

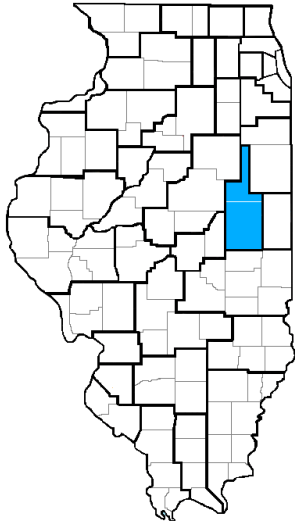
ACTION PLAN



Region 9

Champaign & Ford 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 9 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:

- Angela Worthy from the Trauma and Resilience Initiative (TRI)
- Betty Gavin from the Nutrition Education Program
- Brightpoint
- Former Illinois Representative Mike Marron
- Holly York and fellow employees from Bradley Learning Center
- Illinois Senator Paul Faraci
- The Butterfly Project
- The Ford County Networking Group

Our hope for the Action Plan is to boost ECEC worker numbers, enhance peer-to-peer support, foster better caregiver-provider relationships, reduce waitlists, improve attendance, expand child care slots in Region 9, and increase engagement with minoritized communities.

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.

Birth to Five Illinois: Region 9 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.

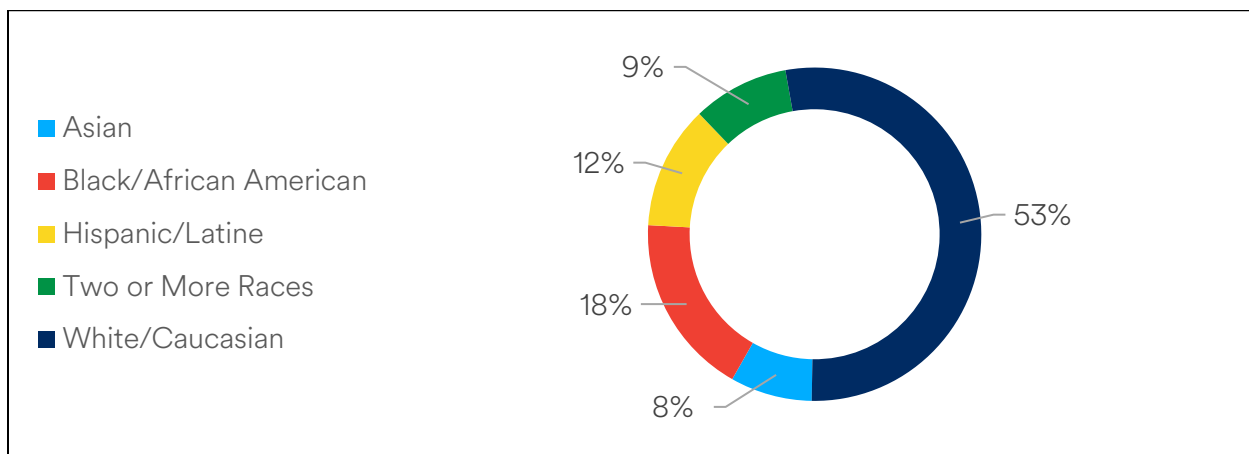
² See <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/nc-smart-goals-fact-sheet.pdf> for more information.

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 9

Region 9 is located in south-central Illinois and includes the counties of Champaign and Ford. In 2022, the total population of the Region was 220,215; 13,742 were children birth through age five. While most of the children in the Region are white, there are significant numbers of those who identify as Black/African American, Hispanic/Latine, Asian, or Two or More Races (Figure 1). There are also identifiable communities of Hispanic/Latine and French-Congolese individuals in Urbana, Rantoul, and Paxton, and increasing numbers of racially diverse residents in Champaign County due to the presence of the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) which has one of the country’s largest populations of international undergraduate and graduate students.

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 8,617 slots in publicly funded, licensed, and license-exempt child care centers and homes for children birth through age five (Table 1). Currently, Region 9 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, 75 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	6	216
Head Start	Ages Three to Five	8	441
Preschool for All	Ages Three and Four	10	1,265
Preschool for All Expansion	Ages Three and Four	3	154
Licensed Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	41	4,076
Licensed Family Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	169	1,625
License-Exempt Child Care	Ages Birth to Twelve	14	840

Source: IECAM

Created by: Birth to Five Illinois

For additional data and information, please access Region 9’s Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment at: www.birthtofiveil.com/region9/#report.

Recommendation 1



Increase the availability of services for children in Region 9 while maintaining equitable options for communities with limited access to financial resources.

This recommendation is based on needs identified by Council members, parents/ caregivers, and Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) providers. There is a lack of affordable ECEC services, supports, and resources in the Region, especially in Ford County, and Council members want to ensure caregivers who wish or need to access ECEC programs have more options for their children.

