



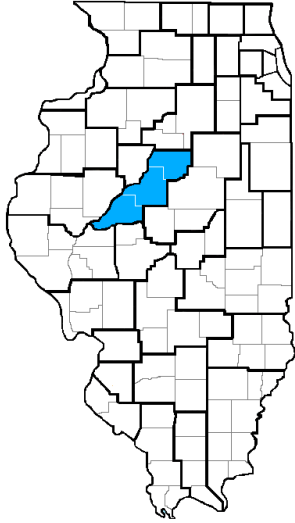
ACTION PLAN



Region 53

Mason, Tazewell & Woodford Counties

Regional Council Manager: Felicia Farden (she/her)
Email: ffarden@birthtofiveil.com
Phone Number: (309) 270-5670
Regional Website: www.birthtofiveil.com/region53



Family Council

Allisa List
Ashley Berlett
Ashley Walls
Christina Hutter
Irene Diep

Julie Swoik
Katie Oliger
Meredith Kerley
Sicily Cotelleso

Action Council

Amy Sloan-Gray
Brenda Smith
Courtney Long
Donna Ashley
Douglas Bury
Heather Schichner
Lynn Burgett

Michelle States
Nicole Meyers-Bilbrey
Phyllis Bliven
Staci Coussens
Stephanie Howerter

Table of Contents

Action Plan Development	4
How this Document is Designed	4
Region 53.....	5
Recommendation 1.....	6
Recommendation 2.....	9
Next Steps.....	12

Letter from Family & Action Council Members

The communities throughout our Region helped lead discussions by providing information through focus groups, interviews, community meetings, and surveys, and we are grateful for their help in developing our Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment 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 53 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 in developing our Regional Action Plan. It is our hope that the Action Plan will help families become more financially stable and have the support of the community, while also receiving high-quality ECEC services for the youngest learners in Region 53. We hope that Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) funding will be more well-known, more understood, and have less stigma. We also hope that it will establish a connected community system where families can engage with local officials who are looped into the ECEC community and have knowledge of available resources.

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 53 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.

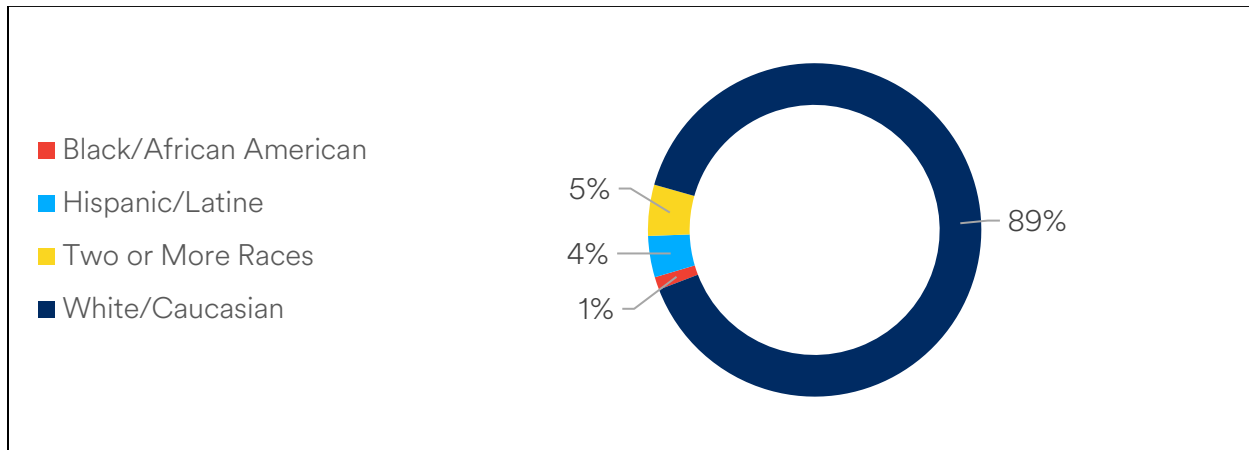
² See <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/nc-smart-goals-fact-sheet.pdf> for more information.

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 53

Region 53 is located in north-central Illinois and includes the counties of Mason, Tazewell, and Woodford. In 2022, the total population of the Region was 185,317; 12,136 were children birth through age five. While the majority of the children aged four and under in the Region are identified as white, there are growing numbers of children who identify as Two or More Races, Hispanic/Latine, and Black/African American (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 3,723 slots in publicly funded, licensed, and license-exempt child care centers and homes for children birth through age five (Table 1). Currently, Region 53 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: Asian, 17 people; Other, 20 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	1	8
Head Start	Ages Three to Five	8	272
Preschool for All	Ages Three and Four	14	872
Preschool for All Expansion	Ages Three and Four	1	20
Licensed Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	25	2,040
Licensed Family Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	39	350
License-Exempt Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	5	161

Source: IECAM

Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

For additional data and information, please access Region 53's Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment at: www.birthtofiveil.com/region53/#report.

Recommendation 1



Raise awareness about the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) among families in the Region and work with community partners so they can provide support to families as they apply for CCAP.

