

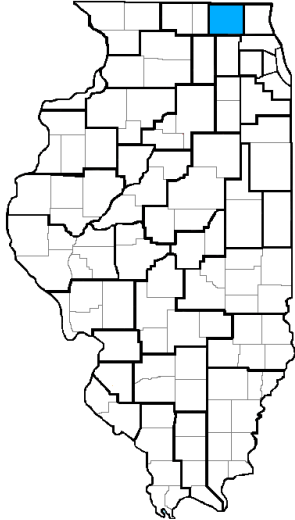
ACTION PLAN



Region 44

McHenry County

Regional Council Manager: Nicole Bach (she/her/ella)
Email: nbach@birthtofiveil.com
Phone Number: (309) 270-5607
Regional Website: www.birthtofiveil.com/region44



Family Council

Amanda Pett
Aurora Scarpaci
Cali Rudd
Thalia Garcia

Action Council

Donna Emmons
Elena Galarza
Elyse Sereyka
Jamee Potash
Jenna Cashman
Kim Lamz
Shelley Kinney
Susan Beckman

Table of Contents

Letter from Family & Action Council Members	3
Action Plan Development	4
How this Document is Designed	4
Region 44	5
Recommendation 1.....	6
Recommendation 2.....	8
Recommendation 3.....	11
Next Steps	13

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 44 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:

- Amber Peters, Elgin Partnership for Early Learning (EPEL)
- Kim Peterson, Kane County Department of Health
- Jennifer Rowzee, Service INC.

It is our hope that the Action Plan will increase the understanding of the importance of ECEC within our Region, build the ECEC field, and provide support for ECEC professionals. 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 44 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.

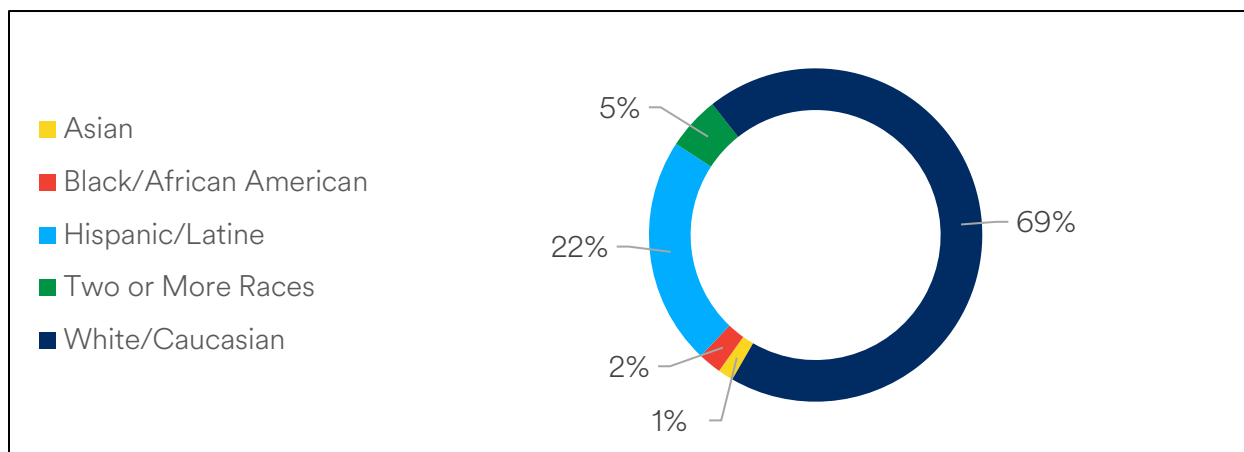
² See <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/nc-smart-goals-fact-sheet.pdf> for more information.

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 44

Region 44 is located in north-central Illinois and includes McHenry County. In 2022, the total population of the Region was 282,248; 17,928 were children birth through age five. While most children age four and under in the Region are identified as white, there are significant and growing numbers of children who are identified as Hispanic/Latine, Two or More Races, Black/African American, and Asian in the Region as well (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 7,040 slots in publicly funded, licensed, and license-exempt child care centers and homes for children birth through age five (Table 1). Currently, Region 44 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: Other, 38 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	3	267
Preschool for All	Ages Three and Four	9	1,010
Preschool for All Expansion	Ages Three and Four	1	30
Licensed Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	44	4,664
Licensed Family Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	61	636
License-Exempt Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	8	433

Source: IECAM

Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

For additional data and information, please access Region 44’s Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment at: www.birthtofiveil.com/region44/#report.

