

Birth ^{to} Five Five ILLINOIS



Year in Review

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	02
Letter from State Leadership	03
Birth to Five Illinois	04
Timeline.....	05
State Team Leadership & Staff Trainings.....	06
Advancing Equity	11
Advocacy.....	12
Birth to Five Illinois Regions	14
Collaborative Partners.....	19
Communications	20
Grants.....	24
Family & Community Engagement (FACE).....	26
Regional Outreach.....	28
Data	31
Next Steps.....	33

Introduction

Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) in Illinois is made up of several programs, including publicly funded programs such as Head Start/Early Head Start, Early Intervention, Early Childhood Special Education, home visiting, preschool, center- and home-based child care, and family, friend, and neighbor home care. ECEC also exists within a larger system of services and supports for families, including pediatric health care, mental and behavioral health care, child welfare, and family-focused economic supports. When available, these services and supports can be confusing and difficult to navigate.

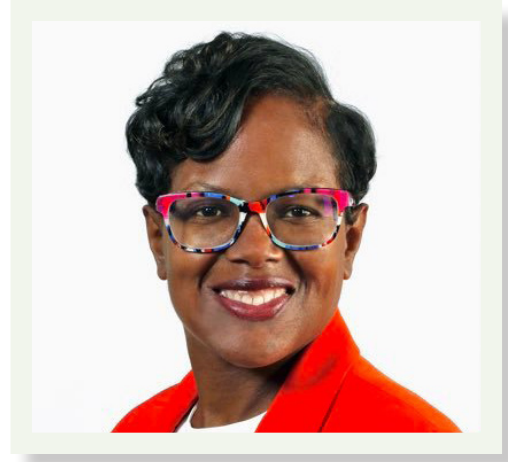
Birth to Five Illinois relies on quantitative data, collected from state, local, and private agencies and organizations, and qualitative data, collected from families, caregivers, providers, and stakeholders, to develop recommendations that will make ECEC services and supports more equitable for all children and families in the State. Birth to Five Illinois was founded in September 2021. Work began with the hiring of State Team staff at the start of 2022, followed by 39 Regional Council Managers in the spring and summer, all 128 staff members by November, and the establishment of 78 Birth to Five Illinois Councils, one Action Council and one Family Council in each Region of the State, by December 2022.

This report highlights the work accomplished during the establishment of the organization at the state and regional levels. It celebrates some of the accomplishments and challenges Birth to Five Illinois faced during the start-up phase and offers insights to those who may be thinking of establishing the same kind of statewide regional community system in their own state.



Letter from State Leadership

Birth to Five Illinois was created to help bridge the gaps that exist between families, caregivers, Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) providers, and decision makers. Our work, which began in September 2021, led us through informative (and sometimes emotional) conversations about the challenges families and providers face with ECEC programs, services, and supports. It also highlighted the strengths and successes of our system and the communities that have come together to serve our youngest children and their families and allowed us all to create a path to make Illinois the best place to raise young children.



While we are looking forward to expanding on our first year's work, we also want to take time to celebrate the relationships we have forged, the communities we have connected with, the work of our amazing staff, and most importantly, the relationships built with caregivers and providers who trust us to advance their stories.

During our first two years, Birth to Five Illinois:

- Hired 11 State Team members and 117 Regional staff.
- Held and/or attended over 1,200 community events and connected with over 80,000 people.
- Stood up 78 Regional Councils that included over 1,000 caregivers, parents, ECEC professionals, and community leaders.
- Met with over 250 local, state, and federal elected officials to bring awareness of our organization, accompany families as they shared their experiences, and advocate for ECEC in Illinois.
- Produced 39 Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessments¹ that identify strengths, needs, and recommendations for communities and amplifies the voices of families, caregivers, and providers across the State.

This report is a celebration of all we have accomplished so far but is also an invitation for you to support and join as advocates for equitable and accessible early learning and development opportunities for all children. We welcome you to the conversation as a member of our Councils and/or as a champion for every community, every family, every child in our State.

Thank you for your support.

Cicely Fleming (she/her)

Director
Birth to Five Illinois

¹<https://www.birthtofiveil.com/reports>

Birth to Five Illinois

Illinois has a goal of becoming the best state in the nation for families raising young children by improving and expanding the delivery of child care and early learning programs for children from birth until they start Kindergarten. In 2019, Governor JB Pritzker established an Early Childhood Funding Commission charged with studying and making recommendations on funding goals and funding mechanisms that provide equitable access to high-quality early childhood education and care services for all children birth to age five.

According to the report of the Illinois Commission on Equitable Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Funding, “The beating heart of an effective ECEC system is the community, and in order to provide for community input, the Commission urges creation of a formal community and regional infrastructure.”

In response to this recommendation, the State partnered with the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (INCCRRA) to build this equity-driven statewide regional system, Birth to Five Illinois, comprised of staff and local Councils to amplify family, provider, and community voices in the state policy-making process and give local and state leaders a more accurate understanding of the early childhood gaps in each Region.

Mission

To create a statewide regional infrastructure that will amplify input from communities in the development of policies and funding priorities. We support the mobilization of communities to build and sustain equitable access to inclusive, high-quality early childhood services for all children and families in the state of Illinois.

Vision

Reimagining a more equitable ECEC system that respects family and community voice and works to ensure it is centered and prioritized at every level of decision-making in Illinois.

Values/Goals

- **Family Voice:** Through this transformation centered on authentic family and community engagement, we will address the inequitable distribution of resources and services and rebuild our State’s ECEC system.
- **Racial Equity:** In an effort to move our ECEC system to one where racism no longer impacts a child’s success, we will work to dismantle barriers that have limited access to high-quality services for minoritized children in every corner of our State.
- **Collective Impact:** Birth to Five Illinois will build a system that harnesses knowledge directly from families and providers and encourages decision makers to ensure new and/or expanded services are created to meet community needs. This community-driven framework will directly influence policy/funding at the local, regional, and state level.

