**Illinois Early Learning Council Executive Committee Meeting**

**November 6, 2023**

**1 – 3 p.m.**

**Join from the meeting link:**

[**https://illinois.webex.com/illinois/j.php?MTID=m08ff1f453552cf25a10d9342034ce603**](https://illinois.webex.com/illinois/j.php?MTID=m08ff1f453552cf25a10d9342034ce603)

Meeting number: 2630 522 4308

Meeting password: rAg87i9dMWp

**Number of participants: 183**

**1 pm. -- Welcome and Updates from Co-Chairs**

The Early Learning Council Executive Committee meeting was called to order at 1 p.m. Phyllis Glink, Co-Chair, welcomed everyone and informed them to view the chat for the definitions pertaining to racial equity. She shared her excitement about the Governor’s recent announcement to form a new early childhood agency and how important this agency will be to ensuring Illinois’ children and families receive high quality, integrated and accessible services. Ms. Glink acknowledged that the ELC is a very important body that will help to inform and lead this work.

Martin Torres, Deputy Governor for Education, took a few minutes to express his appreciation to the staff and leaders of the Governors of Early Childhood Development. They were able to celebrate the GOECD with many former directors and staff, talk about what it meant to them and the field, and what it was able to accomplish. Martin thanked everyone who was there to join the celebration. When the governor made his announcement, part of that executive order was to rescind the GOECD. It was great to be able to celebrate and then launch into work on the early childhood governance.

Martin stated that the early childhood funding commission aligns the governors top line priorities. The funding position did not pause during the pandemic. The first recommendation was to use the Commission’s Articulated, Long-term ECEC Funding Goal in policymaking. The second was to centralize the ECEC funding system and distribute funding in new ways. The third was to centralize Illinois’ ECEC systems into one newly formed Early Childhood Education and Care State Agency. It has been a long time in the making and is going to be a multi-year effort. There will need to be plans set on how many people are needed, Locations of the agencies in Springfield and Chicago, and more. The plan is pushed into FY27 because we know we will run into more things that will take time.

**1:20pm. -- Introduction to Ann Whalen, Early Childhood Transition Director**

Martin introduced Ann Whalen, in the role of Early Childhood Transition Director. She has been recruited because of her experience in education and government. She brings hands-on bureaucratic experience to the table. All that experience will be critical to help the state pull from existing agencies into one early childhood agency. She will create the new agency, manage the internal team, and a team of consultants. Today is her first day so we have just asked her to introduce herself but will not be diving into further conversation with her yet.

Ann Whalen, Early Childhood Transition Director, thanked everyone for the opportunity to be here. It is an exciting moment in time, and she is thrilled to be part of the effort to join this work. She thanked everyone for helping this come to fruition. Ms. Whalen looks forward to working with the ELC and everyone that is on the call. She spent over 20 years in education. She has started programs, confined programs, and worked across multiple agencies on the federal and local level.

**1:30pm. -- Transition Structure**

Martin Torres spoke on the transition structure. Consultants will be funded through the Preschool Development Grant and will be included in the State’s application. Martin introduced the following consultants that have been chosen to support the work acknowledging that some of the contracts are still pending:

**Katie Reed: Afton Partners**

Katie shared that their consultancy is focused on systems building. It is heavily involved with the state and early childhood education, especially since the funding commission and will continue to advance many of the projects already underway.

**Elliot Regenstein: Foresight Law + Policy**, was unable to attend. Elliott has significant experience working with states on governance issues and is an expert.

**Cristina Krasove: CK Impact Strategies**

Cristina shared that CK Impact Strategies works on data integration and bringing data into the hands of all in early childhood. She previously worked at the YMCA to bring in classroom data and has done work in collective impact.

**Erin:** was unable to attend

Martin Torres shared that Erin has over 20 years of experience developing revenue generating programs. She has worked with early childhood, special ed, and multilingual learning.

**Chris Rudd: ChiByDesign**

Chris shared that ChiByDesign is a civic and social design firm. They focus on designing equitable outcomes that are rooted in community. They pioneered and created the anti- racist design field. They bring the stakeholders together and then co-create the new future that they electively imagine. That is the work, and perspective that they look to bring to this work.

Martin thanked everyone for speaking. He also stated that other consultants, such as BUILD, will also support the work overtime. He then spoke about the transition advisory committee. The first step will be to get legislation and budgets for Spring. This will be detailed work and will take time. The second step is integrating and designing a consolidated system. We need to sensor racial equity and parent voice. We need to build and have a parent table. The Transition Advisory Committee is a small group designed to provide input on a variety of issues. We are going to set the ELC plus groups to work on other priorities. We are not announcing the members of this committee just yet. We are looking for less than 20 leaders across the state. Bela Mote is going to be the Co-Chair of this committee. The plan is to have the first meeting before the end of the calendar year.