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>By June of 2025, hold three meetings with local Child Care Resource & Referral Agency (Child Care Resource Service - CCRS), CDI Head Start, and local higher education institutions to discuss ECEC staffing challenges and potential community-led solutions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet with CCRS Navigators and discuss their process for working with current and prospective students on financial aid and grant/scholarship opportunities. • Meet with publicly funded program representatives and higher education institutions about staffing and recruitment challenges. • Draft short- and long-term solutions with community partners. • Aid in advertisement of ECEC programs. • Present solutions to community groups in Region 9. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When three meetings have been held. • When solutions have been drafted. • When solutions have been presented to at least three community groups in Region 9.
<p>Research and connect with transportation entities in the Region to advocate for an increase in transportation options for families. Hold a community listening session/town hall by the end of 2024.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect with transportation entities in Region 9 and request a collaboration meeting. • Discuss current challenges and barriers to expanding service routes with transportation entities. • Discuss potential for increasing grant funds, grant writing support, and how to make grant funding information available. Ask how to expand transportation to child care centers, not just schools. • Hold a community listening session/town hall, where community members can share feedback with transportation entities and legislators in Region 9. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When a meeting is held with transportation services to discuss and explore the current landscape. • When a community meeting is held to deliver feedback to transportation entities and legislators.

<p>Increase caregiver accessibility to information on available ECEC programs in Region 9 by December 2024.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find a partner agency to lead and compile available information on the eligibility requirements and financial assistance offered by ECEC programs for providers. • Disseminate information via social media and at gas stations, libraries, grocery stores, food banks etc. Utilize physical signs with QR codes leading to information online. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When information has been sent to 10 caregivers.
<p>By the end of 2024, hold a community meeting to build collaboration and connections between ECEC programs, and education entities in Region 9.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect with a variety of child care centers, family child care homes, and community college and high school staff. • Facilitate a collaboration meeting with a focused agenda. Discuss college credentials for young ECEC staff working in child care centers. • By the end of the meeting, brainstorm solutions to increase equitable education and child care opportunities for diverse communities of Region 9. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When at least one meeting has been held with child care providers, community college, and high school staff.

Risks & Barriers

Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation	Proposed Solutions to Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation
<p>Lack of funding to support steps and SMART goals.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elevate feedback to legislators and other decision makers who have input on funding allocation.
<p>Employers may not allow employees to participate in meetings or provide feedback. Employees may be hesitant to provide feedback about workplace barriers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow employees who participate to do so anonymously; develop relationships with leadership of employers who consent to participate in feedback collection.
<p>Programs may be unwilling or unable to find suitable facilities/space for new child care centers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share information on available grants, connect people in the community who have similar goals, seek local support (Local Collaborations, Regional Planning Commission (RPC), CCRS, etc.).

Ensuring that the unique linguistic and cultural identities of families are recognized and supported by community members.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide widespread educational materials (gain through existing literature and organize partnerships who could lead this) to the community on the importance of cultural competency when supporting children in the learning environment.
Incomplete data on children in need of child care slots and the capacity of child care slots.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sample a variety of local child care providers in the Region to get current number of open slots for services/better estimate of the entire Region through sampling.
Ensuring the confidentiality of child care employees.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure all data and information gathered from employees is de-identified and identifiable information is not publicly accessible.

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:

- Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) Training & Technical Assistance Consultant: Provide guidance and support with grant writing.
- Illinois Network of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies (INCCRRA) Gateways Staff: Provide training on what grants are available, how to apply for them, and the credentialing process.
- Elected officials: Advocate for funding, expansion of services and programs, and support for funding in the Region.

Possible Funding Sources

While funding may be needed to hold events, support the development of tools and resources, engage community members and partners, collect and evaluate data, develop and distribute marketing materials, and other activities related to this recommendation, the Council members did not identify additional, specific, possible funding sources at this time.

Community

Council members identified community groups who have been and are currently working on similar goals and recommendations: Head Start, ISBE, the local Home Visiting Consortium, and the CCRS Outreach Team. One lesson they learned that was shared with Council members is that community partners must take the time to understand the individual needs of families and organizations and meet them where they are instead of providing broad solutions to their challenges.

Recommendation Implementation

Council members said they will know the recommendation is fully implemented when families and children have access to the services they need and there is no longer a four year wait list for programs.

They also predicted several potential long-term outcomes:

- Better data collection regarding job satisfaction from ECEC professionals.
- Improved school-aged children's test scores and educational milestones.
- An increase in individuals interested in the ECEC field, leading to higher retention of staff.

