

Illinois Early Childhood Funding Commission Meeting (Virtual)

Meeting Minutes *November 10, 2020*

Introductions and Agenda (12:05 – 12:15 PM)

To begin the meeting, Bethany Patten took roll call and reviewed housekeeping items.

Deputy Governor Ruiz thanked the Commissioners for joining the meeting virtually. He shared the goals and agenda for the meeting. Goals included the following: discuss feedback from the national panel of experts at the October Commission meeting and relate that feedback to our work thus far; reconsider the Commission's timeline; and discuss preliminary findings from the Racial Equity Working Group. Agenda items included the following: reflection on what was heard from last month's national panel of experts; a discussion on the Commission's timeline; a presentation and discussion on findings from the Racial Equity Working Group; and next steps and public comment.

Deputy Governor Ruiz reminded the Commission of its charge and reminded Commissioners that the drafted recommendations are designed to directly address different components of the charge. The Deputy Governor reminded the Commission that it is doing this work to address critical challenges in the system for families and providers, including inequitable access to high quality services, challenges in navigating the system, instability of funding for providers, insufficient data to inform equitable decisions, fragmented accountability, and inadequate funding. The Deputy Governor also reminded the Commission of its original Guiding Principles and asked the Commission to use the principles as a guiding beacon and evaluative tool to determine whether the recommendations live up to the principles.

Reflecting on National Panel of Experts Feedback (12:15 – 12:45 PM)

Leader Currie said that in last month's meeting, the Commission heard from a distinguished panel of national experts. The Commission engaged the panel for two reasons: to provide feedback and suggestions to the Commission on the draft recommendations, and to respond to Commissioner questions about the draft recommendations. Minutes from the October meeting detailed the conversation with the panel, and a crosswalk was shared prior to today's meeting that aligned statements from the panel with work done by the Commission to date.

Leader Currie said that the Commission would discuss findings from the national panel by first allowing for independent review of the crosswalk, then going into small group break-out discussion, and then returning to full group discussion. Questions designed to guide discussion in small and full group included the following:

- What else did you hear from the experts that we have not summarized?
- Which of our Commission's recommendations were highlighted by the experts?
- What issues does the Commission most need to address based on this feedback?

The Commission then spent time in independent review, small group discussion, and full group discussion on the questions above regarding the national panel of experts. Members discussed several topics, including the following:

- Some issues need to be resolved before a new agency is created, some issues need to be resolved during an implementation phase, and other issues should be held for a new agency to resolve. We should have a plan for executing remaining work and a plan for how to maintain momentum during a transition period.
- Does the report have enough specificity for us to know what will happen on the ground as a result of the recommendations?
- There are avenues in the recommendations that can get to racial equity, but we have not yet been very explicit.
- There is not enough emphasis in the recommendations on cross-agency, cross-system work.

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- We need more specificity on how we'd structure supports for families in a new agency.
- We need to expand our definition of accessibility and awareness.
- We need more specificity on the role of community collaborations and community-based organizations, and how to amp up family engagement.
- We need to get as much input as possible from parents.
- We should address transitions (between pre-k and kindergarten, between different state agencies) during the implementation process.
- We need to get on the same page about what high-quality means when we speak about high-quality early childhood education and care services.
- We need to name what hasn't been done and describe how it should get decided in order to elevate the issues that we're planning to reserve for a new agency without getting too far into implementation ourselves. Two months of additional time is a luxury, but it won't get us where we need to go.

Leader Currie summarized the discussion by lifting up that the Commission needs to develop greater specificity in the recommendations on the following items: racial equity, cross-agency connections, capacity building and infrastructure, and a focus on family engagement throughout the process.

Commission Timeline (12:45 – 12:55 PM)

Deputy Governor Ruiz had to leave the meeting due to an unexpected urgent issue in the Governor's Office, and so First Assistant Deputy Governor Theresa Hawley introduced the next component of the agenda, which was a discussion on the Commission's timeline.

Dr. Hawley said that the original timeline for the Commission called for a report to be delivered to the Governor in January 2021 in response to the Commission charge. Given everything we know at this time regarding the pandemic, our economic realities, and our ongoing deliberations, we need to extend our timeline to March 2021 to deliver the final report. This will allow the Commission to fully consider feedback from the expert panel, recommendations from the Racial Equity Working Group, findings from the Technical Working Group, a child-centered focus on the recommendations in the final report, and recommendations for planning and implementation work in 2021. With this in mind, we have updated the Commission's schedule to reflect this extension.

The Commission spent time in discussion around the timeline change. Members raised points including the following:

- Questions around what we still need to cover and what the Commission's timeline will be for doing so, including the Racial Equity Working Group, Technical Working Group, town halls, synthesis from these groups, etc.
- We heard from the national panel of experts that lag time tends to kill things. There will always be more to do, versus having clear planned momentum and clarity around next steps. Legislation is one way to do this, but Executive Orders can also do this at any time. The original timeline is to get something out in the world. We need to know the timeline through March and what the handoff is in March to keep the work going through a public-facing accountability strategy.
- Providers need hope and quick wins. We need to keep providers engaged, motivated, and hopeful.
- We've identified that we have a lot more to do and a lot more to flesh out, and two months won't give us that time. We need to start to address outstanding issues while keeping momentum going.