Martin understands everyone wanting to share their perspective and share consideration. He wants to put some guidance out to figure out what engagement should look like and how everyone can legally engage.

Martin gave Phyllis an opportunity to read questions from the chat.

**Carie: Will protective day care stay at DCFS, or will that function move?**

Martin Torres: My sense is that it would stay with DCFS.

**Catherine: Can someone address how this new department will function regarding Chicago. Will the CPS/DFSS programs be under this new department too?**

Martin Torres: It will not be separated. For example, the goal is to shift early childhood block grant out of ISBE and into the new agency. That would shift with them. Teacher licensing will continue to stay at ISBE.

Teresa Ramos, First Assistant Deputy Governor for Education: Two tracks of work are happening simultaneously. First is to start delivering services as early as FY 27, the second track is talking about how we will align program standards. What does that mean for workforce, tracking quality, etc. We do want to center racial equity and parents whose ‘main hat’ is parent. We want to make sure everyone takes the feedback the parent tables set.

**Ireta: Can you say more about the scope of legislation to run in FY25? Is it more focused on the enactment of a new agency, or will it include any programmatic shifts?**

Martin Torres: The goal for us is to focus on the enactment of a new state agency. We’ve seen examples of other states who have gone through this process, and our main priority for FY25 is getting authority to create the new agency and shift responsibility from current agencies into the new agency. How they will evolve is a conversation that starts now. Conversations will have to take place with the labor unions around the agencies. The governor has three years left in this term. To do this successfully we will need all three years.

**Kayla: Where will the infant/early childhood mental health consultation work prior housed GOECD live within the transition activities or new agency?**

Martin Torres: There are core programs that will transition. I expect that work will be integrated into the new agency. Martin spoke on cross agency and how there will have to be a connection between the current agencies and the new Early Childhood agency. Some of these connections will have to be established and not everything will be housed in the new agency.

**Beata: Regarding the CPS and DFSS shift of PFA & PI: Will there be a legislative change to amend CPS and DFSS handling the block grant?**

Martin Torres: The focus of the legislation looking to advance this spring falls into the realm of an important policy conversation that will need to take place.

Teresa Ramos: If the new agency will have the funding streams they currently have through organizations. The conversation will be how to blend funding streams to get us to that goal.

**Janice: Will all childcare programs and community systems supported within IDHS move to the new Dept. CCR&R, AOK, Birth to Five?**

Martin Torres: When it comes to the CCR&Rs and entities under contract with DHS this goes into the realm of how we manage those contracts. They will be the focus of the new agency. Until we get advice from legal, we will not be able to delve deep into those questions.

**Ilani: You mentioned the goal is FY27. How does this relate to the Governor's goal for Universal PreK by 2027? I would imagine those plans are on pause until the full development of the agency?**

Martin Torres: There are no funding plans on pause. Smart Start IL is in year 1 of implementation. That work will continue in FY 25, 26 & 27. Therefore, we make sure the infrastructure is built into the new agency, so we have uninterrupted services. We are going to continue focusing on high quality access.

Teresa Ramos: We have a moment to ask the question – how are we working as a whole? and including parents and families as our own continuous quality improvement.

**David: What is the current thinking about the role of data sharing and coordinated referrals within and across agencies, particularly for B-5 programs at IDPH and HFS? Where does ILDS fit in?**

Teresa Ramos: I am very excited to have Cristina join us. ILDS is a much bigger project in early childhood. The question is, will it be a part of this year and half conversation?

**Catherine: Who should we be emailing suggestions or ongoing questions too?  I realize we shouldn't overwhelm this new team, but is there a specific email/person we can be reaching out to?**

Martin Torres: Direct all questions to Ann Whalen. She will be the primary point of contact with questions and recommendations.

\*Ann Whalen provided her email in the chat: awhalen@isbe.net

**Gerson: Will there be a separate appropriation ask that comes with the proposed single agency legislation?**

Martin Torres: By FY27 we expect this agency to run everything currently happening across three. We will need secretaries, legal, HR. There will be a fiscal impact. Stay tuned for the February budget to see more information.

**2:20pm. -- State Agency Updates**

1. **Jason Helfer-ISBE:**

We are finalizing the procurement. This week we should be releasing the ECBG rewards. The goal In FY24 was to prioritize early childhood deserts. The goal was 5000 preschool slots. We met and exceeded that goal. There are 5400 preschool slots now. We also increased the number of slots in PFAE by 500. The PI program has additional slots as well. In addition, we are going to upward amend the current grantees. We have held listening sessions and are taking that information in, and working with our partners, to find the most equitable model to get at the issue. We are looking into using an electronic grant system. We are working internally to provide a way of pre-applying, so they can receive RCDT codes and such, prior to the application being released. More information will come out as we work on that in the next coming months.

