

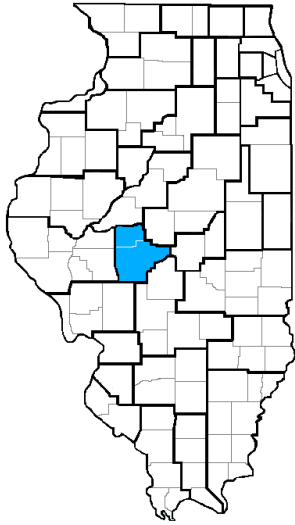
ACTION PLAN



Region 51

Menard & Sangamon 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 51 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:

- Sara Trine, United Way of Central Illinois, Office, and Finance Associate
- Scott Jones, United Way of Central Illinois, Director of Community Initiatives

It is our hope that this Action Plan will shine a light on the underutilized resources available in our community and urge all nonprofits to keep a robust and up-to-date listing of the services they offer via 211. Birth to Five Illinois: Region 51 wants to see the work we do increase the awareness of 211 both for families with young children and programs in Sangamon and Menard Counties so they, in turn, can encourage their friends and families to use 211 in times of need to ensure our families and children thrive.

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 51 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.

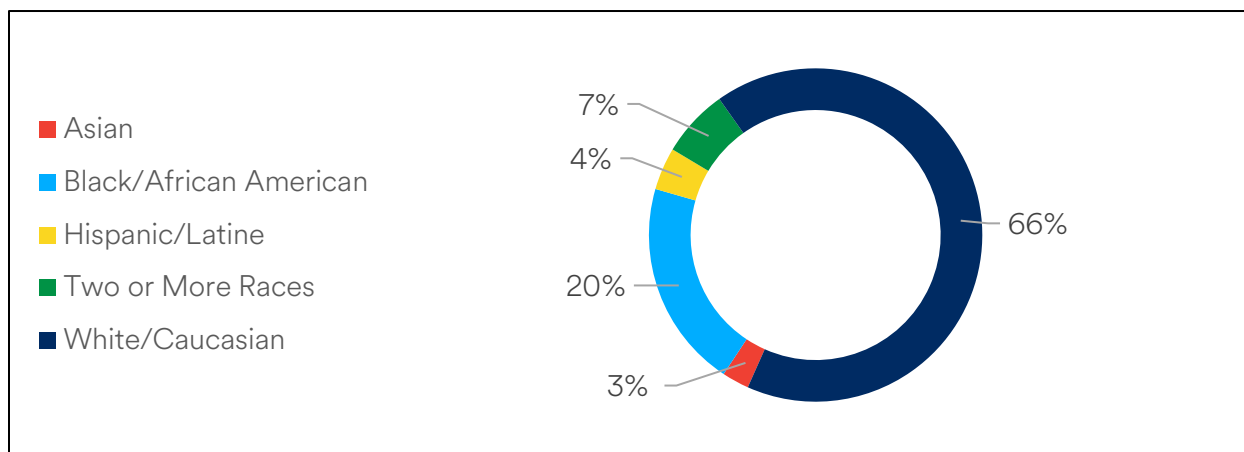
² See <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/nc-smart-goals-fact-sheet.pdf> for more information.

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 51

Region 51 is located in central Illinois and includes the counties Menard and Sangamon. In 2022, the total population of the Region was 206,084; 13,678 were children birth through age five. While most of the children aged four and under in the Region are identified as white, there are significant numbers of children who are identified as Black/African American, Two or More Races, Hispanic/Latine, 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 7,580 slots in publicly funded, licensed, and license-exempt child care centers and homes for children birth through age five (Table 1). Currently, Region 51 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, 6 people; Other, 22 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	2	101
Head Start	Ages Three to Five	3	380
Preschool for All	Ages Three and Four	15	1,340
Preschool for All Expansion	Ages Three and Four	1	40
Licensed Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	37	4,138
Licensed Family Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	120	1,141
License-Exempt Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	9	440

Source: IECAM

Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

For additional data and information, please access Region 51’s Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment at: www.birthtofiveil.com/region51/#report.

Recommendation 1



Increase capacity in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) programs caring for children from birth through age five by using workforce recruiters in the high schools and mentors in ECEC programs to keep staff connected to scholarships and grant opportunities.

This recommendation is based on data and feedback from ECEC professionals that there is a shortage of ECEC staff and teachers, preventing some programs from operating at full capacity or expanding to accommodate more students. Council members suggested focusing on building a workforce pipeline that links high school programs, Career Center students, and local community college students with ECEC programs in need of qualified staff and teachers.

