

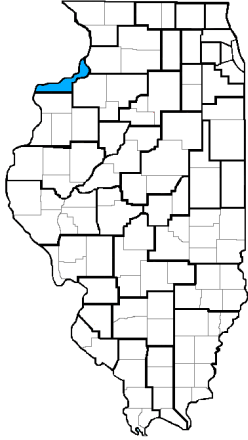
ACTION PLAN



Region 49

Rock Island County

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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 49	5
Recommendation 1.....	6
Recommendation 2.....	9
Recommendation 3.....	11
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 49 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:

- Quad Cities Open Network
- Rock Island County All Our Kids (AOK) Network
- The Early Childhood Coalition
- United Way Quad Cities

Our hope is that through our Action Plan that we can streamline and improve access to services for children and families and optimize our Early Childhood workforce by honoring ECEC educators for their dedication and innovation to the field here in Rock Island County.

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 49 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.

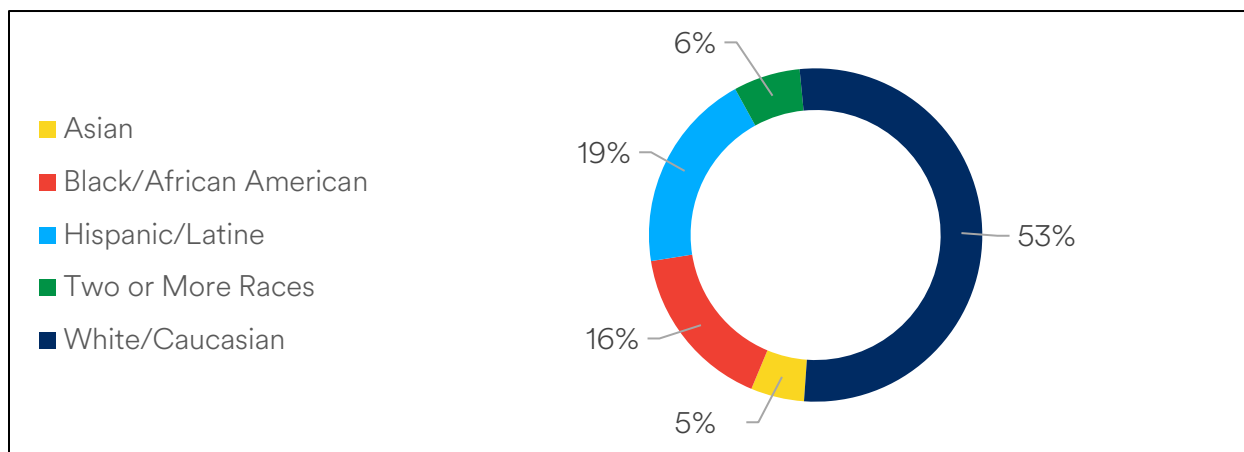
² See <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/nc-smart-goals-fact-sheet.pdf> for more information.

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 49

Region 49 is located in east-central Illinois and includes Rock Island County. In 2022, the total population of the Region was 149,957; 10,415 were children birth through age five. While most of the children in the Region age four and under are identified as white, there are significant and growing numbers of children who are identified as Hispanic/Latine, Black/African American, Two or More Races, and Asian (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 5,784 slots in publicly funded, licensed, and license-exempt child care centers and homes for children birth through age five. Currently, Region 49 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: American Indian and Alaska Native, 13 people; Other, 12 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	5	144
Head Start	Ages Three to Five	15	510
Preschool for All	Ages Three and Four	24	1,288
Preschool for All Expansion	Ages Three and Four	4	100
Licensed Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	30	2,411
Licensed Family Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	115	1,093
License-Exempt Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	4	238

Source: IECAM

Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

For additional data and information, please access Region 49's Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment at: www.birthtofiveil.com/region49/#report.

Recommendation 1



Optimize the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) workforce.

This recommendation was made based on data and feedback from ECEC professionals across the Region who have not been able to recruit and retain qualified teachers due to low pay, lack of benefits, and little support. These challenges have led to classrooms closing due to a lack of Early Childhood Educators, leading to long waitlists and few options for families.

