



# OFFICIAL MEMO

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To: Teresa Ramos, Secretary, Illinois Department of Early Childhood (IDEC) ;  
Christina Krasov, Chief Data Officer, Illinois Department of Early  
Childhood (IDEC)

From: Data, Analytics, and Insights (DAI) Workgroup

Date: January 2026

Re: Phase 1 Deliverables: Recommended Priority Metrics and Equity  
Considerations for IDEC's Day 1 Readiness

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## Executive Summary

The Data, Analytics, and Insights (DAI) Workgroup respectfully submits this memo to present its Phase I recommendations on priority metrics and equity-centered data practices to support the Illinois Department of Early Childhood's (IDEC) Day 1 readiness by July 2026. These recommendations are intended to inform the design of IDEC's data, analytics, and insights function that supports a family and provider-centered early childhood system.

Over the last several months, the DAI workgroup, comprised of families, providers, advocates, and state agency representatives, reviewed national best practices, engaged with other transition workgroups, and applied an equity reflection process to identify a set of essential questions and priority metrics. Collectively, these recommendations provide IDEC with a practical and equity-driven roadmap for understanding family and provider experiences, identifying disparities, and strengthening cross-system coordination and decision-making.

This memo summarizes the workgroup's charge, process, and Phase I recommendations, including guidance for applying an equity lens to data collection, interpretation, and use.

## Background and Charge

The Data, Analytics, and Insights Workgroup was established to advise IDEC leadership, specifically the Chief Data Officer, on the design of a modern, equitable early childhood data system. The workgroup's charge is to support the development of a data infrastructure that is family- and provider-centered, actionable, and aligned with IDEC's mission to ensure all children in Illinois have access to high-quality early childhood experiences. An unwavering commitment to equity is central to fulfilling this charge.

The DAI workgroup approached its work with the understanding that how data are collected, interpreted, and used can either reinforce existing inequities or serve as a tool for accountability, transparency, and improvement. As a result, equity considerations were embedded throughout the workgroup’s deliberations and recommendations.

*For a full list of DAI Workgroup members, please see [Appendix A](#) in the Appendices section at the end of this document.*

## **Phase I Scope and Timeline**

Phase I represents the first step in a multi-phase advisory process leading up to IDEC’s Day 1 operations (July 1, 2026). The focus of this phase was to identify priority metrics and essential questions that IDEC should be prepared to track and use at launch.

- **Phase I (June – December 2025):** Develop recommendations for essential questions, priority metrics, and equity considerations through a family, provider, and implementer lens
- **Phase II (January – March 2026):** Develop recommendations to inform a sustainable data governance structure that incorporates approaches for ongoing stakeholder engagement.
- **Phase III (April – June 2026):** Review and provide feedback on early design concepts, including public-facing data tools.

## **DAI Workgroup’s Process & Inputs**

The DAI workgroup’s process was grounded in community agreements and key principles that prioritize family and provider experience, cross-workgroup learning, and reflect the needs of those most impacted by system decisions. Recommendations were informed by:

- The [STEP Forward with Data Framework](#) developed by the Child Trends Early Childhood Data Collaborative
- Input from the Transition Advisory Committee and alignment with the [TAC Equity Framework](#)
- Engagement with the Family Service Workgroups (Supporting Children and Families with Disabilities and Developmental Delays and Supporting Multilingual Learners)
- Public engagement findings and national best practices

Throughout Phase I, the workgroup developed and applied an **[Equity Reflection Tool](#)** (developed in accordance with the TAC Equity Framework and DAI key principles), to assess proposed metrics for their ability to illuminate disparities, support action, minimize harm or burden, and incorporate community perspectives. This process helped strengthen the relevance and rigor of equity-focused recommendations.

## Recommended Essential Questions and Priority Metrics

The STEP Forward with Data Framework (System Transformation for Equitable Preschools) is designed to help **system leaders** use data to identify and address inequities in how children, families, and workforce members experience early childhood. It provides a **structured, equity-centered approach** to understand where and how disparities occur in system design, access, and outcomes, and to guide data-informed action. The DAI workgroup adapted this framework to fit Illinois' birth-to-five early childhood system context.

The framework organizes essential equity questions around **six system steps**—each representing a point where families or workforce members may experience barriers or inequities.

1. **Supply** – Are there enough programs that meet families' needs?
2. **Outreach** – Do families, especially those from marginalized groups, know about options?
3. **Enrollment** – Are eligibility and enrollment procedures equitable?
4. **Learning Experiences** – What are children's experiences in classrooms and care settings?
5. **Transitions** – How do children/families experience moves into, within, or out of programs?
6. **Administration** – Do policies, funding, and infrastructure support equity systemwide?

