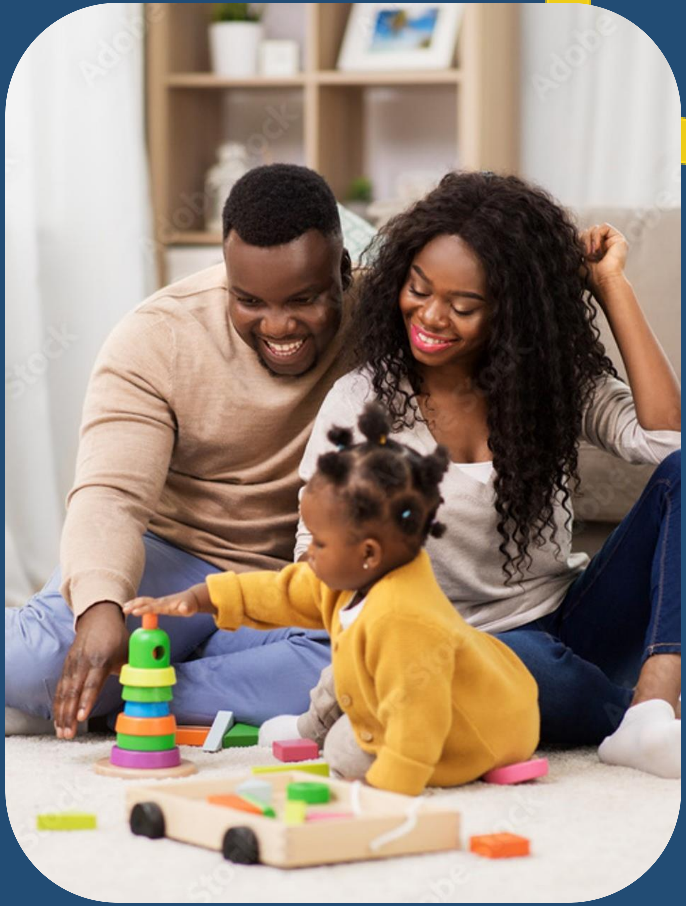
Early Childhood Funding Design Workgroup

February 25, 2026



Meeting Expectations & Notes

For Workgroup Members:

- **Please be on video** as much as possible
- **Mute self** when not speaking
- Use **chat feature or "raise hand" button** for questions or comments
- Technical issues can happen to anyone – **chat Crystal Roman privately for any needs**
- If you are experiencing an unstable connection - **switch to phone call or close other applications**

For Public Participants:

- Attendees can provide input through Padlet, public comment (last five minutes of meeting), and will have the opportunity to engage in small group discussion

Workgroup Members – Please introduce yourself in the chat and share:

- **Your Name**
- **If you had to teach a class on one thing, what would it be?**

Note: This meeting has Spanish translation

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Today’s Goals and Agenda

Goals

- Learn from FCC Deep Dives
- Orient Workgroup Members to Program Standards Alignment work
- Discuss Head Start/Early Head Start Cost Modeling Updates

Agenda

- Welcome and introductions
- Budget Update
- Family Child Care (FCC) Deep Dives
- Head Start / Early Head Start Cost Modeling
- Introduction to Program Standards Alignment Workgroup
- Public Comment

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Workgroup Norms

- Process is part of the solution
- Step Up, Step Back
- Questions seek to understand, be curious
- Prioritize parent 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 hurt or offend others

Funding Design Goals

Develop a funding system for Illinois' early childhood education and care programs that:

- Promotes an **equitable, inclusive, family-centered system** of quality choice for families of all races, home languages, incomes, and geographies
- Works toward **fair resources for all types of providers**, responsive to family choice
- Supports **opportunity, fair compensation, and high-quality working conditions** for the ECEC workforce
- Improves **predictability** and **stability for families, providers, and the workforce**
- **Reduces complexity and burden** on ECEC providers
- Promotes long-term **system-wide sustainability** through clear and balanced priorities and effective use of all available funds (federal, state, local, and private)