Timeline

- **March 2021**
Early Childhood Commission Report Published
- **September 2021**
Birth to Five Illinois Director, Cicely Fleming, Hired
- **February 2022**
Official Public Launch of Birth to Five Illinois
- **March 2022**
Held Regional Community Engagement Live Webinars
- **April 2022**
Established Partnerships with Existing Regional Early Childhood Collaborations
- **May – July 2022**
Hired 39 Regional Council Managers across the State
- **August – November 2022**
Hired Additional 78 Regional Support Staff
- **September 2022**
Awarded \$2.6 Million to 24 Implementation Grantees
- **October – November 2022**
Established 39 Birth to Five Illinois Action Councils
- **December 2022**
Established 39 Birth to Five Illinois Family Councils
- **January 2023**
Awarded \$575,000 to 9 Planning Grantees
- **January – April 2023**
Council Meetings & Ongoing Community Engagement (Focus Groups & Interviews)
- **June 2023**
39 Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessments Released
- **July – August 2023**
Report Dissemination & Public Input



State Team Leadership & Staff Trainings

Birth to Five Illinois leadership includes:

Cicely Fleming (she/her) is the Director for Birth to Five Illinois. She has a successful history within Community Collaborations and has played a key part in systems design and equity analyses. Cicely's primary scope of work includes Strategic/Future Planning, Budget, Alignment with State, Sustainability, Expanding Public Awareness, Partnership Management, Coordination/Partnership with other state community systems, Legislative Liaison, and State Agency Liaison.

Sonja Clark (she/her) is the Director of Operations for Birth to Five Illinois. In this capacity, she plays a central role in establishing the foundation of support for the Birth to Five Illinois Councils throughout the state of Illinois. Sonja's primary scope of work includes creating Internal Policies/Procedures, Continuous Quality Improvement, and Budgeting.

Shavon Parker (she/her) is the Assistant Director for Birth to Five Illinois. She brings over 15 years of early childhood leadership experience and a wealth of knowledge to this role. In her previous position, Shavon was the Program Director for the Maternal and Child Health Birth to Three Home Visiting & Prevention Initiative Doula programs at Catholic Charities of Chicago. Shavon's primary role is providing day-to-day support of Regional Council Managers including Professional Development, team building, and management skill development.

Hiring & Onboarding

Between May 2022 and November 2022, 117 staff were hired to work in the Regional Birth to Five Illinois Offices. Each Regional Office is staffed by a Regional Council Manager, Regional Family & Community Engagement Specialist, and a Regional Administrative Support. Three cohorts of Regional Council Managers were onboarded in-person at the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (INCCRRA) offices in May, June, and July of 2022. Regional Support staff were onboarded by their Regional Managers using a guide provided by the State Team including readings, live meetings, and recorded sessions.

Partner-Led Training for Staff

- **Illinois Action for Children (IAFC):** Through funding provided by Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), IAFC provided Training and Technical support for the Birth to Five Illinois Department for our inaugural year. The Community Systems Development Team supported the execution of Birth to Five Illinois Virtual Kick-offs; offered Communities of Practice and provided coaching support for each Regional Manager; and held live and recorded information sessions for both staff and Action and Family Council members, including eight hours of Chicago Regional Organizing Against Racism (CROAR)^{2,3} training, and other professional development.
- **Erikson Institute:** The entire Birth to Five Illinois Department participated in two trainings on advancing racial equity, decolonizing data and language, systems solutions, and aligning intentions with impact.

² <https://crossroadsantiracism.org/>

³ <https://www.partnerplanact.org/rcs1/regional-community-systems>

- **Trans-Affirming Training:** All State Team staff participated in a workshop providing education and best practices for supporting, respecting, and being an ally to Transgender individuals. A Trans-affirming best practice training for all staff in the Department is forthcoming.

Internal-Led Training for Regional Staff

Additionally, Regional staff received training from State Team members on the following programs and topics to support their work and professional development.

Communications

- Canva (design tool)
- Communications 101
- How to Talk with Press
- MailChimp (email marketing)
- Messaging & Stories
- Orientation to Brand Guide
- Orientation to Style Guide
- Social Media Best Practices
- Tech & Language Support for Meetings

Family & Community Engagement (FACE)

- Best Practices for Using a Live Language Interpreter
- Confab: In-Person Day of Learning
- Engaging Families & Caregivers
- Facilitator Competencies
- Identifying & Developing Family Leaders
- Publishing Family Stories
- Translating Materials into Spanish
- Weekly FACE Support
- World Café & Parent Café

Grants

- ISBE Early Childhood Preschool Block Grant Requests for Proposals (RFP)
- Understanding the Grant Process

Data

- Airtable (database management)
- Conducting Focus Group & Interviews
- Data Collection, Interpretation & Discussion
- Data Ethics
- Report Development Support
- Turning Data into a Story
- Writing Alt-text for Charts, Graphs & Maps
- Writing Needs & Recommendations

Support for Regional Staff

Area Coordinators

To develop community relationships and awareness as staff were hired, Birth to Five Illinois contracted with six trusted community members to serve as Area Coordinators throughout the State. These individuals made connections with key stakeholders within communities in their assigned areas and laid the foundation for the Regional Council Managers including recruiting future Action Council, Family Council, and Selection Committee members. Area Coordinators supported the department from fall 2021 through fall 2022.

Karen Nunnally (she/her), Area 1 Coordinator

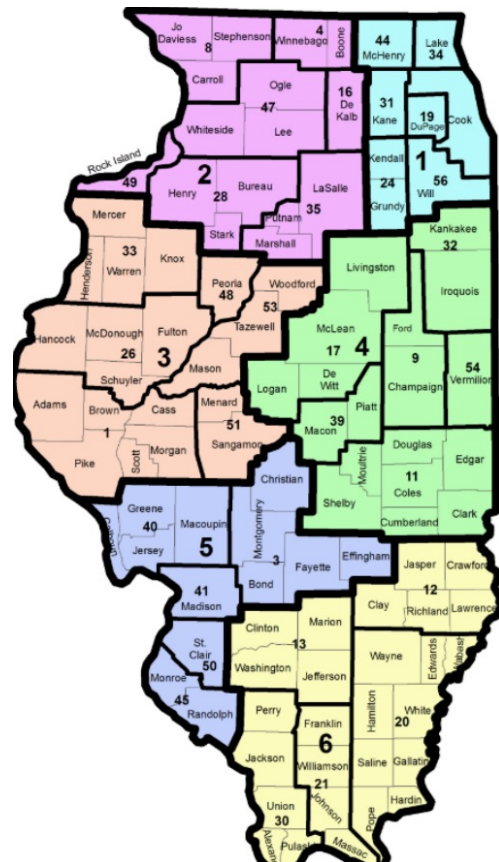
Diana Merdian (she/her), Area 2 Coordinator

Jacqui Jones (she/her), Area 3 Coordinator

Dana David (she/her), Area 4 Coordinator

Kim Hune (she/her), Area 5 Coordinator

Lori Longueville (she/her), Area 6 Coordinator



Office Hours

To ensure Regional Teams had direct access to and support from the State Team, “Office Hours” were established. These open sessions allowed Regional staff to ask questions, get more detailed directions on tasks, and build relationships across the State. Sessions were offered on a weekly or bi-weekly basis.

