

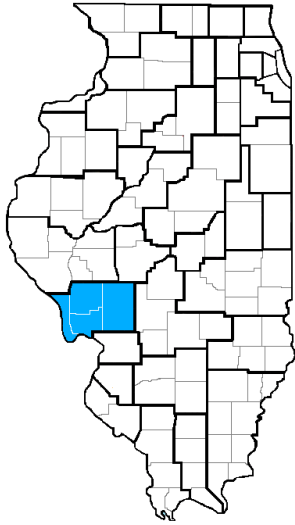
ACTION PLAN



Region 40

Calhoun, Greene, Jersey & Macoupin Counties

Regional Council Manager: Keppen Clanton (she/her)
Email: kclanton@birthtofiveil.com
Phone Number: (309) 240-6425
Regional Website: www.birthtofiveil.com/region40



Family Council

Abby King
Ashton Peacock
Brittany Peters
Jena Walden
Jessica Goode
Kaitlin Heinz

Kassie McEvers
Kelly Ballard
Kelsey Deaton
Stormy Sanders
Tracy Fox-Clarkson

Action Council

Amber Nash
Amy Hess
Cindy Rice
Jennifer Lubrant
Kelsey Arnold
Kristina Stanley
Laura Sams
Lisa Goode

Lisa Kallal
Marcia Schulte
Marla Willard
Molly Peters
Regina Lindsay
Sarah Schmidt

Table of Contents

Action Plan Development	4
How this Document is Designed	4
Region 40	5
Recommendation 1.....	6
Recommendation 2.....	9
Next Steps.....	12

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, which was 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 40 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:

- Greene County Health Department for identifying the need for collaboration and reaching out to learn more about our Region’s needs.
- Marla Willard from the West Central Child Care (CCR&R) for sharing her expertise about the Region’s child care centers and family child care providers.
- Region 40 Preschool For All, Prevention Initiative, and Head Start programs, child care centers, colleges and universities, local businesses, and caregivers for being willing to put this plan into action.

It is our hope that this Action Plan will increase awareness of local ECEC programs, improve the experiences of professionals in the field, and increase retention of qualified ECEC staff. 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 40 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.

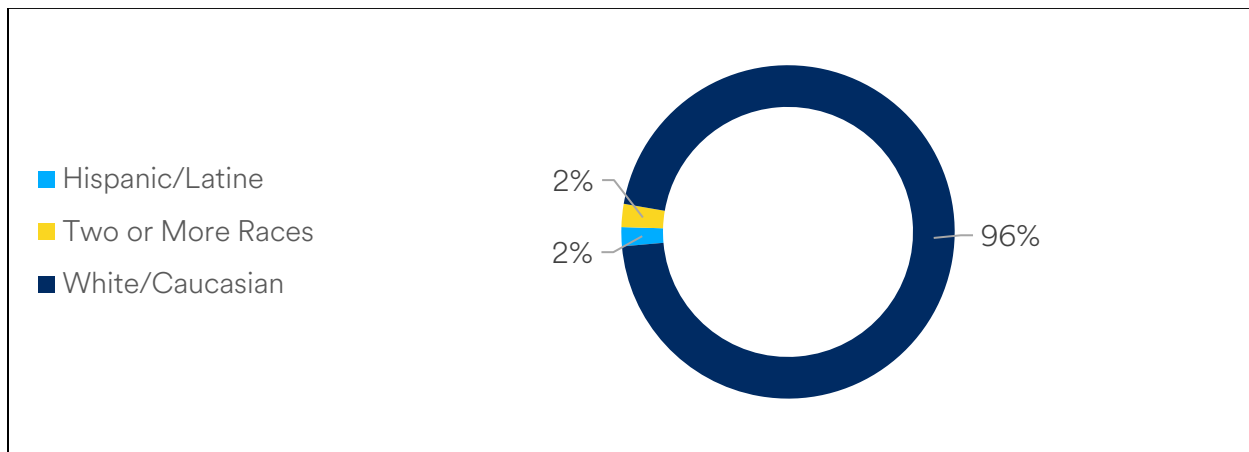
² See <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/nc-smart-goals-fact-sheet.pdf> for more information.

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 40

Region 40 is located in west-central Illinois and includes the counties of Calhoun, Greene, Jersey, and Macoupin. In 2022, the total population of the Region was 85,366; 4,769 were children birth through age five. While the majority of the children aged four and under in the Region are identified as white, the number of people who self-identify as Black or African American and Two or More Races in Macoupin and Jersey Counties has increased since 2017 (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Percentage of Children Aged Four and Under by Race/Ethnicity³



Source: IECAM
Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

Across the Region, there are 2,259 slots in publicly funded, licensed, and license-exempt child care centers and homes for children birth through age five (Table 1). Currently, Region 40 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: Black or African American, 7 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	0	0
Head Start	Ages Three to Five	7	191
Preschool for All	Ages Three and Four	17	1,000
Preschool for All Expansion	Ages Three and Four	2	60
Licensed Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	7	610
Licensed Family Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	36	338
License-Exempt Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	2	60

Source: IECAM

Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

For additional data and information, please access Region 40's Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment at: www.birthtofiveil.com/region40/#report.

Recommendation 1



Develop community-level Collaborations to enhance awareness of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) service offerings for children and families.