This recommendation is based on feedback from community members who attended focus groups and interviews. Council members reported that child care providers want to accept more families that use the CCAP, and families shared that they need and want the assistance, but the process is confusing and long for both providers and 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?
<p>Between January 2024 and December 2024 work to increase family and caregiver awareness of CCAP through partners, events, and social media campaigns.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruit CCAP staff and committee members to attend events. • Create information in conjunction with SAL Child Care Connections staff to disseminate. • Identify events in the area to provide information. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When partners are sharing, and events are being attended. • When a social media campaign has been created and shared with community partners. • When at least 10% of family-centered community events have a representative available to talk about CCAP with caregivers. • When flyers, pamphlets, and/or other resource materials developed have been distributed to at least 20 community partners.
<p>By December 31, 2024, increase the number of “complete” CCAP applications coming in for “round one” of the review process.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a user-friendly mobile version of the application. • Produce video walkthroughs for families filling out the app. • Create quick fact sheets to be provided at all child care centers and homes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When completed applications go from 2% to at least 20%.
<p>By December 31, 2025, provide resources to 50 child care providers so they are aware of the CCAP process and are more capable of informing and assisting families in starting the application process</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create video walkthroughs of the CCAP process for providers to review on their own time. • Connect Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) agency staff and child care providers. • Offer optional CCAP office hours or lunch and learns on a web video platform held by CCR&R staff. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When at least 50 providers have the information and/or assistance needed.

Risks & Barriers

Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation	Proposed Solutions to Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation
Child care providers usually don not have free time during traditional hours and families may not have time to come to resource fairs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be flexible with timing: if weekends work for providers and families, provider trainings and family centered community events should be during the weekend. • Utilize email and video conferencing platforms to help those that cannot attend things in-person.
Costs associated with printing/handing out resource information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use one general flyer to minimize printing costs.
Buy-in from community partners due to time/budget constraints and not willing to change “what is working for them”.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stress the importance of community systems development and build meaningful relationships with providers.

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 discussed engaging with the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) and Code for America to solicit their support in creating a mobile app to create an easier CCAP application process.

Possible Funding Sources

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

Community

Council members noted that IDHS is currently refining the process of applying for CCAP, but no other community groups were identified as working on similar goals or recommendations.

Recommendation Implementation

Council members said they will know the recommendation is fully implemented when parents and caregivers are more successful in completing applications, when the percentage of

completed applications goes from 2% to 20%, and when fact sheets have been distributed to child care providers and other agencies and individuals that work with families to provide accurate information about CCAP. They also predict that by fully implementing the recommendation, more families will be able to afford child care and work, even non-traditional hours, with the support of CCAP.

Recommendation 2



Inform local governments of the efforts being made by Early Childhood Collaborations so they are aware of the existing resources available to families in the communities they serve, and so when families reach out, they will know where to direct them.

This recommendation is rooted in feedback from local elected officials who said families in their communities are asking for resources, but they do not know where to send them. Prior to events held by Birth to Five Illinois, many local elected officials said they were unaware of the barriers related to child care their constituents have been facing.

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 March 2024 and December 2024, raise awareness and understanding of ECEC programs, services, and family/community barriers by ensuring local elected officials and Local Early Childhood Collaborations are connected.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a master list of elected officials at both the community and county levels. • Reach out to elected officials by utilizing Action and Family Council connections. • Identify elected officials from a master list with whom Council members do not have an established connection. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When Birth to Five Illinois: Region 53 staff have held meetings and engaged at least three local officials from each county.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect/invite local elected officials to existing meetings. • Share invites, flyers, and/or marketing from Local Early Childhood Collaborations. 	
By December 2024, attend at least two city council and/or board meetings in each of Region 53's counties to know what is happening at the local level that impacts ECEC.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a master list of meeting times for city councils and county boards. • Find any "office hours" that elected officials may already be holding that we can attend. • Create a list of people that are going to each meeting (preferably if they live/work in that area). • Share out relevant information and opportunities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When Birth to Five Illinois: Region 53 staff have attended at least two council/board meetings in each county.
Between January 2024 and December 2024, Birth to Five Illinois will hold one-on-one meetings with a variety of local officials twice per month.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See who cannot attend larger meetings or those who can but want more in-depth conversation. • Reach out and schedule meetings. • Bring resources and information from larger meetings. • If we cannot get a meeting scheduled, share information through email. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When Birth to Five Illinois: Region 53 staff are scheduling at least one meeting per week with a local elected official.

Risks & Barriers

Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation	Proposed Solutions to Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation
Local elected official awareness and buy-in.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share family and caregiver stories and information relevant to their constituents.
Scheduling time with local elected officials.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use already existing meetings to work around any time constraints and avoid having to add meetings to officials' already busy calendars.

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 discussed engaging with local school board members, hospitals, pediatric dentists, health providers, and libraries to ask them to learn about the work and then share it with community members.

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 the local All Our Kids (AOK) Network has been engaging with local elected officials in recent meetings, particularly their Family and Community Engagement Specialist. In discussions with community members, they noted that many Collaboration meetings occur during typical working hours (9:00am to 5:00pm), which makes it difficult for elected officials who hold other, full-time positions to attend.

Recommendation Implementation

Council members said they will know the recommendation is fully implemented when local elected officials are attending Early Childhood Community Collaboration meetings to get updates on ECEC in their area and share about what is happening in local government, and when they have information they can give to families who reach out to their office looking for help.

They also predict that by fully implementing the recommendation, there will be a more cohesive pipeline of information on available resources, providing families with “no wrong door” to find and receive help.

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 (INCCRRRA).

Photo Credit: Cover: Emma Bauso on Pexels, page 5: 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.