- **Communications:** Sessions were open to questions from any/all Regional Team members, but others covered specific topics such as social media, graphic design, media relations, newsletter production, marketing, and more.
- **Data:** Sessions were open to questions from any/all Regional Team members, but some were focused on topics such as telling stories with data, focus group and interview recruitment, and database management.
- **Family & Community Engagement:** Sessions were held for Regional Family & Community Engagement (FACE) Specialists and covered topics such as engaging families, parents as leaders, recruiting and outreach strategies, meeting facilitation, developing relationships, and meeting and training dynamics.
- **Admin Academy:** Sessions were held for Regional Administrative Support staff and covered tasks such as file organization, scheduling, using Microsoft Office Suite, Airtable, and communications support.
- **Director Sessions:** Quarterly calls with the three directors were held for all Regional and support staff (Regional FACE Specialists, Regional Administrative Support). The goal of these calls was to build community with the Team and to provide time for an unscripted conversation and Q&A.

Regional Council Manager Development

Regional Council Managers (RCMs) also receive continuous support through weekly team meetings, check-ins with Birth to Five Illinois Directors, and ongoing professional development opportunities.

Weekly RCM Meetings

RCM meetings are held virtually via Zoom every week. State Team Managers report information regarding Data, Communications, Family & Community Engagement, Office/Staff Management, Budgets, and more. During this time, RCMs have the opportunity to ask questions, discuss challenges, and share ideas with one another. Other departments of INCCRRA, such as Human Resources, Informational Technology (IT) and Finance, often join to provide additional supports for the RCMs during this time.

Director/RCM Check-Ins

The Assistant Director meets with the RCMs individually on a weekly or bi-weekly basis to discuss Regional Office updates and staffing concerns (if applicable). The RCMs are also given

ongoing support through reflective supervision, which is a practice used to create thought provoking ideas by way of active listening and open-ended questioning. The Assistant Director supports the RCMs through dialogue to provide the support and knowledge necessary to guide critical thinking and decision-making.

All Managers in the Birth to Five Illinois Department also facilitate reflective supervision with their support staff monthly.

What is reflective supervision?

Reflective supervision is a collaborative and supportive process where Team members meet monthly with their supervisor to talk about their work. Teams discuss successes and challenges they are facing at work and use the space to offer feedback and solutions to the challenges they have raised during the discussion. The goal of reflective supervision is to build a professional relationship that is rooted in open communication, honesty, and trust.

Ongoing Professional Development

Regional staff are allotted annual professional development funds to cover trainings, subscriptions, conferences, workshops, and any additional supports related to Birth to Five Illinois' mission, vision, and scope of work.

RCMs and their support staff identify professional development opportunities related to their work and participate individually or together as a team. Ongoing professional development opportunities enable RCMs and support staff to continuously develop their existing skills while learning new ones, which promotes continuous personal and professional growth and development.



Advancing Equity

Birth to Five Illinois contracted NORC⁴ to lead our department through Equity and Culturally Responsive Practice (CRP) to conduct an equity gap analysis, develop a comprehensive equity plan, and establish performance measures for a successful implementation plan. NORC worked with an internal Racial Equity Team that represented staff from throughout the State.

Moving into our upcoming year, our Team will be implementing several learning opportunities, establishing internal Communities of Practice, and reviewing and creating departmental practices to work towards our racial equity goals which include both staff learning and community engagement.



Birth to Five Illinois State Team members and Regional Council Managers with NORC Associate Director, Vince Welch.

⁴<https://www.norc.org/>

Advocacy

Birth to Five Illinois State and Regional Team members visited the Capitol in Springfield in January and February 2023 to talk with State Senators and Representatives who had not yet connected with the Birth to Five Illinois Office in their district, as well as to deepen conversations with those serving on committees about how the Birth to Five Illinois system is designed to give State leadership the community input that will allow them to provide resources and allocate funding based on the actual needs of their constituents.



Left: Birth to Five Illinois Director, Cicely Fleming (left), and Illinois State Representative (IL-78) Camille Lilly.

Top: Birth to Five Illinois Regional Council Managers (front) with advocates and members of the Illinois General Assembly (back).

Elizabeth Gibson, Regional Council Manager for Birth to Five Illinois: Region 32 (Kankakee and Iroquois Counties) provided in-person testimony in Springfield in March 2023 on the importance of a mixed delivery system in eliminating preschool deserts at the newly formed Senate Early Childhood Committee meeting, chaired by State Senator Cristina Pacione-Zayas.



Regional Council Manager, Liz Gibson, testifying in front of the Senate Early Childhood Committee.

Members of the Birth to Five Illinois: Region 51 (Sangamon and Menard Counties) Action Council and Family Council joined Illinois State Senators Cristina Pacione-Zayas, Ram Villivalam, Kimberly Lightford, and Omar Aquino at a press conference in Springfield in March 2023 to share their perspectives on the need for accessible, affordable Early Childhood programs for their families and for children in their programs.



Members of the Birth to Five Illinois: Region 51 Action and Family Councils, along with Regional staff and State Senator Cristina Pacione-Zayas.

Birth to Five Illinois Regions

To provide a structure for communities, families, and caregivers to engage with the data and share their experiences, our new statewide infrastructure was created across 39 Regions. The Regions align with existing Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) Regional Offices of Education (ROE) boundaries. To better match demographic data to the needs for ECEC programs, Illinois Action for Children (IAC), along with the Illinois Early Childhood Asset Map (IECAM), provided maps that reflect the true boundaries of the Birth to Five Illinois Regions. Birth to Five Illinois regional boundaries align with school districts instead of strictly following county lines, which can be a challenge for gathering and interpreting data because many early childhood services are provided by, or tied to, school districts.

Council Formation

Birth to Five Illinois Action and Family Councils were created by Regional Selection Committees. To ensure diverse perspectives, outreach efforts focused on community members who might be new to this type of work. Action Councils are comprised of ECEC professionals, healthcare providers, faith leaders, elected officials, and other community members. Each Action Council reserved two seats for parents/caregivers to ensure family voices were included in every discussion. Family Councils are comprised of parents/caregivers from a wide variety of family types: single parents, adoptive and foster parents, caregivers of relatives, children born to parents aged 19 and under, two-parent families, multi-generational families, and more. Each Regional Selection Committee reviewed Interest Forms, and recommendations were made based on a full consideration of a submitter's role/sector, location within the Region, race/ethnicity, gender, and answers to open-ended questions. To ensure diversity and equity, special emphasis was placed on outreach efforts to the State's priority populations.

Regional Outreach

Over the course of the first year, Birth to Five Illinois Regional Teams held or attended over 1,200 community events and reached almost 80,000 people across the State. Below are highlights of events from Regions 34 (Lake County), 39 (Macon and Piatt Counties), and 45 (Monroe and Randolph Counties).