## Essential Questions

Out of the 20 essential questions (EQs) that the STEP framework outlines across the six system steps, the DAI Workgroup recommends IDEC prioritize the following six EQs. for July 2026 to better understand how children and families experience access and quality within Illinois' early childhood system. These include:

- **EQ1. Supply:** Does the existing supply meet the needs of families from priority populations?
- **EQ9. Learning Experiences:** Do workforce members receive training in supporting the needs of children from priority populations and families?
- **EQ11. Learning Experiences:** Do children from priority populations have access to the developmental supports they need?
- **EQ16. Transitions:** Are children from priority populations reaching developmental milestones when transitioning to kindergarten?
- **EQ18. Administration:** Are there funding mechanisms to support equitable experiences for children and families?
- **EQ19. Administration:** Is there system-level guidance for how to support equitable experiences for children, families, and workforce members?

## Recommended Priority Metrics

For each essential question, the workgroup developed a set of revised priority metrics and additional priority metrics that IDEC may incorporate over time. Collectively, these metrics are intended to:

- Surface inequities in access, quality, and outcomes;
- Reduce fragmentation and establish consistency across programs and agencies;
- Support transparency, continuous quality improvement, and informed resource allocation; and
- Strengthen IDEC's ability to respond to family and provider needs.

The full list of recommended priority metrics, organized by essential question, is presented in the following sections and organized by the following categories:

- Desired outcome: the priority metrics' link to improvement of the early childhood system
- Revised metric: the DAI workgroup's final recommended priority metric
- Additional proposed metrics: supplemental metrics of equity and family experience
- Notes: additional information on definitions and data disaggregation

*Please refer to the next page for the full list of recommended priority metrics.*

# Supply

**Essential Question 1:** Does the existing supply meet the needs of families from priority populations?

**Desired Outcome:** Illinois' Early Childhood system has an adequate supply of early childhood programs whereby families from priority populations have the choice to attend the early childhood programs they want.

**Revised Metric 1:** Ratio of available early childhood program openings to estimate demand among children statewide, with specific reporting on priority populations. Disaggregated by program type, geography, and age group. (reasonable effort).

## **Additional Proposed Metrics for Revised Metric 1:**

- 1a. Percentage of families using more than one ECE program to meet care or developmental needs.
- 1b. Estimated number and percentage of eligible children not enrolled in any publicly funded or private ECE program.
- 1c. Supply-to-demand ratios for each region or county, disaggregated by priority population.
- 1d. Percentage of unique families on at least one waitlist for an ECE program, using de-duplicated counts when feasible.
- 1e. Percentage of programs offering: nontraditional hours, hybrid models, multilingual engagement supports (disaggregate each offering separately and combined).
- 1f. Average number of applications or waitlists families navigate before enrollment.
- 1g. Percentage of families reporting employment or income impacts due to unmet child care needs.

**Revised Metric 2:** Percentage of children (priority populations and statewide) who are on a waitlist or experience delays accessing an early childhood program, by program type and region. (reasonable effort).

## **Additional Proposed Metrics for Revised Metric 2:**

- 2a. Percentage of families on at least one waitlist for each ECE setting (child care, PFA, HV, EI, HS/EHS), using de-duplicated counts when possible.
- 2b. Average wait time (in weeks) from eligibility determination to service start.
- 2c. Average number of applications/waitlists families must navigate before enrollment.

**Revised Metric 3:** Percentage of families from priority populations who successfully enroll in their first- or second-choice early childhood program. (reasonable effort)

## Supply (cont.)

### Additional Proposed Metrics for Revised Metric 3:

3a. Percentage of families reporting employment or income impact due to inability to enroll in preferred care.

**Revised Metric 4:** Percentage of children from priority populations enrolled in programs receiving full or partial public subsidy or financial assistance (e.g., CCAP, PFA, HS/EHS, EI). (affordability)

**Revised Metric 5:** Percentage of families from priority populations who report that their early childhood program is affordable. (affordability)

**Revised Metric 6:** Percentage of families from priority populations paying at or below the state-defined affordability threshold for ECE. (affordability)

**Revised Metric 7:** Percentage of children who experience a change in their primary educator, EI provider, or home visitor during the program year due to: a) staff turnover, b) staff shortage, c) family instability (housing, job loss), d) rising cost of programming, e) family relocation, f) program closure, g) other. (supports child development)

**Revised Metric 8:** Percentage of workforce members who are fluent in, or have access to high-quality interpretation support for, the primary languages spoken by children and families they serve. Disaggregate by fluent staff and those with interpretation support. (supports child development)

**Revised Metric 9:** Percentage of programs that provide services, communication, or materials in at least one language other than English. (supports child's development)

**Revised Metric 10:** Percentage of programs serving children with disabilities or developmental delays where staff have specialized training or experience in inclusive early childhood practice. Disaggregate by type of disability or developmental delay. (supports child's development)

**Revised Metric 11:** Percentage of workforce members holding early childhood endorsements, credentials, training, or relevant experience appropriate to their role and program setting. (supports child's development)

## Supply (cont.)

**Revised Metric 12:** Percentage of early childhood programs that meet or exceed state-defined quality benchmarks, as measured through QRIS or equivalent systems (such as PFA or HS monitoring). (supports child's development)

### **Additional Proposed Metrics for Revised Metric 12:**

12a. Percentage of children attending programs that meet or exceed benchmarks.

