the following entities who should be engaged further to help support the SMART goals and/or recommendation.

- Child Care Resource & Referral Agency (CCR&R)
- Illinois Department of Children & Family Services (DCFS)
- Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS)
- Illinois Network of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies (INCCRRA)
- Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE)

Additionally, Council members identified elected officials to help with disseminating information, identifying potential funding sources, and collaborating by attending functions to promote the creation of the website and support the implementation of recommendations and goals from this Action Plan.

## **Possible Funding Sources**

Council members identified multiple potential sources of funding that might help support the implementation of the recommendation:

- Basics Illinois Network
- Birth to Five Illinois Collaboration and Implementation Grants
- Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS)
- Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO)
- Illinois Head Start Association
- Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) Early Childhood Block Grant
- Local municipalities
- Maternal Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program (MIECHV)

## **Community**

There are several groups in the Region currently working on this recommendation. In conversations with community partners, one lesson they learned was deemed especially important: to be successful, there must be community-wide support that involves partners from local Chambers of Commerce and Economic Development boards, agencies, and organizations. By implementing this recommendation, Council members believe every child in the Region will have ECEC that supports their needs in a quality environment.

## **Recommendation Implementation**

Council members predict the following will happen if the recommendation is fully implemented:

- Enhanced cognitive, social, and emotional development in children due to exposure to high-quality learning environments.



- Improved school readiness and increased likelihood of future academic success for children who participate in programs.
- Increased community engagement and empowerment as caregivers are given more opportunities to be active participants in their children's education.
- Long-term economic and social benefits for the community, including a potentially more skilled and engaged workforce.
- Mitigation of educational disparities, contributing to more equitable opportunities for all children.
- More children birth to age five will have access to high-quality ECEC programs.

## 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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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 (INCCRA).

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