Region 34: National Kidney Foundation of Illinois

Region 34 staff attended an outreach event for the National Kidney Foundation of Illinois in Waukegan. We were honored to have two passionate Family Council members join us. Together, we fostered a warm and welcoming environment, empowering families to be active participants in their children's early education and development journey. The Family Council members at the outreach event passionately conveyed their excitement about Birth to Five Illinois and the significant impact we can have.





Their explanations and genuine enthusiasm resonated with the attendees, leaving them inspired and eager to get involved. The event served as a powerful platform to highlight the importance of the Birth to Five Illinois Action and Family Councils in supporting Early Childhood development and fostering a sense of community among families.

Region 39: Pie in the Face with Birth to Five Illinois!

On June 21, 2023, Region 39 was invited to attend the Mt Zion District Library’s children’s carnival day. On arrival, Birth to Five Illinois staff learned that the volunteer to be Pied in the Face could no longer attend. Our staff stepped up and spent the morning getting hit in the face with over 50 whipped cream pies! The other staff member in attendance was available to talk with parents and caregivers about Birth to Five Illinois’ mission and capture their stories and experiences with Early Childhood Education and Care.



Region 45: Health Kids Day Family Resource Fair

The “Healthy Kids Day Family Resource Fair” held in Monroe County, hosted by Birth to Five Illinois: Region 45, took place on Saturday, March 18, 2023, at the HTC Center YMCA. The event was well-attended, with 25 local Early Childhood stakeholder representatives setting up resource tables. Some of the stakeholders included the Monroe County Health Department, local police departments, firefighters, occupational therapists, speech therapists, prevention initiatives, and many others.

The fair attracted approximately 130 caregivers along with their children and grandchildren. The focus of the event was to provide information and resources to families, offering free screenings for children and fun activities for all participants to enjoy. Events like this play a crucial role in connecting families with important services and resources they may need to support the development and growth of their children. We look forward to hosting this event again in the future!

Family Councils

A priority of the Governor’s Commission on Equitable Early Childhood Education and Care Funding report⁵ is to design a system that centers family voice and racial equity in the allocation of funding. The development of 39 Birth to Five Illinois Family Councils provides a mechanism to engage local family voice in decision-making and create a strategic plan that clearly identifies the need for expansion of quality ECEC programs and services in each Region.

⁵ <https://oecd.illinois.gov/governors-early-childhood-funding-commission.html>

The Family Council membership is comprised of approximately 15 parents and caregivers in each Region. Birth to Five Illinois has intentionally worked to seat parents and caregivers on the Family Councils that reflect the priority populations; we want to ensure that all family voices, especially those voices that have historically not been invited into these spaces, can serve on their regional Family Council. The Family Councils met bi-monthly and worked diligently on the creation of the Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment.

Because we sought to hear from people who have a variety of lived experiences, we were intentional in recruiting parents and caregivers from many different family types. Some examples are those who identify as:

- A single parent
- A parent who had a child at age 19 or younger
- A parent in a two-parent household
- An adoptive/foster parent
- A parent of a child with a disability
- A parent with a disability
- A grandparent or other relative raising young children
- A parent or caregiver in a multi-generational household

We also wanted to ensure we brought the voices of those from priority populations to the table. The Illinois Early Learning Council⁶ has identified several priority populations, defined as underserved and underrepresented populations. The purpose of the priority populations list is to drive resources and attention toward improving access to high-quality, responsive services for children and families with limited to no access to economic or material resources. While the priority populations list addresses the access issue, Birth to Five Illinois strives to focus the attention of policymakers and Early Childhood stakeholders on identifying ways to engage these impacted communities to remove the systemic barriers causing the access issue within each Region.

The list includes but is not limited to:

- Families with refugee or asylee status
- Families who face barriers due to immigration status
- Families with parental involvement in the criminal justice system
- Families of migrant workers
- Families unable to access resources due to limited language, and/or religious or cultural beliefs
- Family or caregiver with less than a high school diploma or degree
- Families that are involved with the Illinois Department of Children & Family Services (DCFS)
- Families with income at or below 50% or 100% Federal Poverty Level (FPL)

In summer 2023, 663 people submitted Family Council Interest Forms. There were 456 invited to serve on the Family Councils; 350 will remain on the Family Councils for year two.

⁶<https://oecd.illinois.gov/content/dam/soi/en/web/oecd/earlylearningcouncil/access/documents/priority-populations-updated-2021.pdf>

Action Councils

Ensuring all children and families have access to ECEC services requires a wide range of stakeholders working together in every community in Illinois to determine what families need to thrive, and then creating new and enhanced services in response. The Birth to Five Illinois Action Councils are made up of local family members, caregivers, Early Childhood professionals, and people from a wide variety of work sectors and roles across each Region, which include (but are not limited to):

- Business owners, employers/Human Resource (HR) staff, Chamber of Commerce staff, Economic Development Council members
- Child care or preschool providers
- Community workers (library worker, safety officer, mail carrier, etc.)
- Early Intervention staff/providers
- Faith leaders
- Family service providers (domestic violence shelter, shelter for the unhoused/those experiencing homelessness, recent refugee or immigrant Welcome Center, etc.)
- Healthcare providers (physician, nurse, physician's assistant, mental health provider, health department, health educator, etc.)
- Higher education staff
- Home visitors
- Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Consultants (I/ECMHC)
- Local Early Childhood or Education Collaboration staff
- Local school district administrators, teachers, or staff
- Local, county, state, or federal elected officials or staff
- Philanthropy or family foundation staff
- Social workers
- Staff from Regional Office of Education
- State of Illinois government employees
- Stay at home caregivers

Their role is to:

- Amplify the voices of families
- Identify gaps in ECEC supports and services, and make recommendations to make the Early Childhood system more equitable for all children
- Work closely with Local Early Childhood Collaborations and coalitions to support state and community goals
- Communicate regularly with families, providers, teachers, communities, policy makers, and legislators about the work

In summer 2023, 809 people submitted Action Council Interest Forms. There were 626 invited to serve on the Action Councils; 471 will remain on the Action Councils for year two.

Year One Council Survey

At the end of year one, Council members were asked to complete a survey that asked about their experiences while serving on the Councils. Eighty-two percent (82%) of all respondents rated their experience with their Council as great, and 83% answered that they were very likely to recommend serving on the Council to someone else. Below are some selected quotes that highlight the experiences of some Action and Family Council members.

I am thankful that this opportunity was made available to me and other interested parents and community members in planning for our communities.

The staff approach everyone with kindness with the goal of understanding. They are wonderful to work with.