Recommendation 2



Use incentives such as vouchers, gift cards, accrual extensions, discounts for child care for Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) professionals, and stipends, as well as competitive wages and professional development to recruit and retain more ECEC workers.

This recommendation is based on feedback from ECEC professionals regarding the low pay they receive and the high rates of burnout they are experiencing due to a lack of pay, benefits, and supports.

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>Advertise existing ECEC recruitment programs offered by CCRS to communities in Region 9 by December 2024.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet with CCRS to gather information and determine how best to disseminate it. • Promote advertisement in the CCRS bi-weekly newsletter. • Advertise dual credit classes for Early Childhood Education. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When meetings with CCRS have been held at least three times. • When there have been at least 10 social media posts about recruitment programs.
<p>By June of 2025, collect and then share communal feedback on wages and benefits to decision-makers and legislators in Region 9.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research various ECEC employers in Region 9. Look at current information on Smart Start and other existing efforts to increase/improve benefits and wages. • Connect with these employers and collect quantitative or qualitative data of wages and benefits. • Elevate feedback from community meetings to legislators in Region 9 about grants, raising minimum wages, benefits packages, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When three meetings have been held with key ECEC professionals to discuss wages and benefits. • When feedback has been collected and disseminated to legislators.
<p>Create a support group for caregivers with young children, and a mentorship group for ECEC workers, with a minimum of two weekly meetings for each group by August of 2025.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect with early child care directors and parents/caregivers and gauge interest in participating in a support/mentorship group. • Recruit a lead agency to assist the creation and continuation of support/mentorship group meetings. • Schedule a date, time, and location for the first support/mentorship group meeting. • Provide an exit survey to gain feedback on the effectiveness of the meeting. • Collaborate with the above entities to schedule a second meeting and ensure the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When at least three people have volunteered to be mentors. • When mentees have been matched with the first group of mentors. • When at least two meetings have been held.

	continuation of the meeting series for both groups.	
Expand community knowledge on the “Parent-Teacher partnership” using the Developmental Service Center (DSC) “Walk hand in hand” presentation between April 2024 until June 2025.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a preliminary meeting with DSC to discuss the presentation and current outreach activities using this presentation. • Utilize community connections via Region 9 Birth to Five Illinois Councils to connect with public school staff. • Decide on a time, date, and location for the presentation(s) to school employees. • Request feedback from school staff after the completion of the presentation to assess effectiveness. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborate with DSC to present “Walk hand in hand” presentation to a minimum of six schools' staff (can combine if presenting to multiple schools or at the district level to bridge the continuity of care from school to home and vice versa, ideally increasing the trust between parents/caregivers and providers.)

Risks & Barriers

Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation	Proposed Solutions to Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation
Collecting feedback from volunteers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow employees who participate to do so anonymously; develop relationships with leadership of employers who consent to participate in feedback collection.
Scheduling conflicts between mentors and mentees, parent-teacher partnership programs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct a time preference survey and match individuals with aligned times. Offer a hybrid option in the event mentors and mentees cannot meet in person.
Building relationships and collaborating with community partners with whom there are no existing relationships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leverage community connections to facilitate introductions instead of cold calling/emailing.
Obtaining buy-in from ECEC providers regarding wage and benefit increases.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share information collected from the Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment about workforce, build rapport, and provide understanding and compassion for the belief that providers do not have control over the wages and benefits of their employees. Provide advocacy information to help shift perspectives/perspective share.

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 both the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) and the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) as agencies that should be engaged further to help fiscally support the SMART goals and/or recommendation.

Possible Funding Sources

While funding may be needed to support the development and maintenance of a digital platform, hold events, provide translation and interpretation services, develop tools and resources, engage community members and partners, collect and evaluate data, develop and distribute marketing materials, and other 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: United Way, Home Visitors, CCRS, INCCRRA Gateways and RPC, Parkland College, and the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. These community groups are actively working on the accessibility of information about their services, the marketing and advertising of educational and professional opportunities in the ECEC field and are participating in the work of Birth to Five Illinois to dismantle barriers.

Some of the lessons they shared with Council members and Regional staff include that this work is a marathon, not a sprint. There are still challenges and obstacles to face regarding the stigma surrounding some of these systems and how they are set up. Additionally, there are many passionate and dedicated people in our community across the Region who care deeply about the future for families and children.

Recommendation Implementation

Council members said they will know the recommendation is fully implemented when more qualified works have been hired and more spots have opened in ECEC programs for children ages birth to five, a higher percentage of ECEC professionals remain in the field, and there is an increase in wages and benefits.

Council members also predicted that by fully implementing the recommendation there will be less turnover, improved workplace culture, the ability of directors and assistant directors to focus solely on the requirements of their position, decreased work load for ECEC professionals, decreased stigma around working in child care, and an increase in resources and supports for families and children.

