

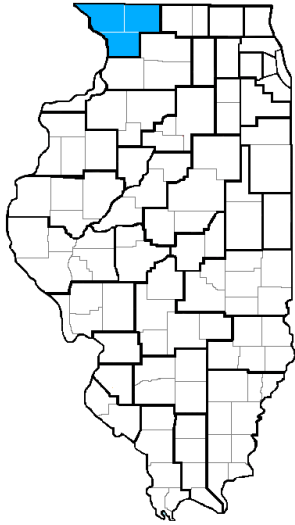
ACTION PLAN



Region 8

Carroll, Jo Daviess & Stephenson 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 8 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 United for Kids Northwest Illinois Early Childhood Consortium and the United Way of Northwest Illinois. This newly formed group of inspired individuals is poised to put lead elements of our Action Plan and bring positive change to our communities.

The Birth to Five Illinois: Region 8 Action and Family Councils are encouraged by the Action Plan, and we hope these local awareness programs can bring about positive change in our communities. We realize the issues we are working on are multifaceted and complex. However, coming together as a community, we can ensure all our children are ready for Kindergarten and are given an excellent start to their academic years.

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 8 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.

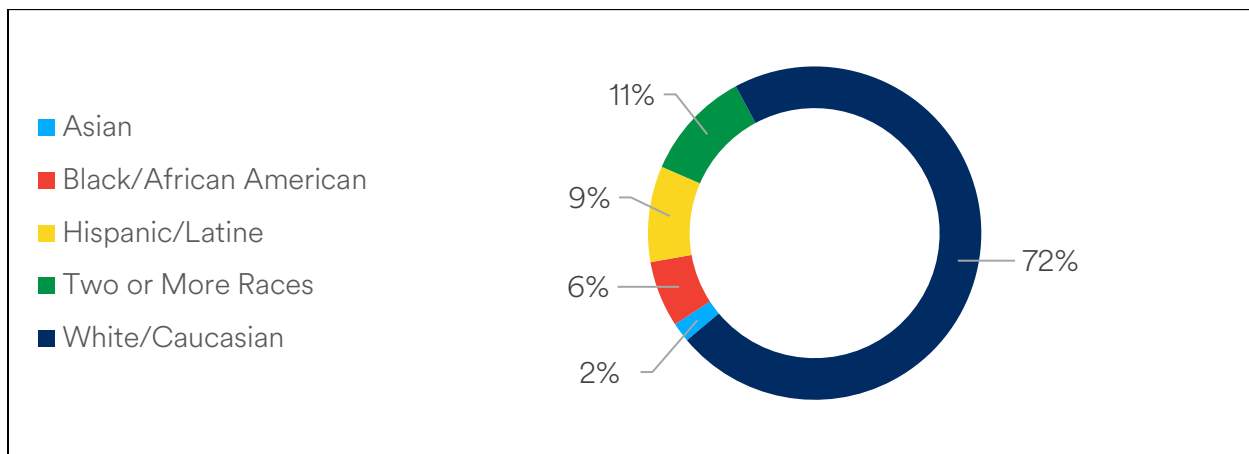
² See <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/nc-smart-goals-fact-sheet.pdf> for more information.

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 8

Region 8 is located in the far north-west corner of the state and includes the counties of Carroll, Jo Daviess, and Stephenson. In 2022, the total population of the Region was 80,938; 5,018 were children birth through age five. While most of the child aged four and under are identified as white, there are significant numbers of children the same age who are identified as Two or More Races, Hispanic/Latine, Black/African American, and Asian (Figure 1). Most Black/African American and Hispanic/Latine households are in Freeport (Stephenson County), but there are communities of Hispanic/Latine families in both Savanna and Galena as well.

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 2,185 slots in publicly funded, licensed, and license-exempt child care centers and homes for children birth through age five (Table 1). Currently, Region 8 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, 10 people; Other, 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	3	188
Preschool for All	Ages Three and Four	18	667
Preschool for All Expansion	Ages Three and Four	0	0
Licensed Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	6	694
Licensed Family Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	54	516
License-Exempt Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	2	120

Source: IECAM

Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

For additional data and information, please access Region 8’s Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment at: www.birthtofiveil.com/region8/#report.

Recommendation 1



Increase the number of licensed child care centers, licensed-exempt child care centers, licensed family child care homes, and after-school care programs throughout the Region.

This recommendation is based on feedback from caregivers, parents, and Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) providers who identified the lack of child care as the top need in our Region. One child care provider in Stephenson County said, “I tell the mothers I currently have in our program they should call me the moment they confirm they are pregnant to get their expecting baby on my list. It will take nine months of their pregnancy and birth-related leave to get them in.”

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 June 2024, a local Child Care Center Development Advisory Team (C3DAT) will be assembled to directly help prospective child care proprietors in navigating the arduous and complicated process of opening a licensed child care center/home.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify and recruit C3DAT members including Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) staff, building inspectors, business development professionals, and grant writers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When the C3DAT has been assembled and met at least once.
By December 2024, identify community members interested in becoming licensed and provide a list to C3DAT Team so they can provide support and guidance through the process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify prospective licensed child care centers and home care providers. Create a database of current and potential providers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When a list of prospective child care center/home providers has been created. When the database is completed and available to C3DAT.