**Revised Metric 13:** Percentage of programs offering transportation or other access supports (e.g., bus passes, mileage reimbursement). (meets families' needs)

**Revised Metric 14:** Percentage of available full-day and full-year ECE slots ( $\geq 6$  hours/day,  $\geq 200$  days/year) across all program types. (meets families' needs)

**Revised Metric 15:** Percentage of programs offering extended-hour, wraparound, or nontraditional-hour care.

**Revised Metric 16:** Percentage of programs demonstrating culturally responsive, developmentally supportive, and strength-based interactions and environments, as measured through observational tools or validated assessments.

#### **Notes:**

- *Affordability is defined as: Not exceeding 7% of household income or another state-defined threshold.*
- *All metrics under Supply Essential Question 1 should be disaggregated by program type, age group, and priority population.*
- *All metrics were revised based on workgroup input.*

# Learning Experiences

**Essential Question 9.** Do workforce members receive training in supporting the needs of children from priority populations and families?

**Desired Outcome:** Illinois' Early Childhood system builds in and fully supports continued professional development for workforce members that is culturally responsive, developmentally appropriate, and trauma informed and tailored to the needs of children from priority populations and families.

**Revised Metric 1:** Percentage of workforce members who receive training in developmentally supportive, strengths-based, and culturally responsive instructional practices that help them understand and support a child's developmental progress.

## Additional Proposed Metrics for Revised Metric 1:

- 1a. Percentage of workforce members who demonstrate application of developmentally supportive, trauma-responsive, and bias-reducing practices in daily work (as evidenced through observation, family feedback, coaching notes, or reflective practice tools).
- 1b. Percentage of supervisors, directors, or providers reporting observable improvement in practice following participation in training or coaching.
- 1c. Training participation and demonstrated application rates disaggregated by workforce type (teacher, home visitor, administrator), program type (child care, PFA, HS/EHS, HV), and region.
- 1d. Training access and completion rates disaggregated by race/ethnicity, home language, and geographic setting (urban, suburban, rural).
- 1e. Percentage of workforce members receiving professional development through multiple modalities, including coaching, TA, peer learning, and formal training.
- 1f. Distribution of training hours by modality and topic area (e.g., developmentally supportive practice, trauma-responsive approaches, bias-reducing strategies).

**Revised Metric 2:** Percentage of workforce members completing trauma-informed or trauma-responsive training, including evidence of how learnings are applied to practice and updated based on local community context.

## Additional Proposed Metrics for Revised Metric 2:

- 2a. Number or percentage of trauma-informed or trauma-responsive training modules updated within the last 12–24 months.

**Revised Metric 3:** Percentage of workforce members participating in ongoing training or coaching on reflective practice, family-centered engagement, and strategies that reduce bias and support equitable interactions, including recency and accessibility of trainings.

## Learning Experiences (cont.)

### Additional Proposed Metrics for Revised Metric 3:

3a. Percentage of workforce members who can identify how differences in family background, diversity, and bias appear in their setting, based on a pre/post reflection survey.

#### Notes:

- *Training includes professional development delivered through multiple modalities such as coaching, technical assistance, peer learning, and formal training sessions.*
- *All metrics under Learning Experiences Essential Question 9 should be disaggregated by workforce role, program type, populations served (race/ethnicity, language), and region.*
- *All metrics were revised based on workgroup input.*

**Essential Question 11.** Do children from priority populations have access to the developmental supports they need?

**Desired Outcome:** Illinois' Early Childhood system ensures that children from priority populations have access to the developmental supports they need to fully participate in activities with their peers.

**Revised Metric 1:** Percentage of children from priority populations who: a) Receive a developmental and learning screening within required or recommended timelines and b) Do not receive or cannot access a timely screening, including cases where screening is unavailable, delayed, or difficult to access.

### Additional Proposed Metrics for Revised Metric 1:

1a. Average number of weeks between identification of potential concern/eligibility and receipt of services, for priority populations.