Recommendation 1



Provide ongoing education on the importance of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) programs.

This recommendation was based on feedback from caregivers, providers, Council members, and community members that there is a lack of awareness of what ECEC programs and services entail and where they are located.

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?
Between January 2024 and December 2025 collaborate with 25 community partners to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a resource list for the flyer. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When flyers have been created and distributed to 25 community partners.

<p>educate families, caregivers, businesses, and the community at-large on the importance of ECEC programs and services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gather data, including the benefits of attending an ECEC program and data on children in Early Intervention (EI), how many children do need services later because they attended EI, etc. • Create two flyers: one for families and one for businesses/community. • Create a list of 25 community partners where we want the flyers distributed to hit all audiences. • Distribute flyers at events, put them in waiting rooms, and post them at agencies. • Put flyers on social media. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When a flyer has been posted to social media at least once.
--	--	---

Risks & Barriers

Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation	Proposed Solutions to Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation
Translating materials into Spanish.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use Council member contacts to support translation of materials into Spanish.
Finding funds or partners willing to print materials.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect with organizations to see who has funding for, or can support printing, mailing, and/or mileage if dropped off in-person.
Materials not being shared.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Send follow-up reminders to community partners who agree to distribute materials.

Additional Engagement with State Organizations, Agencies & Individuals

Council members and Regional staff identified additional community organizations, agencies, and individuals and what role they might need to play in implementing the Action Plan SMART goals and/or recommendation. Local organizations, agencies, and individuals are still being contacted and their specific role is being defined at this time, so they have not been listed as a part of the Action Plan.

Possible Funding Sources

While funding may be needed to support translation and interpretation services, the development of tools and resources, the development and distribution of marketing materials, and other activities related to the recommendation, the Council members did not identify additional possible funding sources at this time.

Community

Council members did not identify other community groups who have been, and are currently, working on similar goals and recommendations.

Recommendation Implementation

Council members said they will know the recommendation is fully implemented when materials have been made available to community members, materials have been shared throughout the Region, and feedback on the process has been collected from community partners.

They also predict that by fully implementing the recommendation there will be more community members advocating for ECEC, increased community awareness of EI, home visiting, and ECEC programs, more people interested in working in the Early Childhood field, and more respect for those working in the ECEC field.

Recommendation 2



Create an information hub and/or Integrated Referral and Intake System (IRIS) to connect families to their specific Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) needs in the Region.

This recommendation was created based on feedback from parents and caregivers who said they were unsure of the process for children who have suspected developmental delays. Many said they did online research across multiple websites to find the information they needed to begin

finding support, only to find barriers to services such as waitlists, being out of network with their insurance, and services being unavailable due to the age of their child.

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>Between January 2024 and December 2024 educate community partners on the importance of developing a website portal and the need for Integrated Referral and Intake System (IRIS).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write a detailed plan on the importance of having a website portal and IRIS within our Region. • Create a list of agencies and organizations to have targeted conversations with about a hub and/or IRIS. • Research funding and grants that could help support this work. • Host meetings with the organizations/agencies to discuss the importance of this service. • Follow-up with community partners about possibly developing a hub and/or IRIS. • Create a community group for both the website portal and IRIS for those interested. • Contact guest speakers (Elgin Partnership for Early Learning (EPEL) for website portal and Kane County Mental Health Board for IRIS) to speak at community groups. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When the detailed plan is written. • When meetings with community partners have concluded.

Risks & Barriers

Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation	Proposed Solutions to Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation
Lack of funding to support the development and maintenance of hub and/or IRIS.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Look for funding/grants that could help and provide information to those interested in supporting the hub and/or IRIS.
No community partner willing to take the lead on developing or supporting a hub and/or IRIS.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to educate community partners on the importance of a digital resource for parents and caregivers.

