



Background Report on Governance Models to Inform Illinois' Early Childhood Governance Planning

Illinois Early Childhood Vision: Every child in Illinois begins kindergarten healthy, safe, eager to learn, and ready to succeed.

Illinois Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development Mission: The Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development (OECD) leads the state's initiatives to create an integrated system of quality early learning and development programs to help give all Illinois children a strong educational foundation before they begin kindergarten.

What success has OECD had to date in building a higher quality and more effective and efficient early childhood system for the state?

- **New Funding:** Secured nearly \$200 million in new federal funding to support the state's early childhood system.
- **Increased High-Quality Early Learning:** Established Excelerate, the state's system to improve the quality of child care and give parents information to help them choose high-quality care for their children.
- **Better Educated Teachers:** Increased the quality of early learning teachers in the state.
- **Improved Supports for Families:** Established a seamless system of supports for families at the state and community level.
- **System-wide Home Visiting Initiative:** Through the federal MIECHV funding, established and led a nationally recognized home visiting system—the envy of many states.
- **Innovations:** Identified innovations and greatly improved coordination of all aspects of the system through strategies such as Innovation Zones, the Pre-k Development Grant, the Early Head Start/Child Care Partnerships and Community Systems Planning.
- **Improved Cross-Agency Coordination:** Established the Illinois Early Childhood Interagency Team (IAT) to overcome silos and to better link components of the early childhood system across 14 different agencies. OECD also coordinates the work of the Illinois Early Learning Council, a public-private partnership established through legislation that brings together government, nonprofit and philanthropy to support and oversee the creation of a comprehensive, high-quality early childhood system.

What are the challenges to the current OECD structure?

- Time-limited federal funding that ends in 2017.
- Lack of administrative infrastructure to adequately manage the state's early childhood system, hire own staff, implement contracts, etc.

- Lack of control over financial resources to manage funding for the state's early childhood system.
- Lack of designated authority to bring agencies to the table for planning and improved coordination and to overcome inter-agency rivalries and barriers to collaboration and the establishment of a seamless system.

What role should OECD or some other early childhood governance structure play going forward to meet the state's vision for young children?

Illinois is a leader nationally in its innovations to build a high-quality early childhood system. In recent years, though, the lack of a governance structure with authority to lead, manage and coordinate the state's early childhood system has hampered Illinois' early childhood leaders. OECD staff have had to rely on good will and the leverage of the secured federal grants to bring public and private leaders together to improve coordination and increase innovation. As those federal grants end and state agencies increasingly move in different directions, the need for a strong, effective coordinating body to lead the state's early childhood system is more important than ever. Such a body can play the following key roles:

- Ensure cross-system collaboration and alignment across agencies and policies.
- Serve as a key informant to the Children's Cabinet on all early childhood policies and projects.
- Oversee, manage, prioritize and monitor all state and federal investments in early childhood programs and services while focused on a common vision.
- Set a framework of common outcomes and accountability measures around which all programs and services are organized and annually measure progress towards those outcomes.
- Gather data on both the reach of early childhood services and the need of children and families; use this data to better align state resources.
- Manage all funding and policies for early childhood components that transcend more than one agency, including child care, workforce development, home visiting (MIECHV-funded initiatives) and community systems planning strategies, among others.
- Regularly convene stakeholders to get input on state approaches.
- Emphasize the importance and facilitate the inclusion of family voice in state decision-making.
- Regularly seek to support innovations and serve as the disseminator of the information gained from these innovations.
- Establish a statewide public engagement and education campaign across the state's early childhood investments that emphasizes both a common vision and messages about the importance of an education and development system that begins at birth and relies on strong participation of families, communities, and the state in assuring that every child arrives to kindergarten ready for success.
- Establish and lead a statewide system of community collaborations.
- In times of limited resources, set priorities and clarify with public and private investors the essential investments in the state's early childhood efforts.
- **Do more and better – Better utilize state and federal resources to reach more children and families in every region of the state.**

What are important lessons from other states? (Excerpted from the BUILD Initiative resource, “Early Childhood System Governance: Lessons from State Experiences.”)