1b. Percentage of families who decline recommended services, with documented reasons for decline (e.g., scheduling, transportation, trust concerns, cultural mismatch, cost, fear of systems).

1c. Percentage of families reporting employment or income impacts due to unmet developmental support needs (e.g., staying home, cutting hours).

**Revised Metric 2:** Percentage of children from priority populations who receive identification and eligibility decisions within required timelines, including: a) Screened and referred for learning/developmental supports b) Screened but found ineligible c) Screened and referred, but family declines services

## Learning Experiences (cont.)

**Revised Metric 3:** Percentage of children from priority populations with identified developmental or learning support needs who receive services in a timely manner and in a setting aligned to their IFSP/IEP and LRE determinations, including access to inclusive settings with typically developing peers whenever appropriate.

**Revised Metric 4:** Percentage of families from priority populations who receive developmental and learning supports in a timely manner and report satisfaction with accommodations or services provided.

### **Additional Proposed Metrics for Revised Metric 4:**

4a. Percentage of families receiving guidance, training, or information on developmental domains and how to observe and track progress at home.

4b. Percentage of families reporting they understand their child's developmental progress, including examples of milestones being met or missed.

**Revised Metric 5:** Percentage of children from priority populations with identified health or developmental concerns as identified by a developmental screening tool.\*

**Revised Metric 6:** Percentage of children from priority populations with identified developmental concerns who are connected to the appropriate service in a timely manner (EI, ECSE, behavior/mental health consultation, related services, etc.).

**Revised Metric 7:** Percentage of children from priority populations who demonstrate developmental progress over time and are "on track" toward kindergarten readiness, based on: a) initial screening results b) subsequent checkpoints, and c) documented growth across developmental domains.

### **Notes:**

- All metrics under Learning Experiences Essential Question 11 should be disaggregated by race/ethnicity, language, disability status, income, program setting (child care, PFA, HV, EI, HS/EHS, FCC), and region.
  - Disaggregate 2 and 3 by child demographics, screening/referral setting (PFA, EI, pediatrician, child care, HS/EHS), and LRE category.
  - Disaggregate 4 by family demographics.
  - Disaggregate 5-7 by family demographics and screening tool.
- All Learning Experiences Essential Question 11 metrics share systemwide indicators for wait time, declined services, and family economic impact.

# Transitions

**Essential Question 16.** Are children from priority populations reaching developmental milestones when transitioning to kindergarten?

**Desired Outcome:** Illinois' Early Childhood system supports children from priority populations to reach developmentally appropriate milestones across developmental domains (i.e., language/ literacy; cognition; social emotional development; approaches to learning; and physical development) upon kindergarten entry.

**Revised Metric 1:** Percentage of children who are meeting benchmarks across all developmental domains (language/literacy, cognition, social-emotional development, approaches to learning, and physical development).

## **Additional Proposed Metrics for Revised Metric 1:**

1a. Percentage of children who have shown substantial progress and development across all developmental domains over a period of time.

**Revised Metric 2:** Percentage of families who receive orientation and have opportunities to understand and weigh in on their child's developmental screening, including: a) what a screening is; b) why it is administered and by whom; c) what is measured and when; d) the importance of developmental milestones; and e) how to observe and support progress at home.

**Revised Metric 3:** Percentage of families who are offered an ACEs or trauma-exposure questionnaire within a standardized and developmentally appropriate window, tied to: annual screening cycles, child's birthdate, and transition points (e.g., EI → PFA, PFA → K).

## **Notes:**

- *Developmental Domains include: Language/literacy, cognition, social-emotional development, approaches to learning, and physical development*
- *"Period of time" includes a year or two before kindergarten if data is available (as data availability varies significantly by program) and includes the first 45 days of kindergarten*
- *"Substantial progress" is defined as the growth at or above the expected developmental trajectory as measured by a valid, reliable tool normed for early childhood development, or growth that represents meaningful improvement for the child relative to their baseline across multiple checkpoints.*
- *Disaggregate all Transition Essential Question 16 metrics by child demographics (race/ethnicity, language, ability, income), program setting (child care, PFA, HV, EI, FCC, HS/EHS), and region.*
- *Include systemwide wait-time and family education indicators where data exist.*

# Administration

**Essential Question 18.** Are there funding mechanisms to support equitable experiences for children and families?

**Desired Outcome:** Illinois' Early Childhood system has sufficient and sustainable funding to ensure that children and families from priority populations have their needs met.

**Revised Metric 1:** Percentage of total early childhood system funding allocated to equity-focused initiatives\* including programs, workforce supports, training, family engagement, and service models designed to reduce disparities in access, quality, and outcomes for priority populations.