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- The last year has exposed racism in our country and in our state and the impact it's having on communities of color. Our kids live in a different world than those in wealthy neighborhoods. We can't continue to have these disparities.
- The Commission needs to consider specific proposals for action that will allow both concrete public and internal steps. Both short and long term recommendations for action in the final Commission report.
- How will we use the additional time to intentionally incorporate the feedback we've seen into the recommendations? Where and when will we start wordsmithing the recommendations?
- This Commission has been a holder of our desire to work collectively toward shared goals. The energy this Commission has harnessed remains. We now have momentum we need to keep. Exactly how long the Commission is still together versus when it hands off work to the next body is less important than that everyone be committed to keeping the conversation going and planning to address the issues raised and that we're thinking about the multiyear process we've unleashed and that we're committed to seeing through. It's less about specifics of the schedule and more about the overall commitment to see through what the Commission does. The Commission was never going to solve everything. We need the Commission to represent a win and the next phase to represent a building on that.
- The Commission's report should recommend that the Governor establish an Executive Order and should detail a list of the work that remains to be done. There should be a high-level representative committee that oversees implementation and funds racial equity work. This is an opportunity to address what has become clear during the pandemic, which is that the impact is greatest on Black and brown communities and this is a way to start to address these disparities.
- The field is hopeful and has been brought in to draft the recommendations, but it doesn't take much at this time in our history to cause distrust.

Dr. Hawley described ongoing work within the Governor's Office, GOECD, and the state agencies involved in early childhood aligned with the Commission's draft recommendations. Superintendent Ayala described leadership meetings, and Dr. Jor'dan discussed receipt of the Preschool Development Grant and establishment of the Early Learning Council's Family Advisory Committee.

Racial Equity Working Group (12:55 – 1:45 PM)

Mr. George Davis said that as a Commission, a core part of our work is to address fundamental inequities in Illinois' early childhood system by providing recommendations designed to ensure equity – equity related to race, ethnicity, geography, and age. Because of this priority, and especially a priority on racial equity in the Commission's recommendations, the Commission created a Racial Equity Working Group. The goal of this Working Group is to evaluate the draft recommendations through a racial equity lens, identify any red flags in the recommendations, and propose guidance to ensure racial equity in implementation of the recommendations. Their work is inspired by a Racial Equity Impact Assessment, which is a tool designed for this type of analysis. The Working Group has been facilitated by Senior Fellows with Chicago United for Equity, with support from Bethany Patten, who is a current CUE Fellow.

Mr. Davis introduced Adam Slade and Vanessa Lee, Senior Fellows with Chicago United for Equity, to present preliminary findings from their analysis and the work of the Racial Equity Working Group.

Vanessa Lee and Adam Slade presented their findings using the meeting facilitation slides. Adam Slade then asked for reactions and questions on the preliminary findings. Members shared brief reactions, including the following:

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- A concern about language in analyzing who benefits from or who is burdened by a policy recommendation, and the political considerations that may spring from labeling a group as benefiting or burdened
- A question around how to balance the fact that the Commission started this work late with maximizing the opportunity to amplify the importance of racial equity work and analysis moving forward.
- A question on whether CUE or the Racial Equity Working Group formed an opinion on whether the Funding Adequacy recommendation included sufficient resources to accomplish goals for improved racial equity.

Mr. Davis thanked Adam Slade and Vanessa Lee for their presentation and discussion and turned things over to Leader Currie to give further updates and next steps.

Next Steps (1:45 – 1:55 PM)

Leader Currie described the Commission's priorities for the coming months, which included the following:

- Fully consider feedback from the expert panel
- Fully consider recommendations from the Racial Equity Working Group & Technical Working Group
- Ensure a child-centered focus of our recommendations as will be written in our final report
- Create a final report
- Formulate details of planning and implementation work for March-December 2021 to ensure our recommendations move forward

Leader Currie then described some process updates on the status of the drafting of the report outline for Commissioner review:

- Commissioners should expect to receive the first draft outline soon
- Commissioners should consider when reviewing the report outline that the main audience is the Governor, with the benefit that the report is public, and the broader audience of the report includes:
 - Families
 - Early childhood providers
 - Legislators
 - Advocates and advisory councils
 - State agency implementation team members
 - General public

Leader Currie said that when Commissioners receive the draft report outline, there will be guiding instructions to support Commissioners in reviewing the report and providing feedback. Guiding questions might include the following:

- What aspects of the draft report outline are strongest in answering the Commission's charge?
- How can the draft report outline be strengthened to better answer the Commission's charge?
- What content specific changes or additions do you recommend, and why?
- What do you envision in a final, written report to include that you do not see in the outline?

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Leader Currie noted that since the Commission has extended its timeline through March 2021, we will need to schedule Commission meetings for January through March, and we will be in touch with those dates and times. In the meantime, the Commission can expect the following next steps:

- Racial Equity and Technical Working Groups will continue their work
- Commissioners will review and provide feedback on the draft final report outline that will be sent to Commissioners
- The December Commission Meeting will be held virtually on Tuesday 12/8

Leader Currie thanked Commissioners for their engagement and welcomed public comments.

Public Comment (1:55 – 2:00PM)

Two members of the public made comments: Dr. Charles Montorio-Archer and Pat Twymon.