States that have designed governance approaches and systems have learned some important lessons, regardless of the model they created. The key lessons include the following:

Authority- Regardless of approach, early childhood governance should include these areas:

- Coordination across programs and services;
- Alignment to promote a developmental continuum;
- Efficiency that results in no duplication and more value for the money spent; and
- Accountability for quality, equity and results.

Influencing Factors- The following factors are critical for the success of the structure:

- Gubernatorial leadership;
- Strong leadership of the structure;
- Clear statutes;
- Control of funding; and
- Consolidation or co-location of critical elements of the system.

Effective Governance Elements- In order for a governance structure to be effective, certain elements must be in place:

- Representation of various constituencies;
- Transparency;
- The ability to access and use data for decision making;
- Plurality of leadership, empowered at all levels; and
- Knowledgeable and savvy bureaucratic leadership.

Proposed Illinois Early Childhood Governance Structure: Based upon the current realities and uniqueness of Illinois, as well as what has been learned by many other states in the development of their own early childhood governance structures, the following is proposed:

Phase 1: Provide adequate funding for OECD over the next two years to allow it to play the following roles:

- Convene the Early Learning Council and the Interagency Team and to serve as a key informant to the Children’s Cabinet on early childhood policies and related decisions.
- Analyze the current early childhood system (policies, funding, contracts, etc.) across all related state agencies and private partners; determine what works and what should be revised.
- Develop a long-term strategic plan for the state’s policies and investments in early childhood programs and services using the framework of a common vision and goals and common outcomes around which all future funding decisions and contracts will be aligned.
- Establish a framework for annually measuring both progress towards early childhood outcomes and needs of children and families across the state.
- Manage/oversee all state agency positions focused on specified early childhood programs and funding. (Assign these positions to work under the leadership of the OECD Executive Director.)

Funding and positions would be allocated by individual state agencies to support OECD's work. OECD would be tasked with meeting the project responsibilities assigned to each of these allocated positions.

Phase 2: By FY 2020, establish a new agency that will have authority over all early childhood related programs, policies and funding.

A. Government Agency - Numerous states have now established government agencies or offices to oversee their early childhood systems-building efforts. One option for Illinois would be to establish a new government agency with authority over all policies, programs and funding related to young children. The head of the new agency would serve as a cabinet-level position and would have similar authority to all other cabinet positions. Funding authority would be phased in over time based upon the complexity of transferring specific federal funding sources and staff. Precedent for such an agency can be found in:

- Connecticut Office of Early Childhood: This office was established in 2014. It is a cabinet-level position and is responsible for coordinating and improving the various early childhood programs and components in the state to create a cohesive high-quality early childhood system. It was first created through Executive Order No. 35 by Governor Malloy and, a year later, Public Act 14-39 formally established the agency in statute. ([Click here for one of the MOUs established prior to the move of programs to the new agency.](#)) The agency includes the following overall goals and responsibilities:
 - Build a child- and family-centered agency culture committed to excellence, innovation, and accountability;
 - Create outcomes-driven policies and programs;
 - Develop a comprehensive early childhood assessment system;
 - Align quality standards across all early care and education settings, including home-based programs;
 - Increase access to high-quality early childhood services through funding and supports;
 - Strengthen state and community partnerships;
 - Develop a cross-system governance structure for a comprehensive early childhood system that has clarity about its structure, definitions of early learning and risk factors, what a system entails, and what cross-system governance should accomplish. ([Click here for the draft system hybrid plan](#));
 - Develop a State Comprehensive Early Childhood Plan in partnership with stakeholders to support children and families in early childhood;
 - Support workforce development;
 - Use data to inform programs and policies and create an integrated statewide data system; and
 - Reform funding for all early childhood services and programs to align and integrate funding sources, eligibility, and administrative requirements.
- Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL): DECAL is responsible for meeting the child care and early education needs of Georgia's children and their families. It administers Georgia's Pre-K Program; licenses child care centers and home-based child care; administers Georgia's Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) program (subsidy), federal nutrition programs, and the MIECHV, RTT-ELC and EHS/CC Partnership grants; and manages Quality Rated, Georgia's QRIS. The department also houses the Head Start State Collaboration Office, distributes federal funding to enhance the quality and availability of child care, and works collaboratively with