I am really impressed with the organization and well thought out process of gathering and sharing data. These meetings never lost sight of what we were, and the process was clear.

We feel so valued, and I know this program is going to make a huge difference!



Collaborative Partners

The work of Birth to Five Illinois would not be possible without support from many partners throughout the State. Listed below are key partners who supported the work of Birth to Five Illinois throughout the first year.

- **Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE):** State Team leadership team met with ECEC team monthly to report on contract and future scopes of work.
- **Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS):** State Team leadership team met with ECEC team monthly to report on contract deliverables.
- **Illinois Action For Children (IAFC):** State Team leadership team and Data Strategist met with Community Systems Development (CSD) team weekly to discuss training and coaching.
- **Illinois Early Childhood Asset Map (IECAM):** State Team members met with IECAM team to discuss accessibility to data and received training on how to use the website.
- **Early Childhood Participation Data Set (ECPDS):** Data Strategist attended meetings with ECPDS committee members on a monthly/bi-monthly basis.
- **Chicago Early Childhood Integrated Data System (CECIDS):** Region 1-A Council Manager attended monthly meetings and served on the Executive Council; Data Strategist attended meetings on an as-needed basis.
- **Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) Child Care Advisory Council:** State Team members attended full meetings and worked with Family & Community Engagement subcommittee.
- **Early Learning Council (ELC):** State Team members attended full Council meetings, as well as the Integration & Alignment and Community Equity & Access Subcommittee meetings.
- **Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) Agencies:** State Team leadership participated in monthly directors' meetings.
- **Pyramid Model Statewide Leadership Team:** State Team staff attended quarterly meetings, as well as monthly IL Implementation Work Group meetings.

Birth to Five Illinois also established relationships with statewide ECEC advocates and stakeholders including: Advance Illinois, Raising Illinois, Latino Policy Forum, Illinois Head Start Association, All Our Kids Network, Start Early, Caregiver Connections, Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity Scholarship Program, We the Village, Child & Family Connections/Local Interagency Council and many, many more.

Communications

Maggie Koller (she/her) is the Communications Manager for Birth to Five Illinois. She most recently served as the Director of Communication & Dissemination for the Illinois Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development (GOECD). Maggie received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology and Theater Arts/Dance from Beloit College and holds a Master of Science in Child Development with a specialization in Children's Law and Policy from Erikson Institute.

Sophie Kershaw-Patilla (she/her) serves as the Communications Coordinator. Sophie has worked in education, communications, and finance for the past 20+ years. She previously worked as the communications specialist for the National Research and Training Center on Blindness and Low Vision at Mississippi State University and is currently an adjunct faculty member in music and psychology at Lincoln Trail College.

Amber McMorris (she/her) works as the Executive Assistant, dedicating part of her time to the work of the Communications Team. Amber has an extensive work history in technology, marketing, and federal service. Throughout her professional career, she has specialized in administrative, analytical, and customer service duties. Most recently, she utilized her talents to aid hundreds of seniors, minors, and those who are underserved in the federal government sector.

The Communications Team supports the statewide communications strategy and the internal communication systems for both the Birth to Five Illinois State Team and the 39 Regional Offices. They are responsible for upholding the organizational values of racial equity, family voice, and collective impact across statewide and region-specific communications, including but not limited to content creation, email marketing, website design and development, social media marketing, and press/public relations.

Equitable Access

At the heart of Birth to Five Illinois is an emphasis on creating a more equitable Early Childhood Education and Care system, which includes access to information in a language or way that meets the needs of all stakeholders.

- **Languages:** State-level communications are disseminated in both English and Spanish. For 18 of the 39 Regions that meet the threshold of 1,000 English Language Learners (ELLs) based on data from the 2021 Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) Report Cards tracking the number of ELLs in public school districts, their webpages, newsletters, and resources are translated into Spanish. Simultaneous language interpretation is provided for Council meetings when needed by members.
- **Accessibility:** It is our best practice to ensure linguistic, auditory, and visual accessibility for all electronic and printed materials. We strive for plain language and readability to make our outreach family friendly.

Newsletters

State Newsletters are sent monthly, highlight the work of Birth to Five Illinois, and provide links to resources and announcements from state partners in both English and Spanish. At the end of June 2023, there were 11,496 subscribers.

The Regional Newsletters are created and distributed by Regional staff. They report on the work of their Councils and link to local events and resources. At the end of June 2023, there were 4,445 subscribers to Regional Newsletters across the State.

Since September 2022, State and Regional Birth to Five Illinois staff have connected with over 19,000 people throughout the State.

Following is an example of our Region 13 Newsletter (Clinton, Jefferson, Marion, and Washington Counties).

Region 13

Clinton, Jefferson, Marion, Washington

An Update on Where Things Are

We have made huge strides in Region 13 in the past few months. Valuable partnerships have been created and true collaboration is beginning to take shape. We are very excited to continue our work into 2023 and are interested in hearing more from you and our community. Our Action and Family Councils have been hard at work to identify the strengths and needs in our region and have begun to compile information for our Regional Scan.

If you would like to contribute to our work, please consider joining a Focus Group or contacting me to set up an interview. We would like to hear from as many voices as possible as we work to make a difference for children and families in our communities.



Meet & Greet Celebration

[Birth to Five Illinois: Region 13](#) had so much fun at our [Meet & Greet Celebration](#) in June! It was fantastic to meet the community members we have been working with for almost one year and their families.



Social Media

Birth to Five Illinois also maintains a presence on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube. Each Regional Office maintains their own Facebook Group to engage with their local communities. Below are the links and subscribers to the State social platforms as of June 2023.

- Facebook: www.facebook.com/BirthToFiveIL (1.4K followers)
- Twitter: www.twitter.com/BirthtoFiveIL (164 followers)
- Instagram: www.instagram.com/birthtofiveil/ (214 followers)
- LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/company/birthtofiveil/ (633 followers)
- YouTube: www.youtube.com/@birthtofiveil (78 subscribers)

Website

The Birth to Five Illinois website, including resources, materials, and reports, is maintained in both English and Spanish: www.birthtofiveil.com.

Cross-Channel Outreach

Family Stories

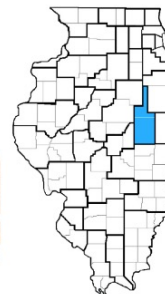
Birth to Five Illinois created a space for parents and caregivers to share their family story of ECEC challenges and successes. As families share their stories, we amplify the disparities in the system so we can work collectively and strategically to mend what is broken, while also celebrating what is working. Stories are posted in English and Spanish on the website and further shared across social media platforms.