**Samantha:** **When will last year’s KIDS data be reported?**

Jason Helfer: It will be reported in the next month. It will be posted on the KIDS website

**Nicole Craft - ISBE**

The Preschool Development Grant Birth-Five completed the third quarter of the Planning Grant. There are 12 projects that are currently in place and each of these projects are on track with completing their contract deliverables.

There are some projects whose contract was executed a little later than anticipated, therefore the Providers who are facilitating these projects have shared that they would like to request a no-cost extension. ISBE has received their request for a no-cost extension and plans to submit a request for no-cost extension to HHS by the end of this month or early December.

Lastly, the Administration for Children and Families will host the PDG B-5 Annual Convening Meeting December 5-7, 2023. The meeting will be held in person in Bethesda, Maryland. The ISBE Team will represent Illinois at this conference.

1. **Christi Chadwick – ICCB**

Christi provided an update on the ECACE Scholarship. There was a soft launch in AY 2022 and significant growth was seen AY 2023. In A24 there was a scholarship eligibility expansion to serve students with a BA who need an additional credential or degree. ECACE scholarship applications and awards have grown substantially. The numbers include AY 22-23 over 3600 applicants, As of October 4800 applications, 3800 pre-qualified, 20,000,000 paid for fall so far.

Institutions are still currently requesting payment

**Amber: are you able to share data by communities where the awards have been rewarded?**

Christi Chadwick: let me see if the data is available yet.

1. **Trish Rooney – IDHS** (slideshow available to view on GOECD website) includes participation in home-visiting, childcare assistance program, migrant seasonal head start, and early intervention. Participation in DEC programs is higher than pre-pandemic levels. IDHS Home-Visiting is preparing for expansions in SFY25 as a part of Smart Start Illinois. Smart Start transition grants kicked off October 1, 2023, with robust participation. IDHS-DEC continues to study early intervention funding strategies to better support service providers and service coordinators.
2. **IBHE -** no update shared
3. **DCFS -** no update shared
4. **ISAC -** no update shared
5. **HFS -** no update shared

After State Agency updates, additional time was given for further questions:

**Shauna:** **What we know is we need stake holders’ investment to get this done well. With the commission work, we got dinged from not centering racial equity. Are we already measuring that, or getting ready to build something in place to make sure we are building an equitable system from the start? Will we use existing parenting tables? Or go outside of that? Have we been thinking about what we have in place to center children and parent choice, and gather different parts of the workforce that we want input in? I just want to make sure people that have had problems with the system are able to give input.**

Teresa Ramos: We are waiting to get feedback from legal and it is Ann’s day one, and we want her to get some time to be able to address it. ChiByDesign is here to start with parent engagement. We will talk to the FAC looking to identify and set a parent table for those who are least well served. I think to put intention around that and how that works for providers and the state and where it doesn’t. There will be a lot of incremental change taking place, but we are not starting from scratch. It is going to start with centering parent voice and an anti-racist design. We need to know where we are currently not serving. I cannot give you more details because we are still fine-tuning.

**Mr. Noble:** **I may have missed in agenda the ongoing call to community partners. What was that in reference to?**

Teresa Ramos: We are exploring the idea of ways to engage with a broader set of partners. We need to think about how we co-create together. We will circle back up on what the cadence will be for legal advice and what that should look like.

**Ireta: Will the advisory meetings be public as well?**

Teresa Ramos: Yes

**2:45pm. -- Public Comment**

**Neoma Nagahawatte - Illinois parent & IAFC**

On behalf of ‘We the Village,’ we are thankful for the creation of the new state agency. This is an important step. We will continue to collaborate for fully funded early childcare services. You have covered a lot of our concerns here in this call and we look forward to moving forward.

**3:00pm. -- Adjourn**

Martin Torres thanked everyone for coming.

The next ELC Full Committee Meeting will take place on November 27th from 5:30pm-7:30pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:00pm

**Racial Equity Definition:** A racially equitable society values and embraces all racial/ethnic identities. In such a society, one’s racial/ethnic identity (particularly Black, Latino, Indigenous, and Asian) is not a factor in an individual’s ability to prosper. An early learning system that is racially equitable is driven by data and ensures that:

• Every young child and family regardless of race, ethnicity, and social circumstance has everything s/he/they need to develop optimally;

• Resources, opportunities, rewards, and burdens are fairly distributed across groups and communities so that those with the greatest challenges are adequately supported and not further disadvantaged; and

• Systems and policies are designed, reframed, or eliminated to promote greater justice for children and families.

**Racial Equity Priorities:**

1. Align and standardize race/ethnicity data collection and reporting;
2. Evaluate and identify whether processes for distributing resources exacerbate racial disparities, including agency contracting;
3. Address race/ethnicity disparities in terms of workforce compensation and advancement;
4. Eliminate racial/ethnic disparities for children participating in all programs that contribute to school readiness and life success by addressing racial disparities in enrollment in preschool for 3- and 4-year-olds and in prenatal to age 3 services.