Notes:

**\*Percentage of funding towards equity focused initiatives include:**

- **Workforce Equity Supports:** Scholarships, compensation initiatives (e.g., wage supplements, pay parity pilots), career pathway programs, recruitment and retention supports, and other workforce equity initiatives for early childhood educators—especially bilingual educators and those from the communities they serve.
- **Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Practices:** Funding for training, curriculum development, and supports that strengthen culturally grounded instruction, affirm children's identities, and effectively serve dual-language learners.
- **Access Expansion for Priority Populations:** Targeted investments to open or expand early childhood slots in under-resourced communities, including rural areas, immigrant communities, and communities experiencing poverty, homelessness, disability, or language isolation.
- **Family Engagement and Leadership Supports:** Funding for parent leadership programs, culturally responsive family engagement models, and capacity-building for families from diverse linguistic, racial, cultural, and geographic backgrounds.
- **Inclusion and Special Needs Supports:** Investments in inclusive models, early intervention collaboration, adaptive materials, assistive technology, and staff training to support children with disabilities or developmental delays.
- **Mental Health and Trauma-Informed Care:** Funding for mental health consultation, trauma-responsive coaching, social-emotional curricula, and staff PD that supports children's and families' well-being.
- **Data and Equity Monitoring:** Investments in data systems and tools that track child and family participation AND workforce participation, including: enrollment, access and outcomes by race, language, income, geography, and disability; workforce compensation, turnover, retention, and advancement disparities; data dashboards or tools that support equity-driven decision-making.
- **Community Partnership Grants:** Funding for community-based organizations that serve cultural, linguistic, or immigrant communities to improve outreach, enrollment, navigation, and trust-building.

## Administration (cont.)

### **\*Percentage of funding towards equity focused initiatives include: (cont.)**

- **Language Access Services:** Funding for translation, interpretation, bilingual navigation supports, ASL services, and accessible communication materials.
- **Equity Leadership & Training Initiatives:** State or regional initiatives providing PD on equitable, bias-aware, and culturally responsive leadership—using terminology compliant with federal requirements while preserving the intent to reduce disparities.
- **Equity Leadership & Training Initiatives:** State or regional initiatives providing PD on equitable, bias-aware, and culturally responsive leadership—using terminology compliant with federal requirements while preserving the intent to reduce disparities.

**Essential Question 19.** Are there funding mechanisms to support equitable experiences for children and families?

**Desired Outcome:** Illinois' Early Childhood system is made stronger when early childhood system leaders provide accessible guidance and expectations for how to support equitable experiences for children, families, and workforce members.

**Revised Metric 1:** The state provides clear guidance on early learning standards (e.g., Illinois Early Learning Guidelines birth–3; Illinois Early Learning and Development Standards pre k–k), including how to support children and families from diverse backgrounds and priority populations. This guidance is: a) Developed and providers receive implementation support b) Developed but implementation is not monitored or required c) Not developed

### **Additional Proposed Metrics for Revised Metric 1:**

- 1a. Percentage of programs reporting that state guidance on early learning standards is clear, accessible, and culturally/linguistically appropriate.
- 1b. Percentage of programs adopting or aligning to early learning standards guidance within 12 months of state release.
- 1c. Frequency with which guidance documents are reviewed and updated using disaggregated feedback from programs and families.

**Revised Metric 2:** The state offers and updates guidance on selecting or implementing culturally and linguistically relevant curricula that reflect children and families from priority populations. This guidance is: a) Developed and providers receive implementation support b) Developed but implementation is not monitored or required c) Not developed

## Administration (cont.)

### **Additional Proposed Metrics for Revised Metric 2:**

- 2a. Percentage of programs reporting that guidance on curriculum is clear, accessible, and culturally/linguistically appropriate.
- 2b. Percentage of programs adopting or aligning to curriculum guidance within 12 months.
- 2c. Frequency of updates incorporating disaggregated program and family feedback.

**Revised Metric 3:** The state provides guidance or training on developmentally appropriate, culturally relevant assessments and screenings that support priority populations. This guidance is: a) Developed and providers receive implementation support b) Developed but implementation is not monitored or required c) Not developed

**Revised Metric 4:** The state provides guidance or training on professional development approaches that support a diverse early childhood workforce, including those from priority populations. This guidance is: a) Developed and providers receive implementation support b) Developed but implementation is not monitored or required c) Not developed

### **Additional Proposed Metrics for Revised Metric 4:**

- 4a. Percentage of programs reporting that assessment/screening guidance is clear, accessible, and culturally/linguistically appropriate.
- 4b. Percentage of programs adopting PD guidance within 12 months.
- 4c. Frequency with which PD guidance is reviewed and updated using disaggregated feedback from programs, families, and workforce.
- 4d. Percentage of guidance updates that incorporate direct input from the workforce (teachers, assistants, home visitors, directors), measured through surveys, focus groups, or advisory committees.

