

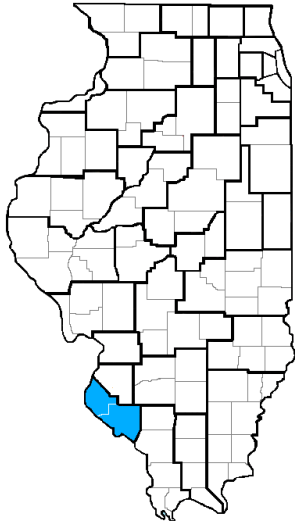
# ACTION PLAN



## **Region 45**

Monroe & Randolph 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 45 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 are thankful to our community members for their support.

It is our hope that this Action Plan will lead to better coordination of resources and efforts and reduce waitlists, ultimately benefiting ECEC across the Region. We also hope it will facilitate connections among caregivers, offering a platform for the exchange of resources and stories. Finally, we hope implementing the recommendations in our Action Plan will expand the community for children of similar ages and abilities, creating avenues to address regional service gaps through mentorship, knowledge sharing, and the exploration of potential new funding sources.

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 45 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.

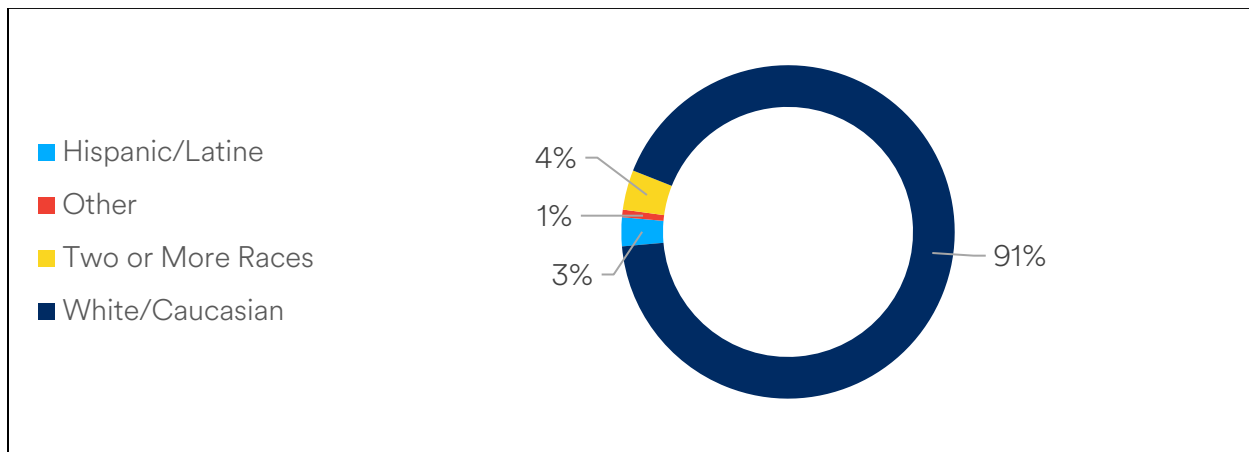
<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/nc-smart-goals-fact-sheet.pdf> for more information.

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 45

Region 45 is located in southwestern Illinois and includes the counties of Monroe and Randolph. In 2022, the total population of the Region was 85,366; 4,098 were children birth through age five. While most of the children ages four and under in the Region are identified as white, the racial and ethnic diversity of the children in the Region has increased, mostly in Randolph County (Figure 1).

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 2,114 slots in publicly funded, licensed, and license-exempt child care centers and homes for children birth through age five (Table 1). Currently, Region 45 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: Asian, 9 people; Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, 2 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	5	159
Preschool for All	Ages Three and Four	3	158
Preschool for All Expansion	Ages Three and Four	0	0
Licensed Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	17	1,628
Licensed Family Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	6	65
License-Exempt Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	2	104

Source: IECAM

Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

For additional data and information, please access Region 45's Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment at: [www.birthtofiveil.com/region45/#report](http://www.birthtofiveil.com/region45/#report).

## Recommendation 1



**Work to secure enough funding to expand existing programs, such as Home Visiting and Prevention Initiative, and establish new ones that cater to children aged three to five.**

The recommendation was made based on feedback from families and providers during the Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment process. This proactive approach ensures early identification of developmental challenges, provides comprehensive care, education, and support for children of all early ages, and helps communities build the capacity to capture available state dollars while enabling prompt and targeted intervention for children beyond age three.