Risks & Barriers

Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation	Proposed Solutions to Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation
Finding people who have the ability needed for C3DAT could be a barrier to forming a successful team.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Form an informal recruitment team whose members have many contacts in the Region.
The successful implementation and conclusion of this goal will require a lot of communication, cooperation, and collaboration.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build relationships with proposed partners and team members before work starts and be clear with the team about what goals and aims are/are not.
Many of proposed community partners may find it difficult to commit to the time needed to learn about and help prospective child care center/home providers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be respectful of everyone's time and ensure meetings and assignments are managed efficiently and professionally.
The willingness of community partners to collaborate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invite community partners to meet with key stakeholders before recruitment begins to build a relationship with them prior to the launch of C3DAT.

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 there are no known 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 a team has been recruited, organized, and trained to assist and support prospective child care providers in the Region.

They also predict that by fully implementing the recommendation, there will be an increase in the number of child care slots, allowing for greater access and availability for parents and families in need of child care.

Recommendation 2



Advocate for the improved wages, benefits, and working conditions of the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) workforce in the Region, as well as pursue strategies to improve, keep, and grow that workforce.

This recommendation stems from input from Action Council members and ECEC professionals in the Region, who identified ECEC workforce retention and recruitment as a top challenge in expanding child care and preschool slots in Region 8.

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?
To raise awareness of the low-wages ECEC workers make in our area, our community will advocate for community members to complete an ECEC Wage Assessment and an outreach and advocacy plan to inform local policymakers of the survey results by May 2024.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify a project lead. • Collect, organize, and review collected wage data. • Create an outreach and advocacy plan for local policymakers. • Send letters to state representatives and senators. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When a project lead has been identified. • When wage data has been collected and reviewed. • When an outreach and advocacy plan is collaboratively created. • When letters have been sent to Region 8 state legislators.
Host an informational session with local ECEC professionals and a representative from the Service Employees International Union Healthcare program and/or other health care plan providers prior to open enrollment periods that will begin January 1, 2025.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify a project lead organization. • Research what individual health care plans might be available for child care providers and workers. • Identify health care plan providers who are available to do in-person, hybrid, or online informational sessions with local child care providers and workers. • Create a “Health Benefits for Child Care Workers” informational session series with health care provider names, dates, times, and site locations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When a project lead organization has been determined. • When a list of child care professionals' health care benefits providers has been created. • When health care benefit providers have been contacted. • When providers, dates, times, session format, and location have been identified. • When invites, sign-up, and sessions have been completed.
Birth to Five Illinois: Region 8 will work with the local Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&Rs) Agencies to market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborate with Caregiver Connections and other behavioral and mental health experts to develop a 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When session provider, format, date, time, and location have been identified and scheduled.

<p>a series of voluntary, hybrid and/or online behavioral and mental health training sessions for ECEC professionals in the Region to begin May 1, 2024.</p>	<p>quarterly series of classroom training sessions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore ways to offer Gateway credits for session attendance. • Partner with the CCR&R and Regional Office of Education #8 to distribute session invites local child care providers and preschool educators. • Host sessions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When determination of Gateway accreditation has been completed. • When invitations have been distributed to local child care providers and preschool educators. • When training sessions begin.
<p>By September 2024, collaborate with community partners to locally execute an ECEC workforce recruitment campaign currently in development by Illinois Cares for Kids.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruit a workforce marketing and recruitment team. • Brainstorm the deliverables. • Develop campaign and campaign materials. • Research important recruitment dates for 2024. • Establish a schedule, timeline, and calendar for campaign execution. • Implement the campaign. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When a Workforce Team has been recruited and has held a first meeting. • When a list of deliverables is completed by the Team. • When the marketing and recruitment plan is completed. • When a list of important recruitment dates for the 2024 academic year has been compiled. • When a timeline for the marketing plan is complete. • When the campaign kicks off.

Risks & Barriers

Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation	Proposed Solutions to Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation
<p>Finding a community partner willing to take the lead on some of the SMART goals.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruit a project lead who can use their connections within the community to lead the steps to complete the SMART goals.
<p>Collaboration and cooperation between community stakeholders.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to build trust amongst organizations, agencies, and community stakeholders to leverage their expertise.

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 noted that state elected officials should be made aware of local ECEC wage survey results, and the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) should be contacted and asked for health care benefit information for ECEC professionals. Additionally, Illinois Cares for Kids should be asked to support a statewide ECEC workforce recruitment campaign.

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 several ECEC partners and providers who are attempting to recruit ECEC professionals to their program; however, there is no organized, collaborative, or intentional campaign to support recruitment efforts in the Region. Additionally, there are no known groups or campaigns in place to raise awareness of ECEC wages, improve health care for ECEC professionals, or organize training around social-emotional and/or behavior supports in the classroom.

Recommendation Implementation

Council members said they will know the recommendation is fully implemented when ECEC professionals and community members are more aware of wages, health care, and training available in the Region, and when the workforce recruitment campaign has begun.

They also predict that by fully implementing the recommendation, more elected officials will support an increase of wages for ECEC workers and more Early Childhood professionals will take advantage of health care benefits. Additionally, more ECEC teachers will feel better supported through trainings offered and more high school students will be interested in pursuing careers in ECEC.

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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