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>During the remainder of FY24 and throughout FY25, collaborate with Capital Area Career Center (CACC), school districts in Region 51, community partners, and CACC team members to discuss how to strengthen connections to help meet the staffing needs of child care providers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet with the Director of CACC to discuss Birth to Five Illinois: Region 51 recommendations and come up with next steps on how to work together. • Meet with the ECEC team at CACC to discuss their program, introduce Birth to Five Illinois, and share what partners can be brought to the table to discuss creating an ECEC workforce pipeline for high school students and help recruit for their Preschool Lab. • Contact post-secondary coaches in the Region and ask them to connect with college bound or non-CACC students in high school about the ECEC workforce opportunities available to them. • Meet with the Lincoln Land Community College (LLCC) recruiters, Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) Navigators, and the CACC recruiter to discuss findings from the Region 51 Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment. • Bring in the Department of Children & Family Services (DCFS) and CCR&R staff to CACC to educate the students on ECEC career paths. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When a meeting has taken place with the Director of CACC. • Once each of the identified partners has responded back to the recruiters and invited Birth to Five Illinois to the appropriate family events. • Once the meetings take place and a plan is developed to help recruit with LLCC, CCR&R, and CACC. • Once DCFS and the CCR&R have met with the students, the students have been introduced to the different options of ECEC career paths, and CACC begins the CDA program.
<p>During the remainder of FY24 and throughout FY25, utilize social media and newsletters to share resources and information about ECEC resources and services in the Region at least once per month.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Locate and share the Illinois Action For Children ECEC videos to introduce families and community members to the programs and services available in the Region. • Share flyers/brochures from the Illinois Network of Childre Care Resource & Referral Agencies (INCCRRA)/Gateways website about the different ECEC career paths and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Once all videos in the series are shared on Facebook and in the community newsletters for Region 51. • Once flyers/brochures and resources are shared via social media (on a quarterly basis), with our Council members, and at community engagement events throughout FY25.

	the importance of the ECEC workforce for the State.	
By quarter two of FY25, identify ECEC internship opportunities for high school students by conducting a community survey.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speak with the staff person at CACC who runs the Intern program and the post-secondary coaches to gather information about ECEC internship opportunities. • Once it is determined how the intern program is run (paid or unpaid), then determine which ECEC programs in Region 51 can host interns in their program. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Once there is a list of child care programs willing to take interns that is distributed to the high schools and CACC.

Risks & Barriers

Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation	Proposed Solutions to Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation
Some community partners may not want to engage with Birth to Five Illinois.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborate directly with junior high and high school Principals, Guidance Counselors, and/or Superintendents about attending Career Fair or Parent Night events at the schools.

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 how to help Navigators recruit for the ECEC workforce.
- Illinois Action for Children: Ask for additional resources.
- Illinois Department of Children & Family Services (DCFS): Ask staff to speak with CACC students about ECEC-related careers.
- Illinois Network of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies (INCCRRA): Ask for additional resources.

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

Recommendation Implementation

Council members said they will know the recommendation is fully implemented when at least 20% of CACC high school students leave the program and enter the ECEC workforce, and when there is collaboration between CCR&R Navigators and recruiters at CACC that allows students to continue their Early Childhood education at an institute of higher education.

Council members also predict that by fully implementing the recommendation, there will be more qualified teachers and staff for Early Education programs, access to affordable college education in Early Childhood, more options for professional development, higher ECEC staff and teacher retainment, and more open program spots for families and children.

Recommendation 2



Support a public awareness campaign to increase usage of Home Visiting services (with an emphasis on pregnant persons) and increase community referrals made through Sangamon HEART.

This recommendation is based on data that show there is a lack of spots in Early Head Start center-based and Early Head Start Home Visiting programs across the Region. While 2,326 children birth to age two qualify for Early Head Start programming based on income, there are only 288 spots available combined, leaving many families without the support and services their