## 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 Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) programs, categorizing them by county and city, and specify the number of available slots and program types to identify potential gaps in services for children ages three to five during FY25.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research, gather data, and document information on ECEC programs in all counties and cities within the target area, including the number of available slots and program types.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When a comprehensive list is developed and analyzed for each county and city with data on available spots for children from ages three to five.</li> </ul>
<p>Bring together community partners to identify and assess children between the ages of three and five in our community who may need services or support within three months of step one (above).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Birth to Five Illinois: Region 45 Team and Council members will collaborate with local schools, community centers, and healthcare providers to effectively reach and support the assessment of the identified children.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When comprehensive assessments, screenings, surveys, and outreach activities reach at least 20% of the target age group within the community.</li> </ul>
<p>Identify and document key stakeholders, partnerships, and resources, including potential funders, community leaders, and Early Childhood experts, who have a vested interest in, or can contribute to and benefit from, new or expanded programs during FY25.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Utilize existing networks, collaborate with programs, and employ outreach strategies to effectively identify and engage with key stakeholders and resources.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When a comprehensive stakeholder, partnerships, and resource document has been created after conducting research and outreach that identifies at least three relevant individuals or organizations</li> </ul>
<p>Identify potential funding sources such as government grants, private foundations, corporate sponsorships, and individual donors that are aligned with Home Visiting and Prevention Initiative programs that serve children beyond age three during FY25.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Utilize available resources, including those from the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS)/the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), and employ research tools to identify compatible funding sources effectively.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When data on at least two potential funding sources has been documented, ensuring they align with our objectives.</li> </ul>
<p>Create a structured plan to actively engage ECEC experts and caregivers, potentially through</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Utilizing existing networks and resources, collaborate with experts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When at least four engagement sessions have been conducted and the active</li> </ul>

workshops, town halls, or webinars during FY25.	in the field, and establish communication channels to effectively engage caregivers and ECEC experts.	participation of caregivers and ECEC providers in our community measures success.
Create a comprehensive outreach and engagement strategy within one year of the start date, designed to enhance awareness of funding opportunities and gather the necessary support for expanding existing programs and introducing new ones for children aged three to five while concurrently providing ongoing support for caregivers of children not currently benefiting from these services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Utilize available resources, collaborate with experts in outreach and fundraising, and leverage technology and communication tools to implement the strategy effectively.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>When a comprehensive strategy document that outlines specific outreach activities, funding sources, and caregiver support initiatives, with clear objectives, metrics, and targets for program expansion, funding acquisition, and caregiver support is created.</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>
Data reception issues and data distortion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement a feedback loop that allows for reporting and resolving data reception problems.</li> </ul>
Stringent program model requirements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review and modify program models to make them more adaptable and inclusive.</li> <li>Find available training and resources to help participants meet the requirements, if feasible.</li> <li>Consider offering alternative pathways or tiers within the program to accommodate a broader range of participants.</li> </ul>
Challenges related to funding options and grant requirements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Diversify funding sources by exploring public and private sector partnerships or alternative financing methods.</li> <li>Collaborate with other grantors.</li> </ul>
Insufficient participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase outreach efforts to engage potential participants through targeted marketing and community involvement.</li> <li>Incentivize participation with rewards or recognition for active involvement.</li> <li>Simplify the registration and participation process to reduce barriers.</li> </ul>
Identifying suitable service providers may be daunting, as there is a limited pool of professionals in the area, and securing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage professionals from neighboring areas to participate or collaborate remotely.</li> </ul>



funding to compensate them further narrows the available options.

- Develop partnerships with academic institutions to access students and professors with relevant expertise.
- Leverage technology for virtual consultations and services, allowing access to a broader pool of providers regardless of geographical constraints.

## **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 identify funding opportunities, support collaboration, and/or provide services and data:

- Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) Agency
- ComWell
- County Health Departments
- Elected Officials
- Head Start
- Illinois Coordinated Intake
- Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS)
- Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE)
- Regional Office of Education #45
- Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)

## **Possible Funding Sources**

Council members identified the following potential funding sources: Early Childhood Collaborations, local municipalities, and the Illinois Head Start Association.

## **Community**

Council members identified community groups who have been and are currently working on similar goals and recommendations:

- Early Head Start
- Family Connects
- Healthy Families Illinois
- Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY)

- Nurse-Family Partnership
- Parents as Teachers

While collaboration and communication has been established with these community groups, no clear lessons learned about their initiatives have yet been conveyed to Council members or Regional staff.

## Recommendation Implementation

Council members said they will know the recommendation is fully implemented when they can assess the level of awareness, support garnered from key stakeholders, program enrollment rates, and the positive impact on children and caregivers. Council members anticipate regularly reviewing and adapting the strategy based on the evolving needs and challenges encountered during the implementation process.

Council members also predict that by fully implementing the recommendation:

- More children aged three to five will have access to quality ECEC programs.
- Children's cognitive, social, and emotional development will be enhanced due to exposure to structured learning environments.
- There will be increased community engagement and empowerment as caregivers participate actively in their children's education.
- Educational disparities will be mitigated, contributing to more equitable opportunities for all children, regardless of socio-economic background.
- School readiness will be improved, increasing the likelihood of future academic success for children participating in programs.
- There will be long-term economic and social benefits for the community, including a potentially more skilled and engaged workforce.

