

Town Hall Summary

Equitable Early Childhood Education and Care Funding Commission

The Equitable Early Childhood Education and Care Commission (Commission), in partnership with Illinois Action for Children and the Early Childhood Funding Coalition, hosted three Town Halls to share the emerging recommendations from the Commission and to allow participants to ask questions of Commissioners. Town Halls were held 12/10/20, 12/16/20 and 1/14/21.

Below is a summary of participants who attended and questions asked.

Town Hall Participants

Town Hall meetings were held via Zoom and livestreamed (on two occasions) via YouTube. Below are the numbers who attended via Zoom. The numbers below do not include anyone watching the live stream on YouTube, since registration is not required and we were unable to track. At any time during the Town Halls as many up to 50 people were watching via YouTube.

Meeting Date	Attendees on Zoom ⁸
Dec 10	205 People
Dec 16	150 People
Jan 14	200 People
Total	~555 (Duplicated count; some attendees attended multiple town halls)

Roles of Participants

During each Town Hall, participants were asked via a poll the role in which they served. Of the 289 people who responded, approximately 40% were early childhood directors, owners, or administrators.

Role	Number	%
Advocate	50	17%
Director/Owner/Admin	112	39%
Government/Agency/Commission	37	13%
Home Child Care	22	8%
Other*	46	16%
Parent/Family	7	2%
Teacher/Assistant/Home Visitor	15	5%
	289	100%

*It appears that some of those who selected 'other' were from higher education, philanthropy, school districts, community based organizations, other non-profits, and others organizations.

Questions and Comments from Townhalls, Combined

Below is summary of the questions and comments submitted by Town Hall participants.

Topics with the most questions included those around:

- **Implementation and next steps.** For example, participants wanted to know how and when implementation of the recommendations would begin and how stakeholders would be included in these conversations.
- **Impact and inclusion of programs and settings.** Participants wanted to know if the goal of the ‘new’ system was to offer mixed delivery of services in schools, homes, and centers and how the system would interact with Head Start.
- **Workforce.** Participants questioned how the Commission will address the workforce issues, including workforce shortage, compensation/compensation parity, qualifications and credential requirements, and recruitment and retention.

Other commonly mentioned topics included:

- **New agency and governance,** including questions around the new state agency, the structure of the agency, and the role of regional and local networks.
- **Relationships and engagement with providers,** including questions about how to improve the relationship between providers and the state, improve communication, and engaging providers in discussions and decisions.
- **Children with special needs,** including questions around serving children in community and home based settings.
- **Provider payment mechanisms,** including questions about contracts (vs vouchers), family co-payments, and administrative burdens.
- **Equity and inclusion,** including questions about the need for ongoing racial equity assessments of decisions and recommendations and how key stakeholders will be included around discussions and decision making about the new system.

A full list of topics and summarized questions are listed below. *Note, these were combined and summarized to eliminate redundancy.

Topic	Questions and Comments
Next Steps, Timing for Implementation	<p><i>There were many questions about next steps and implementation, including what the plan is post-commission, who will be included, and when recommendations will be implemented.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Next Steps: What are the next steps? What will happen after the recommendations are given to the Governor? Provide an overview of the next steps for your commission. What will happen to the recommendations after the conclusion of the commission’s work and who will be involved in those next steps? Will providers and parents be included? • Implementation: Will the state implement these recommendations? Providers are struggling and need help. When do you think these recommendations will be implemented across the state?

