



**FORESIGHT** LAW+POLICY

# Illinois DEC Advisory Groups Planning Workgroup Meeting #10

March 30, 2026

# Introductions

- Please add your name, county, and role in the chat!
  - What's a childhood memory you associate with springtime?



# Plan for Today

- Introductions
- Meeting Norms
- Desired End State recap
- Recommendations from other groups
- Next Steps
- Public Comment

# Welcome!

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Here are our virtual meeting protocols:

## **For Workgroup Members:**

- ✓ Please be on video as much as possible to help with overall engagement
- ✓ Mute self when not speaking
- ✓ Feel free to come off mute, use Chat feature or “raise hand” button for questions or comments
- ✓ If you are experiencing an unstable connections, switch to phone call or close other applications

## **For Public Participants:**

- ✓ Attendees can provide input through public comment (last five minutes of meeting)



## Workgroup Working Norms

- Process is part of the solution
- Step Up, Step Back
- Questions seek to understand, be curious
- Prioritize parent experience and provider experience
- Act with courage and vulnerability
- Recognize the difference between intent and impact; I might not intend to hurt or offend but the impact may be to hurt or offend



# Where We Are In Building Recommendations



# How We Are Building Recommendations

1. We have developed draft recommendations for a desired end state that were shared with other groups.
  - Today we will reflect on the feedback from those other groups.
2. We have done some learning about the current state.
  - We learned about Birth to Five Councils and Head Start Family Councils.
  - We learned about the Early Learning Council, the state's designated State Advisory Council under the Head Start Act.
  - We've learned about the state's emerging family engagement framework.
  - We will then dig in and discuss what we've learned.
3. We will then discuss how to get from the current state to the desired end state: identify immediate next steps -- and ongoing processes for IDEC as the advisory function evolves



**Recap:  
Our Draft  
Desired End  
State**



## In the Draft Plan

The Draft Plan includes the following sections:

- Measuring impact
- Engaging the entire advisory ecosystem
- Direct engagement
- Advisory groups: What and who
- Advisory groups: How (including family and community engagement)

## Measuring Impact (1 of 3)

- The advisory function will be successful if:
  - The Department is regularly seeking feedback on critical questions relating to policy and operations. The early childhood community believes that when there are major directional questions being considered, the Department will engage with its partners before answering them. Advisory groups can also raise issues on their own that they believe could be important to the Department.
  - The Department is regularly acting on feedback it receives to produce policies that are equitable and inclusive.
  - The Department is communicating to its partners about how it used the feedback it received. When the Department receives feedback that it cannot or will not act on, it communicates clearly the reasons why it cannot or will not.
- These actions create a cycle where Department partners believe that their input will be valued and continue to provide it.

## Measuring Impact (2 of 3)

- The advisory function will be successful if:
  - IDEC is taking steps to build awareness about its advisory function, and a wide range of people – diverse across geography, roles, demographic, linguistical, and other factors -- are in fact aware of engagement opportunities.
  - A wide range of people are actually participating in the advisory function through multiple entry points.
  - The advisory function provides transparency to the early childhood community.
  - The advisory function continues to evolve as needed to meet the needs of the agency and community.
  - The advisory function takes into account the lived experience of the state's families and providers, including families who have not been served by the system.

## Measuring Impact (3 of 3)

- To measure impact, the Department should conduct outreach asking stakeholders about the advisory function
  - This measurement should not be limited to surveys, but should also include focused conversations
  - The measurement of impact should reach across multiple populations, including providers, families, and those least well served by the system
  - The process of measuring impact should be ongoing and embedded, not just episodic
  - The process of collecting this input should be of minimal burden, and where possible should be combined with other engagement opportunities
  - The Department should use technology where possible to make it easier to provide input
- Consider having a dashboard or other method of transparently tracking input
- Impact should be measured with a regular cadence, perhaps quarterly

## Engaging the Entire Advisory Ecosystem

- The advisory ecosystem includes local advisory bodies that collect community-level feedback. The group will come back and revisit this issue after further study of the current landscape.
  - The group will consider what kinds of activities the agency might support at the local level.
  - The group will consider how the agency should work with and/or build on existing resources, including the 39 Birth to Five Councils and Head Start Policy Councils.
  - The group will consider what channels need to be established to work with community-level leaders.