Atención inclusiva para todos los niños - Por Aurea Garvin

Mi mayor desafío con la atención a la primera infancia fue en 2017, cuando mi hijo regresaba a casa del hospital, después de haber estado casi 2 años en múltiples hospitales; solo pude encontrar un centro de cuidado infantil dispuesto a atenderlo. De todos los centros en Champaign y Urbana, solo había uno. Mi hijo tenía una enfermera en casa que asistiría al cuidado infantil con él y se haría cargo de todas sus necesidades médicas, y aún así la mayoría de los centros no me devolvían la llamada. Decían que no estaban calificados para cuidarlo, y uno incluso me dijo que como ya casi cumplía 3 años, podía asistir a preescolar en donde le podrían hacer adaptaciones.

Yo solo quería que mi hijo asistiera a la guardería para estar con otros niños. Por la gracia de Dios, ahora tiene 7 años, le va muy bien en la escuela y está creciendo. Recibimos otros servicios en casa que le ayudaron y le permitieron crecer. No quiero que otras familias enfrenten la misma situación. El cuidado infantil debería ser inclusivo para todos los niños con o sin necesidades médicas.

Lo que más necesitamos ahora es atención infantil asequible para nuestro hijo de 2 años. La mayoría de los centros de cuidado infantil son demasiado costosos para lo que podemos costear o tienen listas de espera extremadamente largas. Sólo quiero que mi hijo disfrute donde va a la guardería, que juegue, aprenda y se divierta. Todos los niños merecen una oportunidad para crecer, aprender y desarrollarse, sin importar cuánto dinero ganen sus padres.



El cuidado infantil debería ser inclusivo para todos los niños con o sin necesidades médicas.
- Aurea Garvin

Press & Media

Birth to Five Illinois staff are regularly interviewed by local news outlets. Their radio interviews, podcasts, TV broadcasts, and articles are posted to the website and shared across social media platforms.



Heartland Head Start Faces Leadership Turnover and Uncertainty as New School Year Begins

Carol Weisheit, Region 17 Council Manager, provided comments for this article on the leadership turnover at Heartland Head Start, a Bloomington-based early childhood program.

[Read More](#)



Nonprofit Works to Address Issues Plaguing Early Childhood Education and Resources

Read an interview in the Wednesday Journal with Tiffany Draine, Regional Council Manager for Region 1-B-B (Cook County West)!

[Read More](#)



'It Can Implode and Our Families are Suffering': What are Northern Illinois' Early Childhood Needs?

Peter Modlin with NPR talks with State and Regional Birth to Five Illinois staff about the needs identified in the Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessments for Boone, Winnebago, and DeKalb Counties.

[Read More](#)

Grants

Angela Hubbard (she/her) leads Birth to Five Illinois' efforts to provide grant funding to local Early Childhood Collaborations. She manages the marketing, application, selection, reporting, and monitoring processes of the grant program. Birth to Five Illinois places a high value on the work of Collaborations because they are embedded in local communities of families and children participating in Early Childhood programs and services. Collaborations have a direct line of sight on how to improve and build upon existing systems. It is important to Birth to Five Illinois that the State begins to view Collaborations as natural funding conduits for local Early Childhood systems.

In our first year, Birth to Five Illinois offered two grant programs. Implementation Grants are intended for Collaborations that are already well-established. Planning Grants were created for groups looking to initiate Early Childhood Collaborations in areas where they do not already exist. In developing these grants, Birth to Five Illinois intentionally built in aspects that would help select recipients in an equitable way. Applicants were prioritized based on their service to children of color, geographic reach, and social vulnerability index.

Grantees are using the funds to accomplish a broad range of activities including increasing outreach to minoritized groups, development of workforce solutions, and the establishment of Coordinated Intake systems. Collaborations have shared the following feedback with us about the importance of this funding to their missions:

Nile Township Early Childhood Alliance

This Collaboration has hired family liaisons who speak Urdu, Pashto, Farsi, Dari, Spanish, Arabic, and Assyrian. They have accompanied multiple newly arriving families on child care tours and through the enrollment process of Early Childhood programs. They have hosted multiple outreach events and used grant funds to create a new resource-filled website.

“This Birth to Five Illinois grant has enabled monumental growth within our Early Childhood collaboration that would not have been realized otherwise. We are looking forward to continued growth and the opportunity to continue to affect a more equitable community.”



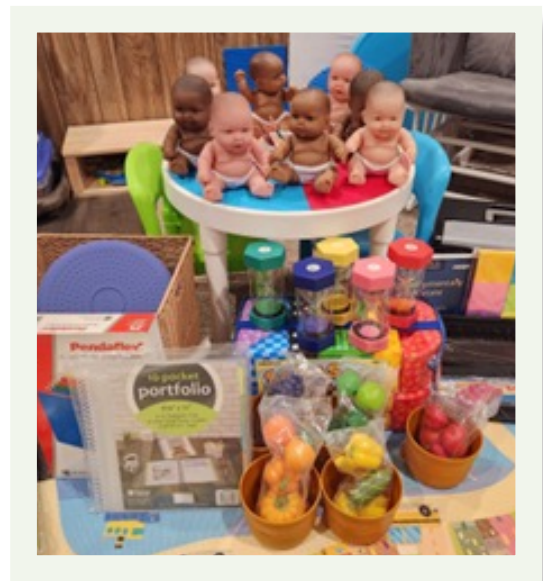
The Village

This Collaboration is working on filling a gap in providers who can better serve the community's French-speaking Congolese families and children. The Village is using grant funds to provide support to a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential cohort by providing teacher kits, technology, training, and mileage to the participants to help them achieve their CDA.

Carbondale Early Childhood Impact Table

This Planning Grant supported the development of a new Collaboration that has used grant funding to build on the momentum of work that was already happening in the Region. With this much-needed infusion of funds, the Collaboration has hit the ground running. They are developing an online presence and have increased local engagement to attract additional local investment. The City of Carbondale has gotten behind the Collaboration's efforts by funding its first ever community calendar for family use.

"Probably the most important partnership is with the city. As a result of this work, they are more engaged in looking at how the city is meeting the needs of children and families. The new Mayor served on the Steering Committee for the cabinet and is very supportive of this initiative."



Items contained in outreach and awareness kits distributed to local hospitals, doula programs, and other partners.



Outreach material for Implicit Bias Training.

Boone County Maternal and Child Health Advisory Council

This Collaboration hosted a training called "Humanize my Hoodie" to educate council members and the community at-large on Implicit Bias.

Family & Community Engagement (FACE)

The State Family & Community Engagement (FACE) Team is comprised of Family & Community Engagement Manager, a Family & Community Engagement Coordinator, and 39 Regional Family & Community Engagement Specialists.