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?
Launch a community recognition award program for Early Childhood teachers,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a detailed plan outlining the name of the award, award criteria, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A detailed plan has been written.

<p>aiming to recognize six outstanding teachers by the end of December 2024.</p>	<p>nomination process, and selection committee.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reach out to potential sponsors and media partners to gauge interest and support. • Recruit a selection committee. • Secure sponsorship for the awards. • Plan an acknowledgement celebration. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a list of identified partners. • A committee has been formed. • Sponsorships have been established. • A celebration has occurred.
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Risks & Barriers

Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation	Proposed Solutions to Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation
<p>Funding for the Champion of Early Childhood Educator Award trophy and gift.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborate with community partners for suggestions and connections to those who can support funding. • Solicit in-kind donations.
<p>Feelings of duplication amidst other recognition programs like Quad Cities 40 Under 40 and Teacher of the Month.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educate community members on the objective: to raise the status of ECEC professionals in the community.
<p>Sustaining interest in nominating teachers for the Champion of Early Childhood Education Award.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure applications can rollover. • Market in a variety of different places both in person and online.
<p>Equitable distribution of information about nomination forms and award programming.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner with the local Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) Agency to distribute information about nominations and scholarships.
<p>Promoting the award Region-wide.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect with local newspapers and news stations, Mothers of Preschoolers (MOPS) blog, Living Local, Early Childhood Coalition website, and Facebook. • Connect with teachers for ideas on how to best share information amongst educators and ask them to share information with colleagues.
<p>Bias in who is selected for the Champion of Early Childhood Education Award.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the award and eligibility criteria have protections in place, such as reviewing nominations without the names of nominators or nominee to protect against potential bias.

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 the 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:

- Early Childhood Coalition (ECC)
- Golden Apple
- Regional Office of Education (ROE)
- United Way of the Quad Cities
- WQAD News 8

Some community partners offer a teacher of the month or community servant award, highlighting the award winner in their newsletter, on the radio, or in other public arenas. The ROE shared the Google Form they developed to serve as a template for the nomination form discussed in this recommendation.

Recommendation Implementation

Council members said they will know the recommendation is fully implemented when six Early Childhood Educators have been awarded the Champion of Early Childhood Education Award.

They also predict that by fully implementing the recommendation there will be more awareness of the ECEC field amongst community members and mindsets that Early Childhood Educators are not “professionals” will be changed. Council members believe implementing this recommendation will help programs recruit new professionals to the field, retain quality ECEC staff, and help build passion for working in the field. Additionally, they predict that it will help

families share in the recognition of Early Childhood professionals and encourage local elected officials to honor the work of those in the field and to advocate on their behalf.

Recommendation 2



Streamline service coordination.

This recommendation is based on feedback from caregivers and Council members, who expressed a need for a one-stop shop where families can access the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services they need. One parent who is a refugee said, “We need help in learning the language, going to school, and knowing how to pay our bills. We do not have any people explaining services to us. We cannot just call an office; they are not in our own language. If they do find us someone who speaks our language, they help us for a little bit, but then refer us to another place where the same thing happens all over.”

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?
Streamline service coordination by reengaging at least 15 organizations in the Integrated Referral and Intake System (IRIS) platform by the end of 2024.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Form working relationship with the IRIS Data Manager. • Identify relevant providers. • Hold open office hours weekly for provider troubleshooting and support. • Encourage provider attendance of regular collaborative meetings for IRIS users. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When at least 15 service providers will be onboarded or reengaged in IRIS utilization. • When data show an increase in referrals made and received per organization.

Risks & Barriers

Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation	Proposed Solutions to Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation
Onboarding organizations without organizations to refer clients to.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritize commonly referred to organizations/programs.
Utilizing IRIS adds another system into which service providers must upload information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IRIS may be used as a resource hub for those unable to accept referrals.
Resistance due to COVID-19 interruption in IRIS launch within the Region.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highlight ease of use of IRIS; utilize established IRIS users for testimony. • Provide troubleshooting sessions and supportive meetings.