**Revised Metric 5:** The state provides guidance or training on classroom environment and interaction quality tools (e.g., ECERS, CLASS, ASQ), ensuring they reflect and support children and families from priority populations. This guidance is: a) Developed and providers receive implementation support b) Developed but implementation is not monitored or required c) Not developed

## Administration (cont.)

### **Additional Proposed Metrics for Revised Metric 5:**

- 5a. Percentage of programs reporting the guidance is clear, accessible, and culturally/linguistically appropriate.
- 5b. Percentage of programs implementing or aligning to guidance within 12 months.
- 5c. Frequency with which guidance documents are updated based on disaggregated feedback from programs and families.

**Revised Metric 6:** The state regularly evaluates the number and percentage of programs implementing early learning standards, curricula, assessments/screenings, PD guidance, and quality monitoring tools in alignment with state guidelines.

**Revised Metric 7:** System leaders, in partnership with community representatives, evaluate whether guidance is accessible, relevant, and effective for programs serving priority populations.

### **Additional Proposed Metrics for Revised Metric 7:**

- 7a. Percentage of programs reporting that state guidance is clear, accessible, and culturally/linguistically appropriate.

**Revised Metric 8:** Percentage of families and workforce members reporting positive, culturally responsive, and trusting relationships, as measured through validated relational climate or engagement tools.

#### *Notes:*

- *All metrics under Administration Essential Question 19 should be disaggregated by program type and region.*

*(End of recommended priority metrics)*

## Recommendations for Applying an Equity Lens

The DAI Workgroup affirms that equity must be embedded **throughout the full data lifecycle (data collection, interpretation, and use)** to ensure that IDEC's data systems meaningfully advance equitable access, experiences, and outcomes for children, families, and the early childhood workforce. The following recommendations reflect the workgroup's consensus on foundational equity practices necessary to support IDEC's Day 1 readiness and long-term system design.

### Applying an Equity Lens to Data Collection

The DAI workgroup recommends that IDEC design and implement comprehensive, disaggregated data collection practices as a foundational strategy for identifying disparities, understanding lived experiences, and informing equity-driven decision-making.

**Disaggregation.** Across all priority metrics and topic areas, IDEC should require disaggregation by region, program type, race, and ethnicity, home language, income, disability status, priority population status, and other relevant contextual factors. Data systems should be intentionally structured to reveal inequities in access, service delivery, and outcomes rather than masking disparities through aggregate reporting.

**Minimizing burden and harm.** To ensure equitable participation, data collection practices must minimize burden and barriers for families and providers to participate in the data collection process. The workgroup recommends that IDEC ensure assessments, surveys, and family-facing data tools are available in families' home languages and are administered in culturally and linguistically responsive ways. IDEC should partner with trusted community-based organizations and family liaisons to support families through data collection, screenings, and navigation of early childhood systems. Additionally, IDEC should critically review data elements to remove sensitive or unnecessary questions that may create fear, discourage participation, or disproportionately exclude families who have experienced marginalization or system-related harm.

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***“What are we doing with the data we’re collecting?... We base a lot of decisions on the data that’s coming in, much of which can be subjective. We need to ask: How is this data collected? What is the purpose of collecting this? How to connect this to making meaning and outcomes for children and decisions for how to better support the workforce?”***

- DAI workgroup member

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**Standardized collection processes.** The workgroup also recommends that IDEC establish standardized data collection processes across programs and settings to promote accuracy, comparability, and equitable interpretation. This includes consistent expectations for data collection cadence, reporting timelines, and tracking from eligibility determination through service delivery, including wait periods. Assessments should be administered by trained professionals who are familiar with child development, cultural context, and the child's primary environment. Incorporating multiple checkpoints throughout the year, such as entry, mid-year, and end of year, will allow IDEC to monitor progress over time and ensure that services remain aligned with children's evolving needs.

**Transparent communication.** Finally, transparent communication and informed consent are essential to building trust and supporting meaningful family engagement. The workgroup recommends that IDEC ensure developmental screeners and assessments reflect diverse developmental trajectories and cultural expectations. Providers should be equipped to clearly and respectfully communicate eligibility criteria, results, and next steps in families' home languages. IDEC should also develop strategies to identify and better understand the needs of families who are not currently engaged in publicly funded programs but may require developmental or family supports.

### Applying an Equity Lens to Data Interpretation

#### **Cultural and contextual understanding.**

The DAI Workgroup recommends that IDEC interpret data within the broader social, cultural, and systemic contexts that shape family and provider experiences. Quantitative metrics should be complemented with qualitative data, such as family experience surveys, focus groups, or interviews to provide essential context and prevent misinterpretation. IDEC should also develop clear guidance for interpreting commonly used indicators, such as waitlists, affordability, and service delays, to distinguish between unmet need, system constraints, and family choice.