Dena Chapman (she/her) is the Family & Community Engagement Manager for Birth to Five Illinois. Dena brings 20+ years of family and community engagement experience spanning the early intervention and child welfare sectors. Her resume includes building sustainable parent support groups, curriculum development, parent training facilitation, and parent leadership development work. Additionally, Dena manages the work of the Family Advisory Committee of the Illinois Early Learning Council as one of the committee Co-Chairs. As a staunch advocate for parent voice, Dena has a proven track record of mobilizing parents to become effective and respected leaders, building power on the policy front for the ECEC community.

David Quiroz (he/him) served as the inaugural Family & Community Engagement Coordinator for Birth to Five Illinois. David earned a double major in Early Childhood Education and Spanish at Millikin University in Decatur, Illinois. During his studies, he traveled to Latin America to visit schools and continue learning about different cultures and educational landscapes. After graduating, David taught bilingual preschool for seven years before transitioning to work in family engagement. Since then, he has facilitated several different parenting programs in a variety of settings and started programs in multiple districts, focusing on engaging parents and strengthening the school and home connection. David is currently the Regional Council Manager for Region 31.

Melissa Williams (she/her) became the Family & Community Engagement Coordinator for Birth to Five Illinois in August 2023. Melissa has worked in education for over 15 years in various settings including public schools, early childhood centers, Head Start, Early Head Start, and Child Care Resource and Referral. Throughout her career she has maintained a dedication to ensuring families are valued and treated as partners in their child's education and strongly believes that family voice is vital to ensuring that quality early childhood education is accessible to all. Melissa earned a Bachelor of Science in Education from Lock Haven University of Pennsylvania and a Master of Science in Education from Western Illinois University.

The FACE Manager determines the vision for the scope of family and community engagement work and its alignment with the mission, vision, and values of Birth to Five Illinois. The FACE Manager and FACE Coordinator work in tandem to coach and support the work of the 39 Regional FACE Specialists. Largely, that work has been focused on creating and implementing processes and structures to lay a foundation for FACE Specialists to execute their work. Additionally, the State FACE Team implemented trainings to enrich and develop the skill set of the FACE Specialists, which enabled them to build meaningful relationships with the parents and caregivers on the Family Councils and within their local communities. Strong relationships enable the FACE Specialists to have strong, equitable partnerships with our parent leaders.

State Outreach

In our first year, FACE Specialists were laser-focused on outreach opportunities in their specific Regions. The intent behind outreach has been recruitment of parents and caregivers to serve on the Regional Family Councils. FACE Specialists focused their outreach efforts on family and community events specific to the demographic served by Birth to Five Illinois. Creative and stringent efforts were employed to seat diverse and inclusive parents and caregivers on the Family Councils across the State.

Training

The Parent Café is a nationally recognized, parent-driven process for parents to keep their children safe and their families strong. Through the Parent Cafés, parents host small, intimate conversations to strengthen their parenting and parent-to-parent support by building protective factors. All 39 Regional FACE Specialists completed Be Strong Family's virtual Parent Café training. Birth to Five Illinois will use this training model to further engage and support our parents on the Family Councils and build their leadership capacity.

The World Café is a structured model for hosting intimate community conversations that matter and will result in a plan of action. Regional FACE Specialists as well as members of the Action and Family Councils also completed World Café Training this year. The training was offered as one tool for community dissemination of the Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessments.

Engaging & Developing Parent Leaders

The work of Family and Community Engagement is never static; it is forever moving and changing as are the parents that we seek to engage. As all 39 Regions and their staff worked arduously to recruit parents and caregivers to their Family Councils, the FACE Team was hard at work devising a plan to keep those parents and caregivers engaged in the interim of Councils starting their work.

Our FACE Team effectively created a two-step approach to family engagement for our parents and caregivers: first, we implemented "check-ins" for each and every parent and caregiver that was selected for the Council. Those check-ins consisted of a phone call (or email, if unreachable) to share updates on the work of Birth to Five Illinois and to answer any questions they might have. We also did check-ins with the parents that were not selected for the Council; we invited those parents to stay connected to the work of Birth to Five Illinois and other parent leadership opportunities such as focus groups, surveys, and interviews which would afford them the opportunity to share their success and challenges in the ECEC system.

Our second strategy was the implementation of a virtual Parent Café. Our Parent Café theme focused on parental resilience and being resilient advocates for early childhood education. The parents really loved the Parent Cafés! They enjoyed getting to meet their soon-to-be Regional Council Manager and meeting other parents in their Region and across other Regions of the State.

The FACE Team of Birth to Five Illinois is passionate about building healthy relationships and strong partnerships with the parents and caregivers we work with; we believe that strong, healthy relationships are central to the success and sustainability of authentic family and community engagement.

Regional Outreach

Regional FACE Specialists shared about the outreach and engagement that has been happening in some of the communities they serve.

Region 1: Brittany Peterson

“It’s been really exciting for our team that 100% of both Councils are going into year two with us and wanting to continue to do the work in Region 1 together. It was also really valuable to be selected with the 7 other individuals to provide feedback in a listening session with Wendy McCollough this past month. It proved to be really valuable for all of us to share openly about the work we have done in our Regions.”

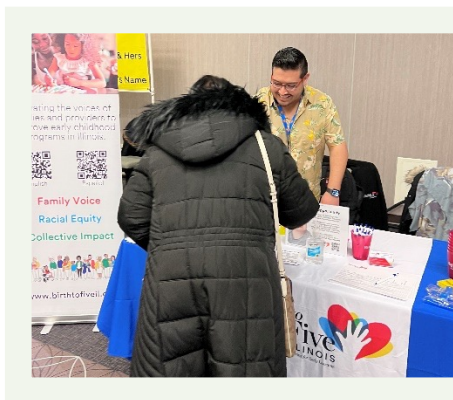


Region 1 FACE Specialist Brittany Peterson at a local community event.



Region 1-B-C: Jaime Garibay

“The Region 1-B-C Team attended its first summer event at the Homewood/Flossmoor Juneteenth Festival! We connected with many members of the community from our Region. We met with the owner and CEO of Play-Smart about the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) Request for Proposal (RFP), an assistant principal from Lincoln Elementary in Calumet City, and the directors of The Children Research Triangle. We also held a combined meeting of the Councils to brainstorm and get their input on disseminating our Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment.”



Region 1-B-C FACE Specialist Jaime Garibay and a community member at an event.



Region 1-B-C FACE Specialist Jaime Garibay and Administrative Support Leah Armour at a community event.

Region 9: Jackie Charles

“I am so excited to report that all of my Family Council members are staying on the Council for another year!!! And I also have two new potential members to add!!!”