## Direct Engagement

- The Department will have multiple channels for direct engagement to seek input and direction in addition to advisory groups.
  - This could include focus groups or focused conversations.
  - It could also include social media or texting opportunities.
  - This direct engagement should be available in multiple languages.
- These channels of engagement will be distinct from the Department's efforts to provide customer service or constituent services; these are about changes to policy and practice, not just about resolving individual situations.
  - The Department's customer service and constituent service functions should feed into its advisory function.

## Advisory Groups: State Advisory Council

- The Department will ultimately need to have a single lead advisory group, which will be designated as the state's advisory council under the Head Start Act (one of several relevant federal requirements). Federal law defines some minimal requirements for membership in this group and topics it must address, but the workgroup can add to those recommendations.
  - Federal law requires the state to include a mix of state agency representatives and organizational representatives, with the freedom to add other members as desired.
  - The workgroup has emphasized the importance of including providers and families, including those least well served by the system (more on this in later slides).
  - The workgroup has discussed the importance of having providers and families included in ways that avoid isolation and tokenism.
  - The workgroup has also discussed ensuring that other partner agencies are included.

## Advisory Groups: The Full Range of Advisory Bodies (1 of 2)

- Historically there have been various other advisory groups that all have different – and sometimes overlapping – responsibilities.
  - The federal requirements for the State Advisory Council are broad, and include a wide mix of issues. Other required advisory bodies tend to be more specialized.
  - It may be useful to have different members of groups appointed by different leaders, and to ensure that there are enough members appointed from outside the agency to provide balance.
    - Term limits may be a useful tool to ensure fresh perspective on an ongoing basis.
  - As we have discussed, federal and state laws also require advisory bodies on topics including child care and early childhood special education.
  - IDEC should have an “air traffic control” function to ensure coordination among these groups.
    - IDEC should also ensure coordination with other agencies to ensure that IDEC’s advisory function is working well with other agency advisory functions, and not placing too great a demand on stakeholders.

## Advisory Groups: The Full Range of Advisory Bodies (2 of 2)

- Historically there have been various other advisory groups that all have different – and sometimes overlapping – responsibilities.
  - This workgroup can make recommendations for how these other advisory bodies should be organized and populated, including whether or not they should be part of the state advisory council (e.g., subcommittee). That issue will be revisited after examining the current state.
  - The workgroup believes that reorganization should take place in a context that is sensitive to the fact that for many providers and families, participating in an advisory body is more difficult than providing feedback for other channels.
    - A major goal of this advisory workgroup is minimizing the burden on participants.
  - There will be a need to balance having standing advisory bodies with short-term task-oriented groups.
    - There are benefits to having short-term task-oriented groups, but having too many can be burdensome.

## All Advisory Groups: Regular Practices

- All advisory bodies should engage in practices that support provider and family engagement, including:
  - Conduct on-boarding to ensure that all members understand their role and the advisory group's expectations
  - Scheduling advisory groups when providers and families can participate
  - Establishing norms of participation in an advisory group that are welcoming and inclusive
    - Sharing materials in advance
    - Avoiding jargon
    - Supporting participation in multiple languages
  - Multiple ways to engage in the meeting
  - Strong facilitation to encourage participation

## Advisory Groups: Engaging Families (1 of 2)

- To engage families, IDEC should:
  - Engage with families and support them before and after meetings, building ongoing relationships and making them feel welcome. Good communication takes place in the context of relationships, and authentic engagement is crucial.
    - This may include providing training and support to family representatives joining advisory bodies.
  - Ensure that diverse families are participating -- including immigrant and refugee populations, families not well served by the system, and families from around the state.
  - Ensure that families have multiple opportunities to provide input, including regional and local opportunities and both in-person and virtual forums.
  - Communicate to families about the impact of their engagement.
  - Develop continuous improvement processes to ensure that the state is learning from experience and engaging families more effectively as time goes on.