Additional Engagement with State Organizations, Agencies & Individuals

Council members and Regional staff identified additional community organizations, agencies, and individuals and what role they might need to play in implementing the Action Plan SMART goals and/or recommendation. Local organizations, agencies, and individuals are still being contacted and their specific role is being defined at this time, so they have not been listed as a part of the Action Plan.

Possible Funding Sources

The Council members identified the following additional possible funding sources to support this recommendation: Birth to Five Illinois Implementation Grant, Community Foundation, IRIS, and the United Way.

Community

Council members identified community groups who have been, and are currently, working on similar goals and recommendations: People in Need Forum, Shared Paper Referral System (which includes the local Child Care Resource & Referral Agency (CCR&R), Options and Advocacy, McHenry County Health Department and Women, Infant, Children (WIC)), and the United Way.

These community partners shared that funding for the development and maintenance of a digital platform can be difficult to obtain, but the website and work involved to maintain it is important for parents, caregivers, and providers in the community.

Recommendation Implementation

Council members said they will know the recommendation is fully implemented when community agencies and organizations understand the importance of an information hub and/or IRIS system and are supportive of at least one, there is at least one agency or organization willing to take the lead on developing or supporting a digital resource, and there is a list of funding options to help develop and maintain the digital resource.

They also predict that by fully implementing the recommendation there will be “no wrong door” for families to access the ECEC services they need, agencies will be more connected and able to collaborate, and the Region will have better data on referrals made through the IRIS system.

Recommendation 3



Work to increase services for children within Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) classrooms who require extra support due to developmental delays and/or challenging behavior.

This recommendation was made based on feedback from ECEC professionals and Council members who reported that they are being asked to provide support to more children with developmental delays, behavior challenges, and specialized needs without additional support or training. Additionally, no child care program in the Region specializes in working with children who have disabilities, leaving parents with no choice but to send them to programs where staff have not been properly trained to support their individualized needs.

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?
By the end of FY25, determine which community organizations could help support ECEC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Survey child care programs in the Region to understand staff training/support needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When a list of services has been developed.

<p>providers who have children in their care with developmental or behavioral challenges.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct interviews with child care directors, teachers, and home-based providers to find out what their needs are, what they are seeing, what they are doing, and what support they want. • Gather information on the resources/services from public school programs. • Make a list of what services in the Region could meet the needs of child care staff/programs. • Speak with organizations on the list to see if they can offer additional support/training and what the criteria would be if they can. • Distribute the list to child care programs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When the resource list has been disseminated to child care programs.
---	---	--

Risks & Barriers

No risks or barriers were identified by Council members.

Additional Engagement with State Organizations, Agencies & Individuals

Council members and Regional staff identified additional community organizations, agencies, and individuals and what role they might need to play in implementing the Action Plan SMART goals and/or recommendation. Local organizations, agencies, and individuals are still being contacted and their specific role is being defined at this time, so they have not been listed as a part of the Action Plan.

Possible Funding Sources

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

Community

Council members identified community groups who have been and are currently working on similar goals and recommendations: Autism Resource Center (ARC), Illinois Crisis Prevention Support Service Teams (SSTs), Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Consultants (I/ECMHCs), Infant/Toddler Specialists at the CCR&R, and Service INC.

These organizations shared with members of our Councils and Regional Teams that there are no additional supports for ECEC professionals besides I/ECMHCs, and there is currently only one Consultant who works with child care programs in the Region, highlighting the critical need for expanded supports for those working in the field. Finding funding to hire the number of Consultants needed and provide trainings to support ECEC professionals has been difficult.

Recommendation Implementation

Council members said they will know the recommendation is fully implemented when there is a list of supports for child care providers that has been distributed to programs, and when there are trainings available for supporting children who have differential needs.

They also predicted that by fully implementing the recommendation there will be an increase in ECEC staff, improved employee satisfaction, more developmental screenings in child care programs, a decrease in the number of children suspended and expelled, and families will have an easier time connecting with child care programs that will enroll their child.

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: Hồng Xuân Viên on Pexels, page 6: kate_sept2004 from Getty Images Signature via Canva Pro, page 8: FatCamera from Getty Images Signature via Canva Pro, page 11: yohoprashant from Pixabay via Canva Pro, page 13e: enigma_images from Getty Images Signature via Canva Pro.