Topic	Questions and Comments
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation Timeline: Is there a timeline for reaching these goals, beyond getting the report to the Governor office by March?
Parent Choice, Parent/Family Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family Choice: How can we ensure the recommendations and implementation, reflect the needs and experience of parents/families? • Full Day Options: In our area, families really need full day options, but child care programs are full with waiting lists, and PFA preschools are half day sessions, leaving parents without care for the other half of the day. • Rural Communities: Rural communities need more options for child care and other services.
Settings, Programs	<p><i>Lots of questions about which programs and settings will be included and how schools, homes, centers, and other providers will be impacted.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CBOs: Will private organizations be included in this plan? Community based organizations? How does a fully funded system impact private child care? • CBOs vs Schools: Will the commission level the playing field between public schools and community organizations? Will districts be encouraged to work with private organizations? Will funding be added to schools or centers or both? • Family Child Care: Where do family child care providers fit in this system? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Head Start/Early Head Start: Where does Head Start fit into this plan? There needs to be collaboration with Head Start to ensure low income families are served. Head Start has positive evidence based outcomes for kindergarten readiness and family outcomes. • PFA: Would this affect Preschool for All? How will you determine if providers have the capacity to administer a PFA program? • Crisis Nurseries: Are crisis nurseries included so that we can help families get services? Currently, crisis nurseries are a vital 24/7 resource in the state for families of young children ages birth to six.
New Agency, State Infrastructure, Regional/Local, Intermediaries	<p>Centralize/New Agency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What Agency: You mentioned centralizing into one agency. Which agency? How did you decide? Is this a separate new government agency being proposed to govern childcare? How will the agency be structured? Will all programs be housed there? • Intermediaries: Will middle man agencies like Healthy Start and DFSS still exist? • Chicago: Will this work and recommendations pertain to City of Chicago or just the rest of the state? • Regional Networks: Do you envision state funding to further develop a regional network of support agencies for child care providers? Do you envision funding to support local collaborations and community systems development?
Relationships and Engagement with Providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationships: Will the new agency work towards building better relationships with providers? The relationship oftentimes is adversarial and mistrusting. How providers are treated and the responsiveness of the funding is due in part to state agency leadership.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communications: How will communications be handled? Communication is slow, and we often are left not knowing what’s happening. DHS is slow to respond (or unresponsive) to questions about CCAP. • Relationships with DCFS: Several mentioned adversarial relationships with DCFS. One mentioned she had a “good” representative. • Engagement/Inclusion in Decisions: Will providers be offered opportunities they can easily access to provide input on a new system? How will providers be included in discussions going forward?
ExceleRate, Quality, Program Standards	<p>Licensing Standards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will DCFS licensing standards change? There is a direct correlation between standards and quality. • Current licensing allows having 16 2yos in classroom with only 2 adults; this is unsafe and does not represent quality. • The state of Illinois has some of the strictest DCFS rules in the country, which has led to a huge staffing crisis. • Implementing lower class sizes and child/staff ratios must be coupled with significant increases in funding. <p>Excelerate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will Excelerate be restructured? Will Circles of Quality be considered when distributing or determining funding for centers?
Workforce, Qualifications, Staffing and Compensation	<p><i>This area got the most questions from providers. Many are worried and impacted by the staffing shortage. This is the issue most commonly mentioned.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workforce development is the greatest challenge we are facing and the workforce is the backbone of our system. Will the funding commission make any recommendations for funding a system that develops current teachers and attracts new people to the field (in addition to education/ credentialing? And one that compensates our staff appropriately? (Wages and benefits) • How will Illinois realistically address the current staffing crisis in child care? <p>Compensation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We must increase workforce compensation. Did the Commission consider increasing compensation for those who work in centers and homes? We are struggling to find teachers for our programs. They can be paid more to work elsewhere. • What are the Commission strategies to increase ECE wages from aspirational to implementation among all ECE providers including for profit, not for profit, community based, home providers? • How will you address the issue of pay parity across the ECEC settings? There are many qualified, passionate, educators that are severely underpaid even with equal or similar qualifications as their peers in school districts, or funded programs. <p>Provider Credentials/Qualification Requirements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not reduce qualifications and credentials, as these are critical for quality.

Topic	Questions and Comments
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing our ECEC workforce is essential, as is supporting our current workforce. Has the commission considered specific ways to address this, without reducing qualifications? • Will there be mandated educational expectations of all providers to be in compliance with these new recommendations? If so, will there be adequate time and funding for these changes? • What will staffing requirements in our licensed centers be considering the staffing crisis? • It seems education is higher priority than those soft skills in requirements. I want to hire those with nurturing mannerisms, those who are willing to learn quality curriculum and how to facilitate a developmentally appropriate classroom. • Will there a change/decrease in current staff qualifications to increase the candidate pool? • Staffing requirements are challenging to meet, and it's difficult to find staff that meet these requirements. • The State of Illinois has some of the strictest DCFS rules in the country which has led to a huge staffing crisis. • We urgently need to find ways to better ways to prepare and support our workforce without exhausting them or putting more burden on the child care centers. <p>Financial Incentives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there an opportunity to include financial support and incentives for professional development? • Consider college loan forgiveness or full scholarships for those pursuing ECEC certificates and degrees, since their low wages don't allow them enough income to spend on college tuition. • Provide direct grants for apprenticeship models so that colleges and centers can work together to increase their staffing and the educational qualifications of their current staffing. <p>PD/Higher Ed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where does INCCRRA fit into this new system? • Will the commission work with higher education to develop alternative licensure programs for Level 5 to PEL? The current Public Act ends 2023. • We need to ensure mentoring and coaching is available so less leave the field.
COVID	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there any consideration about direct compensation to childcare staff, especially those that have worked through peak pandemic for essential workers?
Provider Payments (Mechanisms, Paperwork, Eligibility Verification)	<p>Contracts and Vouchers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contracts can bring assurance of funding and more stability to providers. • Why was the decision made to recommend contracts and not vouchers? Here's a study from NY that shows that contracts (vs vouchers) do not bring stability to the industry. http://policyforchildren.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/fulltext.pdf