## Advisory Groups: Engaging Families (2 of 2)

- To engage families, IDEC should:
  - Provide opportunities to participate in the family's home language.
  - Leverage existing family engagement efforts, including through Head Start.
  - While there is not unanimity on the subject, in general workgroup members believe families should be paid for their participation.
  - Ensure that families participating in any advisory workgroup should be given space to connect with each other (including across workgroups), with support and staffing to help them succeed in their roles.
    - This space should be voluntary for families and designed by those families to meet their needs.
    - If families have other suggestions for building community the Department should be as responsive to those suggestions as possible.

## Advisory Groups: State Advisory Council

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  - Federal law requires the state to include a mix of state agency representatives and organizational representatives, with the freedom to add other members as desired.
  - The workgroup has emphasized the importance of including providers and families, including those least well served by the system (more on this in later slides).
  - The workgroup has discussed the importance of having providers and families included in ways that avoid isolation and tokenism.
  - The workgroup has also discussed ensuring that other partner agencies are included.
- The Early Learning Council currently fulfills this federal obligation.
  - The Early Learning Council was created by Illinois statute years before the federal requirement came into place.
  - When the federal requirement was adopted the BUILD Initiative published a short [guidance document](#) meant to help states successfully implement their councils.



# Outreach: Who We Talked to and What We Learned



## Where We Shared the Draft Desired End State

Body	Date
Transition Advisory Committee	December 9, 2025
Funding Design	December 17, 2025
Supporting Multilingual Learners	January 6, 2026
Supporting Children with Disabilities & Developmental Delays	January 13, 2025
Professional Development Advisory Committee	February 4, 2026

- We are grateful to all of these bodies for hosting us and having these important conversations.

## What We Heard: Things People Liked About Our Recommendations

- The idea of having an “air traffic control” function to help coordinate among advisories.
  - This could include mapping out how all the advisories relate to each other, including identifying any that have decision-making powers in addition to their advisory function.
- The importance of having diverse ways to provide feedback.
- The emphasis on two-way communication.
- The value of feedback loops to let people know their input mattered.
- The idea of getting fresh voices on the Early Learning Council, including term limits (staggered to provide some continuity).
- The idea of centering family voice and supporting family engagement from across communities and cultures, including on the Early Learning Council.
- Supporting family representatives across different councils, including supporting them to engage with each other.
  - This includes pre- and post-meeting support.
- Compensation for providers and families who participate.
- The emphasis on equity.
- Moving toward change while leveraging existing infrastructure.

# What We Heard: Suggested Amendments to Our Recommendations

*Do you want to add language on any of these topics?*

- Ensuring clarity about how and why appointments are made to advisory group.
  - Ensure that appointed members have clarity on the expectations for their service.
- The need for regional and local advisories (which we talked about just after finalizing our draft desired end state).
  - In some cases surveys might best be distributed by trusted local partners rather than the state.
  - The state should also have a strategy for engaging existing parent and family groups at the local level, including Head Start.
- Ensure that people can access information and provide feedback on their mobile devices, which for many people is their primary communication tool.
  - IDEC might seek to use Padlets and surveys to collect information, including through text messaging or Signal.
  - IDEC also needs to find ways to engage families that are not tech-savvy.
- Have communications that don't look too "official" – for certain communities that could be a negative.
- Families from some cultures may be unfamiliar with the idea of advisory councils and may need culturally-competent support to be effective as council members.
- Be more explicit about the need for staffing beyond just the air traffic control function.

## What We Heard: Recommended Perspectives

We heard comments about voices that are needed on advisory councils, including:

- Multilingual families.
  - This may include families who speak multiple languages, including American Sign Language.
- Families whose children have disabilities.
  - This includes ensuring the inclusion of families with “dual identified” children (disabilities and multilingual).
- Families from the child welfare system.
- Adoptive and foster families.
- Elected officials.

Do we want to include these specific recommendations?



# Next Steps



## Next Steps

- At our next meeting, we will integrate ideas from our discussion of the current state.
- Please send us any additional materials you are aware of that might be relevant, from Illinois or elsewhere.



**QUESTIONS?**



# Public Comment Hearing from you!



# Survey

<https://tinyurl.com/ILDECsurvey>