Georgia child care resource and referral agencies and organizations throughout the state to enhance early care and education. In 2004, then Governor Sonny Perdue and the Georgia General Assembly created DECAL to streamline the state's services to Georgia's children from birth to age five and to support the families of these young children. To form the department, the Office of School Readiness merged with units from the Department of Human Resources, the Department of Education, and the Georgia Child Care Council. The focus of DECAL has steadily expanded to incorporate other elements of the state's early childhood system. DECAL leaders also collaborate with the Department of Public Health and the Department of Family and Children Services and meet regularly to strengthen coordination.

- [Massachusetts Department of Education and Early Care \(DEEC\)](#): DEEC's mission is to provide the foundation that supports all children in their development as lifelong learners and contributing members of the community, and supports families in their essential work as parents and caregivers. It was created as part of an Executive Office of Education that includes the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, the Department of Higher Education and the University of Massachusetts. DEEC was created by former Governor Mitt Romney in 2006 and its areas of authority include child care licensing, subsidy, workforce/professional development, Head Start, community systems, family support, home visiting, kindergarten entry assessment and QRIS, among others.
- [Washington State Department of Early Learning \(DEL\)](#): DEL's mission is to assure that children in Washington start kindergarten healthy, capable, and confident in their ability to learn and succeed. It offers voluntary, comprehensive, high-quality early learning programs and support to families and early learning professionals, builds public awareness and support for high-quality early learning and promotes system excellence. Areas of authority include child care licensing, subsidy, QRIS, Head Start, professional development, community systems planning and collaboration, Infant/Toddler (ESIT) program, home visiting (MIECHV), pre-K, etc. Under legislation, DEL is required to meet regularly and collaborate with the Department of Public Health, the Department of Education and Thrive (a nonprofit organization created to be the private sector partner to DEL in its early childhood systems-building efforts). DEL's approximately 271 employees work at the headquarter office in Olympia or in one of the 16 field offices. The current biennial budget is approximately \$622 million in state, federal and private funding. DEL was established in 2006 through [legislation](#) and its scope and authority have expanded over the years since its inception.

- B. [Governor's Office](#) – Another option would be to maintain the OECD but to give it more policymaking authority over all aspects of the state's early childhood system. An option to look at for a similar model would be the Governor's Early Childhood Office in Ohio. The staffing for this office is limited. The individual state agencies retain their staff and funding but they are under the authority of the Governor's Early Childhood Policy Adviser including the early childhood components of the Departments of Education, Job and Family Services, Mental Health, Public Health, Developmental Disabilities and the Offices of Health Transformation and Management and Budget. This position and its authority were created by executive order in 2011. A similar position was created focused on health transformation at the same time. The goals of the office were to:
- Define and measure kindergarten readiness;
 - Break down silos between government agencies and programs to assure that all government support to high-need children is coordinated, streamlined and effective; and
 - Improve system performance.

Under the executive order, all cabinet agencies, boards, and commissions are required to comply with any requests and directives issued by this position to meet the goals of the executive order. The Executive Order also established an Early Education and Care Innovation Committee to include state, local, business and philanthropic representatives. The office was also tasked with work at the community level to support early childhood systems planning.

- C. Nonprofit or Public/Private Partnership: Another option to consider in establishing an entity with authority over early childhood systems building is a nonprofit organization or a quasi-governmental public/private partnership. To accomplish all that you want to accomplish, remaining in the public sector is likely the best option but consider a private-sector component to your governing structure. The private sector provides a great deal more flexibility than does the government. Both North Carolina ([NC Partnership for Children](#)) and Michigan ([Early Childhood Investment Corporation](#)) have established such organizations to coordinate components of their state early childhood systems-building efforts. NCPC was created through [legislation](#) in 1993 and ECIC was created through an interlocal agreement with Michigan's intermediate school districts in 2005 under provisions of the Urban Cooperation Act and the Revised School Code authorized by the state legislature. While both organizations have funding over which they have authority, neither has responsibility for the broader components of the early childhood system. By the funding and authority that they do have, they have earned a seat at the table for planning and coordination. In addition, both models are responsible for overseeing their statewide system of local partnerships. The approach in each of these states creates opportunities for additional private-sector funding and support. But neither of these entities has authority over other components of the work. Should Illinois consider a significant governance role for a nonprofit organization, these two state models have lots of lessons learned that can guide Illinois' planning so that you can maximize the benefits and minimize the deficits. Another example to consider is [Thrive Washington](#). It was created in 2006 at the same time as Washington's Department of Early Learning (DEL) to be the private-sector partner and was recognized in legislation for that role. The organization now manages a budget of approximately \$11 million (much of it government funding from DEL) to support innovation and community-based planning to support DEL's goals.