This recommendation is based on feedback from families, community partners, and businesses who reported they were unfamiliar with local ECEC programs and how to navigate them, the impact of ECEC programs on the local economy, and the need for ECEC workforce encompassing educators and health care. The development of an ECEC Collaboration will enhance the awareness of program and service offerings for children and families in our 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>Increase the number of Birth to Five Illinois community partners by 10% and provide them with knowledge and opportunities about current Region 40 ECEC programs by the end of FY25.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine the baseline number of community partners by May 2024 by generating a list of agencies, businesses, and stakeholders. • Gather information about programs, services, and locations. • Identify what information needs to be shared. • Identify who needs information. • Each community stakeholder involved in supporting this SMART goal should reach out to new contacts to share ECEC opportunities and current services via email, phone, and social media. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The number of subscribers to Birth to Five Illinois: Region 40 newsletter has increased between January 2024 and January 2025. • Each person involved in supporting this SMART goal reports contact with at least three new individuals, agencies, and/or businesses. • The number of social media engagements increases from five times per month to 10 times per month between January 2024 and January 2025.
<p>Identify community partners across the Region for the development and promotion of a Local Early Childhood Community Collaboration by December 2024.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build a list of community partners who have an interest in collaborating. • Contact community partners to share information about the Local Early Childhood Community Collaboration. • Connect partners and agencies who are interested or able to provide resources to a Collaboration. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When a Local Early Childhood Community Collaboration has been established.

Risks & Barriers

Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation	Proposed Solutions to Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation
Ability to reach all families, including those who are unhoused and do not have access to transportation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Look for places where families gather to place information.
Lack of access to technology.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use a variety of “outreach” tools including those that are not tied to technology.
Lack of response from professionals within and outside of ECEC.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Share success stories with those professionals to encourage engagement.

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 Children and Family Services (DCFS), Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), County Health Departments, and members of the local judiciary be engaged in conversations about what programs and services they offer, as well as the types of outreach they provide.

Possible Funding Sources

Council members discussed the need to apply for Birth to Five Illinois Planning and/or Implementation Grants to support the work related to this recommendation.

Community

Council members noted that there are no community groups currently working on similar goals and recommendations.

Recommendation Implementation

Council members said they will know the recommendation is fully implemented when a Local Early Childhood Community Collaboration has been established and at least two communication types are being utilized between ECEC providers and caregivers throughout Region 40. They also predict that by fully implementing the recommendation, there will be an increase in family engagement and the number of children enrolled in ECEC programming in the Region.

Recommendation 2



Form a way to attract, prepare, and retain public and private sector licensed and unlicensed Early Childhood Educators, Early Intervention Specialists, Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Consultants (I/ECMHCs), and counselors.

This recommendation was made based on feedback from caregivers, who reported that their children were put on education, healthcare, and Early Intervention waitlists due to lack of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) workforce in all three areas. During interviews and focus groups, community members reported that salaries for ECEC professionals is low and inequitable, and accessibility to ECEC services is limited due to barriers such as lack of transportation, family and/or child eligibility, and the recruitment and retention of qualified staff.

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>To assist interested center- or home-based or new providers by December 2024, Birth to Five Illinois: Region 40 staff and Council members will connect with at least one state and/or local agency to build region-wide relationships for guidance on the licensure process.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify local and state agencies regarding the types of ECEC programs and licenses required. • Identify services provided by agencies and set up a time to meet. • By December 2024, connect with three community members in the Region who are interested in becoming licensed child care providers and invite them to meet with state and local agencies. • Using social media, share opportunities to meet with state and local agencies to learn more about the licensing process. • Check in with potential providers to see where they are in the process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When new potential partners are identified. • When new partners have met at least three times. • When a handbook that includes contacts, steps, and a progress checklist has been developed. • When new interested partners have been connected with licensed professionals.

<p>By December 2024, build one new partnership with higher education programs to bring awareness to current ECEC certification programs and funding options.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify local ECEC certification higher education programs. • Identify funding options. • Share information by developing a one-pager of programs offered, scholarships available, contacts, etc. with at least three new people. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When a new partner in higher education will have been identified. • When we have met with the higher education partner at least three times. • When a one-pager that identifies established programs, the application process, and funding options will be developed.
<p>By December 2024, build a child care forum to connect child care center directors and staff to support each other.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact the Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) Agency about current child care programs. • Create a list of child care directors and staff, with contact information. • Identify who will lead, as well as the first meeting topics, for the “Child Care Connections Roundtable” quarterly meeting. • Send out invitations via email and social media. • Set quarterly meeting location, dates, and times and share information via social media and email. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When a communication system for Region-wide child care providers is developed.

Risks & Barriers

Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation	Proposed Solutions to Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation
<p>Not all ECEC professions may be able to attend sessions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer forum meetings virtually and in-person. • Offer meetings at two different times, one during the day, and the other during evenings or weekends.

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:

- Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) Agency: Ask for the number of certified child care centers and for them to disseminate information via social media and newsletters.
- County Health Departments: Ask for I-Plan data, to disseminate information via social media, and to support community meetings.
- Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS): Ask for the number of families using care, the number of current child care centers and family child care homes, and for help supporting interagency community meetings.
- Workforce Center: Help with advertising open ECEC positions.

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 the Greene County Health Department, West Central Child Care CCR&R, and Blackburn College are currently working on similar goals and recommendations. Community members shared it is difficult to cultivate a profession where Early Childhood Educators are not compensated an equitable amount in comparison to public educators. Additionally, they shared that some DCFS licensing staff are not as strict as others when assessing programs, which can create barriers for some child care providers and licensed centers trying to retain staff.

Recommendation Implementation

Council members said they will know the recommendation is fully implemented when the number of filled child care slots increases due to the increase in staffing, allowing more children to attend child care programs. They also predict that by fully implementing the recommendation, there will be an increase in communication among child care providers, school districts, and higher educator programs across the Region.

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).

Photo Credit: Cover: Anastasia Shuraeva on Pexels, page 6: kate_sept2004 from Getty Images Signature via Canva Pro, page 9: FatCamera from Getty Images Signature via Canva Pro, page 12: yohoprashant from Pixabay via Canva Pro.