## Recommendation 2



Create a centralized platform that fosters connectivity and seamless information sharing among Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) providers, resulting in enhanced coordination and communication among professionals.

This recommendation is rooted in feedback from Council and community members who reported that it was difficult to find information about ECEC services, and from providers who expressed a desire for a referral system to support families.

## 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>Establish a specialized ECEC Council tailored to the unique needs of Monroe and Randolph Counties by the end of FY25.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• During FY25, compile a comprehensive list that captures diverse perspectives, ensuring a well-rounded representation of insights and experiences.</li> <li>• Develop a meeting cadence within the next three months and implement a platform to facilitate collaboration with ECEC Council members.</li> <li>• Develop objectives within three months of step two (above), that revolve around comprehensive information sharing, facilitating referrals, implementing joint screening initiatives, advancing professional development opportunities, and delivering inclusive educational training.</li> <li>• Over the 12 months of FY25, identify and evaluate grant opportunities that align with the objectives of the ECEC Council.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When the list includes perspectives from caregivers and stakeholders representing diverse backgrounds and roles directly impacting the well-being of children in the Region.</li> <li>• When there is a platform that enables real-time updates on best practices, research findings, and relevant resources, enhancing the collective knowledge base.</li> <li>• Once feedback is gathered from stakeholders, team members, and relevant parties involved in implementing the objectives; positive feedback, successful outcomes, and alignment with expectations are indicators of progress toward goal achievement.</li> <li>• When each identified grant opportunity is evaluated to ensure alignment with the specific objectives of the ECEC Council; the goal is achieved when many identified grants directly support or complement the ECEC Council's mission.</li> </ul>

## Risks & Barriers

Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation	Proposed Solutions to Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation
Finding suitable meeting times.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement flexible scheduling tools or apps that allow team members to input their availability, making it easier to find common meeting times and rotate meeting times.</li> </ul>
Lack of open communication channels.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish multiple communication platforms that encourage real-time collaboration.</li> </ul>
Irregular participation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clearly communicate the importance of consistent attendance and offer flexibility when possible, allowing team members to catch up on missed discussions or tasks.</li> </ul>
Lack of trust.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop team-building activities to strengthen relationships among team members.</li> <li>Offer follow-up surveys to receive feedback.</li> </ul>
Limited funding opportunities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explore alternative funding sources, such as grants, partnerships, or sponsorships.</li> </ul>
Lack of buy-in from ECEC Council members.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clearly articulate the proposed initiatives' goals, benefits, and potential outcomes.</li> <li>Conduct open houses/events and pamphlets on the Council's benefits.</li> <li>Engage ECEC Council members early in the decision-making process to incorporate their input.</li> </ul>
Maintaining continuous engagement between meetings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement online collaboration tools to facilitate ongoing discussions and document sharing.</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 support collaboration and/or provide services and data:

- Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) Agency
- ComWell
- Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS)
- Illinois Early Childhood Coalitions
- Integrated Referral & Intake System (IRIS)
- Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE)

## Possible Funding Sources

Council members identified that local fundraisers and collaborations, ISBE, IDHS, IRIS, and Birth to Five Illinois should be engaged to discuss potential funding opportunities to support this recommendation.

## Community

Council members identified that the Early Learning Partnership in East St. Louis is currently working on similar goals and recommendations. In discussions with community members, they noted key lessons from working on similar goals and recommendations:

- Support and completion of the work really depends on the capacity of the members engaged, and the ability to pay some staff for the work being done.
- Those engaged in the work should examine their policies and procedures to ensure families are able to access information and services more easily.
- Families must be centered in the work so their needs can be fully met.
- There should be a physical space dedicated for operations.
- Finding a fiscal sponsor can take time.

## Recommendation Implementation

Council members said they will know the recommendation is fully implemented when the ECEC Council has been officially formed and there are mechanisms in place to monitor the initiatives of the collaborative and evaluate participation of stakeholders.

They also predict that by fully implementing the recommendation:

- Collaboration will be enhanced among various stakeholders, including caregivers, educators, community leaders, and organizations.
- Resources will be better coordinated, reducing waistline and, ultimately benefiting ECEC.
- Community awareness regarding the significance of ECEC will increase, fostering greater community engagement and support for initiatives to improve young children's well-being.
- Having a support network for parents and caregivers will reduce stigmas and promote greater unification.
- There will be more connections among caregivers via a platform for the exchange of resources and stories.
- There will be potential to expand the community for children of similar ages and abilities, creating avenues to address Regional service gaps through mentorship, knowledge sharing, and the exploration of potential new funding sources.

# 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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