Recommendations and Key Considerations

As Illinois leaders determine the best governance approaches to strengthen your early childhood system, we offer a few recommendations for consideration:

- **Political Champion:** A political champion – preferably the governor – is essential to establishing authority and leadership over the state's early childhood system. North Carolina's Governor Hunt is a great example of such a champion. Governor Hunt put his early childhood agenda at the top of his list of priorities and reminded legislators, his cabinet, and the public of that agenda on a weekly and, sometimes, daily basis. Every member of his cabinet was asked to report regularly on what s/he was doing to support the early childhood agenda. Ohio Governors Voinovich (1993-2000) and Kasich (current) were/are similar champions in their state, putting both funding and authority into their annual budgets to the legislature and regularly speaking on the importance of early childhood investment and coordination.
- **Authority and Institutionalization:** What distinguishes the examples of governance approaches cited above is the level of oversight and authority each has to lead the state's early childhood system. Good will and a political champion can move early childhood efforts but the authority ends when the champion leaves office. In any proposal you advance, think about how it

institutionalizes authority and assures that the work you need to accomplish can continue long after the governor leaves office.

- **Legislation:** While early childhood initiatives are often launched through an executive order, the ones that last are sustained through passage of actual legislation providing actual authority and longevity for the work. (Examples of such legislation can be found in the previous pages.) Those states that launched their work with great fanfare as the result of an executive order are often now a distant memory, having been eliminated with the advent of a new governor or even earlier, due to the lack of real authority or funding in the executive order to move an early childhood agenda across multiple agencies.
- **FLEXIBLE Funding:** At a minimum, funding should be institutionalized to maintain a staff that oversees the work of the governing entity. Preferably, funding will be allocated to support the agency's programmatic efforts. Flexibility in use of funding is also important. If possible, advocate for bridge or seed funding from state general funds that can be used as leverage with other agencies to move the early childhood agenda. Most state and federal funding comes with significant restrictions that limit the ability to try new strategies. With flexible funding, you can test a program that can be sustained by other state and federal funds if it proves effective. Flexible funding also can bridge the work of two different agencies to fill the gap that they cannot cover because of federal or state requirements. Such opportunities will facilitate conversation and collaboration among agency leaders and allow for new approaches to long-standing problems. Think strategically about funding for the new governance structure that might promote innovation. Even if you propose a public-sector governance structure, consider potential linkages with a nonprofit partner that can secure additional private sector funding – a source that often comes with greater flexibility than public dollars.
- **Set your Vision and Measurements Early:** Early on, determine how you will measure success. Translate those measures into outputs (in the beginning) and outcomes (longer term) related to children and families. Integrate those measures into everything you do, including contracts, memorandums of understanding, public communications, etc.
- **Determine a Realistic Pace for Change:** Rome wasn't built in a day and Illinois' new early childhood governance structure does not have to be either. In many of the state efforts cited, initial steps were small and often involved taking over obvious areas of responsibility that didn't inspire significant opposition. This left more controversial moves for later discussion. From a political perspective, this may minimize opposition and inspire support from those who want an easy win that shows that they are early childhood supporters.
- **Think Politically:** The messaging on a new governance structure is going to be critical. Brief legislative champions and others about the proposed structure as soon as that is feasible. Make sure their questions are answered and their concerns are addressed. Innovation, efficiency, effectiveness, accountability should be watchwords.