“Having an **understanding** about the **level of training** and **where additional supports/resources should be allocated** seems important at the system level for funding approaches. If this is **disaggregated by region or program type**, that could help the system have a **better understanding of where additional training may be needed**. This will help the state drive **additional opportunities for trainings**.”

- DAI workgroup member

**Understanding developmental goals and needs.** For children receiving specialized supports, data interpretation should be grounded in the child’s Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) or Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals to ensure alignment with family priorities and developmental needs. The workgroup also recommends that IDEC clearly define the purpose and intended audience for each metric, such as system accountability, program improvement, public transparency, or family decision-making, prior to collection and reporting.

**Implicit Bias.** Addressing bias is a critical component of equitable data interpretation. The workgroup recommends that IDEC require training for assessors and system partners on cultural humility, bias awareness, and engagement with families who may experience racialized fear, mistrust, or other barriers related to immigration status or their prior involvement in the system. IDEC should move beyond tracking training completion alone and instead incorporate tiered measures that assess demonstrated application of learning over time. Safeguards should also be implemented to reduce the risk of over-identification or misdiagnosis, particularly for multilingual learners and children with disabilities.

**Accountability.** To ensure cultural validity and shared accountability, the workgroup recommends establishing a standing review body or formal process that includes community and family representation. This body should regularly review benchmarks, tools, scoring practices, and data collection procedures to ensure they remain culturally, linguistically, and developmentally appropriate across regions and program types. Standardized definitions for key terms should be adopted across systems to support consistent interpretation and use.

“***If there is not a feedback loop to ensure a teacher in classroom A sees the same behavior as a teacher in classroom B, there is not enough information that’s meaningful and that’s where [implicit] bias can creep in. Any metric needs to be high quality for it to be meaningful.***”  
- DAI workgroup member

### Applying an Equity Lens to Data Use and Feedback Loops

Through this phase, the DAI workgroup emphasized the importance of transparency, accessibility, and intentional feedback loops that support continuous learning and improvement. IDEC should implement clear strategies to communicate data back to families in ways that support their understanding of developmental domains, screening results, and available next steps. Strengthening coordination with kindergarten systems, including training for educators on how to interpret and use developmental data, will be essential to supporting equitable transitions.

**Linking cross-program data.** Integrating data across programs is critical to identifying unmet needs, strengthening coordination, and reducing duplication. The workgroup recommends that IDEC link child- and family-level data with workforce indicators, including staffing levels, qualifications, and bilingual capacity, to better understand how workforce conditions shape access and quality. Cross-program data integration should be designed to reduce repetitive data collection and streamline referrals across Home Visiting, Early Intervention, Head Start, and other early childhood programs.

**Continuous quality improvement.** Finally, the workgroup strongly recommends that IDEC use data to support continuous quality improvement rather than punitive accountability. Data should inform resource allocation decisions, particularly where disparities are most pronounced, and guide the strategic use of equity-targeted funding alongside universal investments. Equity-focused funding data should be reviewed on a regular basis (at least annually) to inform policy, program design, and long-term investment strategies.

**“How do we define ‘culturally competent’?**  
*Shouldn't it be based on the population that a given center is working with? For example, culturally competent care will look different in a majority-Latino center in Chicago vs. a majority-white rural center in Edwards County. **Should educators receive training on overall cultural competency or on the cultural competency specific for the population they are working with?**”*  
- DAI workgroup member

## Conclusion

The DAI workgroup offers these Phase I recommendations in recognition of IDEC’s opportunity to establish a data, analytics, and insights function that meaningfully advances equity, transparency, and family-centered decision-making from its first day of operation. The workgroup views these recommendations as a foundation for continued learning and innovation.

We appreciate the opportunity to support IDEC leadership during this critical transition and look forward to continued collaboration in the subsequent phases of work.

## Appendices

### Appendix A: DAI Workgroup Members

- Alicia Lynch-Deatherage, Illinois State Board of Education
- Angel Powell-Mudrow, School District 148
- Angela Ballard, Parent
- Bela Moté, Carole Robertson Center for Learning
- Candace Moore, Office of the Mayor of Chicago
- Celina Villanueva, General Assembly - Senator
- Edie Washington, Illinois Department of Children and Family Services
- Elizabeth Hamilton, Parent
- Evelyn Osorio, Workforce
- Felicia Gray, Illinois Department of Human Services
- Hannah Miro, Illinois Action for Children
- Janice Moenster, Brightpoint
- Johnna Darragh-Ernst, Heartland Community College
- Kelsey Bakken, Advance Illinois
- Kristen Morin, Parent
- Laura Faver-Dias, General Assembly - Representative
- Lauri Frichtl, Illinois Head Start Association
- Marcy Mendenhall, SAL Community Services
- Mariana Souto-Manning, Erikson Institute
- Pamela Franks, Home-based provider
- Rochelle Golliday, Cuddle Care, Inc.
- Wendy Lu, Center-based provider
- Zena Madison, Birth to Five Illinois