Recommendation 3



Increase outreach strategies to populations with limited access to resources to make services more readily accessible.

This recommendation was chosen to address the resource gap for non-English speaking families in our Region, underscored by the underrepresentation of marginalized populations in accessing these services. Furthermore, it highlights the absence of translated materials and transportation resources for non-English speakers to access these services for their children.

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>By August 2025, research existing ECEC agencies in the Region that work with the Early Learning Council’s priority populations and document both the providers and the support services they provide.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reach out to agencies and request a collaboration meeting. Document what services they provide for this population and see how Council members and Regional staff can help spread information about services to gain more engagement with priority populations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When services have been identified and mapped. When agencies agree to meet. When an active list is made detailing the available resources in Region 9.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spread this information via Region 9 Council members' networks. 	
<p>During FY25, connect with ECEC agencies that serve priority populations in the Region and attend/facilitate at least two community meetings to strengthen collaboration with and between these agencies.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reach out to agencies and request a collaboration meeting. • Document what they provide for these populations and see how Birth to Five Illinois Councils and Regional Team can help spread information about services and get these populations more involved. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When at least 10 agencies have been contacted. • When agencies have agreed to meet and share information and resources. • When two community meetings have been scheduled and executed. • When agencies agree to meet regularly to update this information.
<p>In FY25, meet with at least three community leaders and/or agencies to build understanding and share information between ECEC programs and the communities with limited access to resources they serve.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact the agencies and propose a meeting with a focused agenda on the experiences of communities with limited access to resources engaging in ECEC services in Region 9. • Brainstorm ways to improve cultural representation and competency through organizational processes and procedures. • Share this information with service providers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When meetings with at least three community leaders and/or agencies have been completed, and their feedback has been collected and shared with the appropriate parties.
<p>Using U.S. Census data and feedback from local agencies and organizations, determine where priority populations live and lack access to ECEC resources to build outreach strategies and share information with ECEC providers in FY25.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research local cultural groups/meetings and establish rapport. • Using current data and collect new qualitative data from community groups to inform brainstorming of more effective outreach strategies. • With Region 9 Council members and communal feedback, compile a list of equitable and culturally competent outreach practices. • Disseminate the list to providers in Region 9 who serve these communities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When priority populations have been mapped. • When qualitative data has been collected from at least 5 agencies and/or community groups.

Risks & Barriers

Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation	Proposed Solutions to Anticipated Risks/Barriers to Meeting Goals/Recommendation
Families and caregivers may not be comfortable utilizing ECEC services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect families directly to the resources they need; share information about why ECEC services are important and how they could benefit from them. • Utilize family advocates to start building trust/rapport.
The lack of trust that may exist between community agencies and/or organizations and priority populations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide information/services without requiring much personal information. • Commit to de-identify information after minimum requirements for assistance are needed to protect their identity from public knowledge.
Lack of awareness of educational or legal rights, especially amongst those who identify as a member of a priority population group.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using established chains of communication to disseminate information on the educational and legal rights of parents and children.

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:

- IDHS: Facilitate collaboration between local organizations and agencies, share collected data, and help determine where services are needed most.
- Illinois Welcoming Center: Help educate families about services and support available.
- ISBE: Make translators more accessible to ECEC programs and service providers.
- United Ways: Continue facilitating collaboration between local organizations and agencies, providing resources and education on recent laws.

Possible Funding Sources

While funding may be needed to hold events, provide translation and interpretation services, support the development of tools and resources, engage community members and partners, support data collection and evaluation, produce and distribute marketing materials, and other

activities related to the recommendation, the Council members did not identify specific, additional possible funding sources at this time.

Community

Council members identified several community groups who have been, and are currently, working on similar goals and recommendations. They noted that some organizations have multiple data collection processes that are not intuitive for interpretation, nor do they have a well-defined or well-funded system for collecting data. They also said they have been unable to make necessary changes due to a lack of funding opportunities and/or because they were unaware of what languages were needed for translation and interpretation or how many families needed it. Additionally, they shared that sometimes there are caregivers who need or want materials translated into their native language while also wanting their children to only speak English in the school setting, raising uncertainty about how best to meet the needs of families.

Recommendation Implementation

Council members said they will know the recommendation is fully implemented when there are many places a family or caregiver can access resources. Additionally, there will be increases in the frequency of services provided, the amount of engagement between ECEC providers, families, and caregivers, the number of materials translated, and the number of interpreters available for families and caregivers.

Council members also predicted that by fully implementing this recommendation, those whose home language is something other than English and who may not be native to the United States will feel more comfortable seeking out ECEC services. Additionally, they believe this will increase trust amongst families, caregivers, and providers.

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).

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