Region 9 Council Manager Caitlyn Scarbro (left) and FACE Specialist Jackie Charles at a Trunk-or-Treat event. Region 9 staff with local Early Childhood leaders.

Region 21: Chelsi Diles

“Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment Sneak Peak discussions were held at the Johnson County Children’s Cabinet meeting, Johnson County Business Group meeting and the Mantracon Board meeting. We also have dissemination meetings scheduled.

Family Council members have been active and engaged! They have been informing the public of the Council Interest Forms and speaking with others about their experiences on the Council. They also helped hand out Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment Sneak Peak flyers in their community. Half of my Council signed up to take the World Cafe training.”



Region 21 FACE Specialist Chelsi Diles at a library event.

Family Council member Karen Beach helps Region 21 staff hand out flyers to a local Head Start.

Region 40: Lindsey Coultas

“We recently presented to the Regional Office of Education in front of Region 40 superintendents and principals. We received great feedback from this presentation and were invited back during the Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment dissemination process.”



Region 40 Administrative Support Lisa Wojcik at a local library event.



Region 40 staff with local dentist mascot, Flossy.

Data

Leslie Price (she/her) is the Data Strategist for Birth to Five Illinois. She has experience in partnering with communities to create and implement evaluations of programs and policies, as well as data analysis. Leslie has served as an external evaluator on local boards related to mental and behavioral health, maternal health, and substance misuse treatment and recovery.

August Stockwell (they/them) is the Data Coordinator for Birth to Five Illinois. They have a background in behavioral research, mental health and neurodiversity, and gender-affirming practices for clinicians and organizations. August's primary scope of work includes data management, content accessibility, training, and writing support.

The State Data Team is responsible for building relationships with external data partners, supporting Regional Teams with data collection, and identifying resources that can be utilized by the organization in the discussion of Early Childhood supports and services.

Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessments

The Action Council, Family Council, and Regional Teams reviewed quantitative and qualitative data related to ECEC services, programs, and supports, and worked together to create an Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment to highlight the experiences of families and caregivers throughout the Region, as well as strengths, needs, and recommendations developed by both Action and Family Council members.

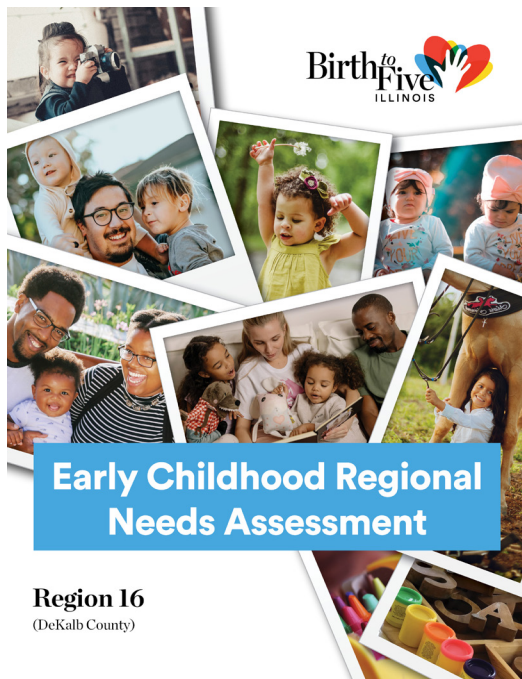
Through the Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessments, Birth to Five Illinois seeks to amplify the voices of those who have historically been minoritized, marginalized, and uninvited to the decision-making table. The report offers parents, families, and caregivers a platform for sharing valuable insights about their experiences within their local the ECEC system. Additionally, it provides local, regional, and state decisionmakers with qualitative information about each Region, adding critical context to the quantitative data that is available.

The report serves several purposes. First, the Regional Councils have identified gaps in data that is needed to best understand ECEC in their area; Birth to Five Illinois Council members and Regional staff have also created recommendations on how to increase enrollment in, and access to, ECEC programs and services, as well as to determine what additional services/programs may be needed to support families and caregivers throughout the Region.

Second, policy makers, elected officials, and state agencies can use the report to help understand the ECEC landscape in the areas they serve. The aim is to help decisionmakers direct funding to areas of need and understand data related to ECEC indicators by providing context from a community perspective.

Lastly, the report has been shared with local units of government, Early Childhood providers, organizations, and agencies so they can use it to assess local ECEC funding and supports in their community, especially for minoritized community members. The data can be used to identify where ECEC providers and supports may need to be expanded to support working parents and caregivers, as well as children who receive Early Intervention and Home Visiting services.

The Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessments were released on July 31, 2023; copies of each Region's report can be found by going to www.birthtofiveil.com/reports.



Data Partnerships

The work of Birth to Five Illinois depends on strong partnerships with several Early Childhood data partners throughout the State. Below are key partners, along with the dataset(s) they share with Birth to Five Illinois.

- **Northern Illinois University (NIU):** Early Childhood Participation Data Set (ECPDS)
- **Illinois Early Childhood Asset Map (IECAM):** Regional enrollment and demographic data
- **Chicago Early Childhood Integrated Data System (CECIDS):** Chicago-specific enrollment and demographic data
- **Illinois Action For Children (IAFC):** Regional asset maps with child care sites and demographic data
- **Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (INCCRRA):** Early Childhood workforce data

Next Steps

Beginning in the fall of 2023, Birth to Five Illinois transitioned to our second official year of work (thanks to the financial support of the Illinois Department of Human Services Division of Early Childhood), building on the Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessments in two key ways: (1) developing Regional Action Plans, and (2) expanding the assessments to include the Region-specific “whole child” service needs as identified by the community.

The Action Plans will allow Council members to build on the recommendations made in the Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment. This plan will lay out how the Region can use available local resources to move forward with the needs they prioritized. In addition, this Plan will continue the conversation regarding what support is needed from state and federal ECEC programs to meet local needs. The goal is that every Region will have an ECEC blueprint and be prepared to take advantage of opportunities for expansion, including anything new made possible by the Governor’s Smart Start investment.

In addition to being prepared for expanded early learning, many of the Regions identified other gaps in support services that are vital to a child’s (and their family’s) well-being. Like the Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment, this process will examine data (quantitative and qualitative) around mental health. We recognize that children do not live in classrooms, so understanding their larger needs is key to making Illinois the best place to raise young children.

Our Regional Teams have used a true collective impact model to build relationships in their communities, leading to diverse Council membership across the State. The work of the Council members reflects the commitment many people have made to improving the ECEC experiences for children and families and just one piece of these important efforts that have been underway for decades in this State. We look forward to deepening our partnerships with families, providers, community leaders, and state agencies, and to building a better, more equitable Early Childhood system for all children in Illinois.

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