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 that the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) should be engaged further to help support the SMART goals and/or recommendation by tying IRIS to contact deliverables.

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:

- All Our Kids (AOK) Network
- Quad Cities Open Network
- Rock Island County Police Departments

Some lessons regarding IRIS have been learned since the initial launch prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is important to have people who work in the ECEC field take the lead in working with community partners and championing the use of the system since they have frequent contact with providers. Additionally, referral services must be offered both virtually and on paper to ensure equitable access for all.

Recommendation Implementation

Council members said they will know the recommendation is fully implemented when there is a continuous flow of partners inputting information and referrals being made to community members.

They also predict that by fully implementing the recommendation families and caregivers will have their needs met more easily and they will have increased trust in the systems and organizations that serve them. Utilizing IRIS will prevent duplication of services; allow providers to use their money and resources better; will provide better data about what is most needed in the community; will allow for providers to prioritize service provision; and will give staff a new approach to case management.

Recommendation 3



Improve affordability and access to specialized care.

This recommendation is made based on feedback from caregivers that the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) system in the Region is not accessible to all who need or want care for their children, it is not easy to navigate, it is not affordable for families, and it lacks specialized and specific services to meet the needs of all children, families, and providers.

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 2024, implement a universal screening tool in conjunction with the Integrated Referral and Intake System (IRIS) platform within five medical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consult with existing local and regional agencies that currently utilize screeners based on the Social Determinants of Health (SDOH). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a list of categories and questions created. There is a collaborative working document. The IRIS platform has been updated to include screeners.

<p>provider sites, including pediatric and family health centers, to help families access available support to meet their basic needs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify SDOH categories and assessment questions needed to develop a screening tool adapted to fit local needs. • Compile local services and existing/potential partners (organizations and/or locations) by SDOH categories. • Update IRIS system capacity with existing partners in collaboration with Council members. • Begin developing a toolkit comprised of research, screening tools, recommended process, and best practices. • Develop procedures and process for the distribution and collection of screening tools, and how to upload those into the IRIS system. • Finalize, publish, and promote the toolkit. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) has been established with existing partners. • A collaborative working toolkit document has been created. • There is a draft of a collaborative working toolkit document with feedback collection. • A screening tool has been customized and developed and is being utilized across agencies. • There is a mechanism in place to track the number of agencies utilizing the screening tool.
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Risks & Barriers

Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation	Proposed Solutions to Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation
<p>Buy-in from community partners who may resist the idea of taking on additional work.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer training support. • Create a handout that shows how many dollars can be saved by families and the community by utilizing this system.
<p>Undocumented members of the community may feel uneasy providing documents for screenings or to access resources.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consult with other counties to understand how citizenship documentation is approached.
<p>Not everyone will have access to the screening tool due to language barriers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure information and the screening tool are offered in additional languages.
<p>Ensuring the tool is being used accurately and with fidelity.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a screening to service protocol that addresses procedures, best practices, etc. • Develop a protocol to ensure referrals are not dropped and the system is being used effectively.

Community members may feel there is limited transparency regarding the screening tool and referrals.

- Share information with community members and IRIS partners.

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:

- Quad City Open Network
- All Our Kids (AOK) Network of Rock Island County
- SAL Community Services - Open Door
- Davenport Public Library Social Worker

One of the biggest lessons these organizations shared with Council members and Regional staff is to ensure that ECEC organizations, agencies, and providers are leading IRIS so they can ensure the program is supporting their missions and the needs of the families they work with, and not impeding their work.

Recommendation Implementation

Council members said they will know this recommendation is fully implemented when the screening tool has been developed and is being utilized across agencies, and there is a mechanism in place to track utilization of the tool by agencies and organizations.

They also predict that by fully implementing the recommendation there will be enhanced collaboration and clearer communication amongst community partners, families will see streamlined access to supports and will be empowered to advocate for their needs, and by acting

as a proactive support versus a reactive response to families who are or may be on the brink of a crisis, crises will be prevented. Overall, implementing this recommendation should help raise awareness of the service and support available to families and help rebuild the trust many have lost in the Early Childhood system.

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.



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