children may need. Council members want to raise awareness about the disparity, how to make referrals to services, and how Home Visiting can benefit children and their families in the 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>Build on the community engagement initiated through the development of the Region 51 Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment through Q3 of 2024. Connect with 30 or more community agencies/ organizations to educate them on Sangamon HEART and invite them to join the Early Childhood Community Collaboration.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a list of partners which includes healthcare providers, human resource organizations, child welfare organizations, mental and behavioral health services, Early Childhood services and programs, and all nonprofit organizations serving families and children. • Connect with potential partners and invite them to join Sangamon HEART. • Collaborate with Sangamon HEART to develop a “How to Make Referrals in the Integrated Referral and Intake System (IRIS) Database Tutorial Video” to share with new and existing members. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When the list has been developed with at least 30 new potential partners identified. • Once the video is made and shared with existing and new partners.
<p>In 2024, collaborate with Sangamon HEART to develop a social media campaign that includes the development of a new logo, website, outreach events, and marketing materials.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A logo will be developed for Sangamon HEART: IRIS; then feedback will be requested from the Sangamon HEART workgroup and staff to help them finalize a logo for the Collaboration. • Work with the staff and residents at Southern Illinois University (SIU) Medicine to finalize the Sangamon HEART: IRIS brochures. • Communicate with staff and Dr. Volle with Sangamon HEART on the update of the website. • Develop a social media campaign pushing the brochures quarterly and sharing via e-blast twice per year. • Locate the Illinois Action For Children Home Visiting videos on the importance of Home Visiting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Once the logo is made and approved by SIU/Sangamon HEART. • Once all steps are complete, brochures are produced and released in the community. • Once a website is started. • Once brochures have been shared on social media quarterly and twice per year via email. • Once videos have been shared on social media quarterly and twice per year via email. • When events take place. • When all partners have the website and/or brochure on their website and/or social media.

	<p>services and share them via social media quarterly and via newsletter twice per year.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify which organizations from Sangamon HEART would like to set up at healthcare programs/providers/hospitals to partners for a one-day event “Sangamon HEART Day” to push the Home Visiting Awareness Campaign and allow other organizations to bring awareness to their programs. 	
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Risks & Barriers

Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation	Proposed Solutions to Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation
A website hosted by SIU may not be available.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborate with other community partners to ask if they can host the website instead.
Organizations, non-profits, and healthcare programs may not join Sangamon HEART.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educate community partners on the benefits of joining Sangamon HEART. Continue to engage with community organizations to ensure continuity of relationships.

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 noted that United Way 211 hosts a similar program, but Sangamon HEART focuses primarily on Home Visiting and ECEC programs. 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 all community partners are enrolled in Sangamon HEART and are utilizing the IRIS database to make referrals.

They also predict that by fully implementing the recommendation, families will be more easily connected to ECEC services, and Early Childhood Education professionals who learn about resources will be able to connect families to the support they need. Overall, they believe that children will have better developmental and educational outcomes.

Recommendation 3



Launch a 211 campaign through United Way that includes social media, community outreach, and enrollment in the 211 system.

This recommendation was made based on feedback from community members that there is a lack of awareness about the 211 system and how it can benefit families in the 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>In 2024, establish a baseline number of community partners in both Menard and Sangamon Counties enrolled in the 211 database.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask United Way of Central Illinois or Personal Assistance Telephone Help (PATH) to pull the data from 211 in January of 2024 to show which organizations and/or ECEC providers from Sangamon and Menard Counties are already signed up on the 211 database. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Once an Excel list of organizations is provided to Birth to Five Illinois Council members.
<p>During the remainder of FY24 and throughout FY25, contact community organizations not enrolled in the 211 system to invite them to enroll.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action Council members will create email verbiage inviting organizations to add themselves to 211 or to identify services in 211. • Birth to Five Illinois Councils will look at the resource guides to ensure all emails are provided for organizations. • United Way and an identified Council member will send emails to all organizations in Sangamon and Menard Counties using the Sangamon County Resource Guide and the Menard County Resource Guide as a starting point. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Once all emails have been sent out and all the organizations begin to enroll and/or update their status in 211 database.
<p>During the remainder of FY24 and throughout FY25, partner with United Way of Central Illinois to distribute flyers, cards, videos, and social media content to community partners and families.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact United Way of Central Illinois to get access to 211 flyers and 211 cards for Council members share in the community or with their organizations, then locate 211 video(s) and social media content to share quarterly on social media and via newsletters. • Birth to Five Illinois Council members will identify who in the community should receive 211 cards, ensuring families in our community are reached with this campaign. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When flyers and cards have been collected and distributed.

Risks & Barriers

Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation	Proposed Solutions to Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation
Organizations/nonprofits/healthcare programs may not join 211.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Educate community partners on the benefits of joining 211.• Continue to engage with community organizations to ensure continuity of relationships.

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 discussed that Sangamon HEART is currently working on similar goals and recommendations; however, they focus more on Home Visiting and ECEC programs than on other essential community services, such as housing or food. 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 all organizations are enrolled in the 211 database and families are able to call or text the number to find local resources.

They also predict that by fully implementing the recommendation, the process for finding help will be simplified and families will be able to find the resources and services they need more easily. Referrals for services will be immediate, leaving community members feeling more supported.

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).

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