### Appendix B: STEP Forward with Data Framework: At-A-Glance

Developed by Child Trends, **the STEP Forward with Data Framework** (System Transformation for Equitable Preschools) is a structured, equity-centered approach designed to support early childhood system leaders in using data to identify, examine, and address inequities in system design, access, and outcomes. The framework guides leaders in analyzing how children, families, and the early childhood workforce experience systems differently and supports data-informed decision-making to advance equity across early learning systems.

**Link to the framework:** [https://cms.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/STEPForwardAtAGlance\\_ChildTrends\\_Nov2023.pdf](https://cms.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/STEPForwardAtAGlance_ChildTrends_Nov2023.pdf)

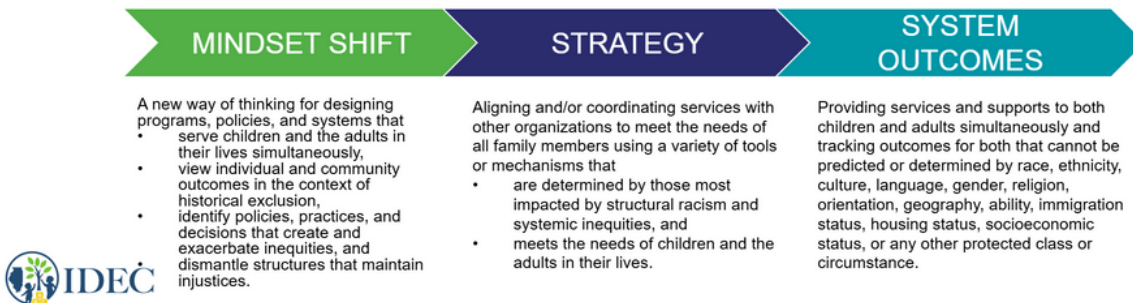
## Appendix C: Transition Advisory Committee (TAC) Equity Framework

### TAC Equity Framework

An equitable system is one that meets the needs of all children and families, resulting in individual outcomes that cannot be predicted or determined by race, ethnicity, culture, language, gender, religion, orientation, geography, ability, immigration status, housing status, socioeconomic status, or any other protected class or circumstance.

Achieving an equitable system requires a mindset shift that honors and embraces each family's unique racial, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, gender, religious, orientation, geographic, ability and socioeconomic identities, and the intersections between and amongst them. This new way of thinking about how programs, policies and systems can serve children and families simultaneously, views individual and community outcomes in the context of historical exclusion, identifies policies, practices and decisions that create and exacerbate inequities, and dismantles structures that maintain injustices.

Achieving this vision for equity within the context of the transition to the new IL Department of Early Childhood requires all of us to make decisions that prioritize those most impacted by structural racism and systemic inequities. This calls for a strategic approach that aligns and coordinates holistic services and maximizes parental choice to meet the needs of children and the adults in their lives. The process used to achieve this vision should use a variety of mechanisms that are inclusive of local voice and community partners and determined by those most impacted by structural racism and systemic inequities. Analyzing and reporting of disaggregated outcomes is critical to provide transparency about the impact and inform future changes that bring us closer to our vision of equitable family outcomes.



## Appendix D: Equity Reflection Tool

### Priority Metrics were Evaluated Using an Equity Reflection Tool

| Equity Dimension                                        | Guiding Question                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|---------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Understanding Disparities                            | Does this data help us understand or address disparities in access, experience, or outcomes? If not, what additional data would help us achieve this understanding?                                                                    |
| 2. Community Perspective                                | Does the data reflect what families, providers, and communities value or have named as important? If not, what additional data or modifications should be made?                                                                        |
| 3. Potential for Action                                 | Can this data meaningfully inform decisions, policies, or resource allocation to address inequities? If not, what additional or modifications should be made?                                                                          |
| 4. Burden & Harm                                        | Does the data reinforce deficit-based narratives or place undue burden on families/providers to prove inequity? Does collecting the data potentially create harm for families and providers? If so, what modifications should be made? |
| 5. Disaggregation & Visibility (* under IDEC's purview) | Can the data be disaggregated to show variation across race, income, language, ability, geography, etc.?                                                                                                                               |

Developed in accordance with the TAC Equity Framework and DAI key principles.