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is your thinking behind recommending contracts vs vouchers? It seems that stability and quality would improve if there was more of a financial investment in the industry. • Contracts through the ExceleRate pilot have been a game changer. <p>Rate increases:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will center based providers see an increase in rates? • We need a solution to address the problem of CCAP rate increases eventually making full pay/private pay care unaffordable. <p>Paperwork/Processes: Will the current system of DHS payments, certificates, approvals, etc. change with the new agency? There is so much paperwork involved for low income families to receive DHS funding.</p>
Funding the System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copays: What will family co-pays be, and how will co-pays be administered in a new system? • Learning from EBF: The Evidence-Based Funding Formula been successful. What research has been done and lessons have been learned from the first few years of EBF implementation to apply to Birth to 5? • Fully Funding the System: Is there any plan to fully subsidize the first five years of education? • Chicago Set Aside: Is there a recommendation to change the state statute that sets aside funding for Chicago?
Cost Factors/ Cost Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why is so much funding needed: Why do you need that much more funding? What is happening with current funding? • Cost Factors: Can you share more about what’s included in the cost for the system? How did you come up with costs for quality care and early learning? • Workforce Development Costs: Can you speak more to how workforce development- both recruitment of new individuals to the ECE workforce and upskilling of current professionals- was factored into the cost model?
Budget Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the budget crisis impact these goals?
Children with Special Needs/Early Intervention/Special Education	<p>Serving Children in Community Programs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often children with disabilities are excluded from childcare due to the expense of modifications, or increased staffing needed to care for them. How will the Commission’s report address equitable access for children with disabilities in private early childhood programs? • Will additional funding be set aside for community providers to serve children with disabilities? • How will the state support centers to serve children birth to three with special needs? • Model out of NYC for serving special needs in centers: https://infohub.nyced.org/working-with-the-doe/special-education-providers/preschool-providers/seit-guidance <p>Accountability to Serve Children With Special Needs</p>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What types of accountability will be required for childcare providers to create inclusive settings? <p>EI and Grant Based:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early Interventionists receive significant Medicaid Reimbursement and providers receive significant private insurance reimbursement. Grant driven may not work. <p>“Shared” Specialists</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It would be great to create a pool for providers which consist of specialists, consultants, infant/toddler specialists, special ed therapists etc.
Child Outcomes, K Readiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kindergarten Readiness: What strategies does the commission plan to implement to close the vast gap in kindergarten readiness?
Cross System Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the vision for cross-system collaboration and support, especially between early childhood and child welfare? • How will the new agency collaborate and coordinate with ISBE around transition, issues impacting English Learners and children with special needs and their families, etc.
Equity, Marginalized and Under-resourced Communities Racial Equity Impact Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring priority for underserved communities: What safeguards will be put in place to ensure that those communities in the state that have been historically neglected will get the funds needed to level the playing field? The amount of dollars needed in these communities will be substantial. <p>Racial Equity Impact Analyses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With a comprehensive Race Equity Analysis of the Early Childhood Care and Education landscape, the state can better determine the inequities in access to services and the obstacles faced. • Adding new resources to the existing Early Childhood Care and Education system, without a proper Race Equity Analysis, may end up perpetuating existing disparities.
Provider Voice and Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will the voices of practitioners continue to be heard and incorporated after the report is submitted? • Who will be engaged in next steps? Who will be included in planning to implement recommendations? • Providers must be at the table for conversations moving forward. • How have parents been included in these discussions?
Commissioner Composition and Processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who participated on the Commission? Were there any providers? • What is the commission's process to resolve disagreements about the direction of the recommendations?