Emerging Design Principles – drawing on input from communities, working groups, and state leadership

1. **Reduce administrative burden** by streamlining current funding streams
   - Combine state funds into fewer funding streams with similar purposes and recipients
   - Reduce burden of managing multiple state and federal funding streams by aligning requirements wherever possible
   - Simplify applications and reporting wherever possible

2. **Builds a transparent road map to full costs of early learning services that enables equity and efficiency**
   - Ensures **operational funding** from all sources that is adequate to deliver services that meet licensing standards for all children and allows transparency in how much existing funding from all sources covers costs
   - Enables a **family-centered definition of quality,** and is tied to the **services families want to see** based on children's needs, including for children with disabilities and developmental delays, multilingual learners, and historically underserved communities
   - Promotes **competitive workforce compensation**
   - Reflects the **different structure** of costs and services in centers, homes, and school districts across programs and requirements
   - **Maximizes** federal funds

3. **Assess gaps** between current funding and need to inform equitable prioritization for future investments

4. **Work for existing and new** programs and programs with a mix of children being served by **public and private funds**
   - New programs can enter the system through a transparent process that assesses quality, capacity, and community need
   - Funding design incorporates local funding and parent tuition alongside state and federal dollars while acknowledging the needs of providers who serve school-age children

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Anticipated Timeline

WINTER/SPRING 2025	LATE SUMMER / EARLY FALL 2025	LATE FALL 2025	WINTER 2025-SPRING 2026	FY27 SUMMER 2026-SPRING 2027	FY28 2027-2028
Setting Direction and Establishing Parameters	*Moving Toward Solutions*	*Tentative Recommendations*	*Advance Legislation*	*Continue Build Out*	*Begin Implementation*
• Continue to understand context • Establish a shared knowledge base • Set the direction • Understand parameters for funding design solutions	• Address questions of funding stability, alignment, consistency, and equity • Move toward tentative recommendations	• Receive additional feedback on recommendations and refine cost factors • In partnership with State leadership, identify possible legislative actions	• IDEC, in conjunction with partners, move forward funding legislative package	• Continue to address funding implications of other workgroup findings • Continue to pressure test findings and recommendations with the field	• Funding system changes begin
IDHS AND ISBE CONTINUE TO ADMINISTER PROGRAMS				IDEC ADMINISTERS PROGRAMS UNDER CURRENT STRUCTURE AND RULES	IDEC ADMINISTERS NEW FUNDING APPROACH

Upcoming Funding Design Workgroup Meetings and Topics

- We are planning to continue to meet monthly. Upcoming meeting dates:
  - March 25
  - April 22
  - May 27
  - June 17
- Upcoming topics may include:
  - Impact of proposed funding design on provider archetypes
  - Revisiting family and local contributions
  - Updated Funding Equity Map

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Budget Update

The Governor's Proposed FY27 budget includes nearly $4.5B in Early Childhood investments

Investing in What Matters: Early Childhood Development

SMART START ILLINOIS: Investing in Early Childhood

Governor's Proposed FY27 Budget for Illinois Department of Early Childhood (IDEC): $4.424 billion All Funds, $2.088 billion General Funds

- Includes the first year of full operational and programmatic funding for IDEC.
- **$748 million** to maintain investment in the Early Childhood Block Grant funding.
  - Maintains the funding level that has supported the addition of over 11,000 new seats added since 2023.
- **$200 million** investment for Early Childhood Workforce Compensation Grants.
- Other Early Childhood Investments include:
  - **$55 million** in additional investment for increased participation in the Child Care Assistance Program, up to 155,000 children.
  - **$2.3 million** to continue implementation and expansion of Dolly Parton's Imagination Library.
    - Today, more than 97,000 children under the age of five are receiving free books in the mail every month, a 59 percent increase since February 2025.
  - **$15 million** increase for Early Intervention programs to support timely services for families.
- IDEC funding consolidates nearly $2 billion in FY26 General Funds appropriations for early childhood programs such as the Child Care Assistance, Early Intervention, Home Visiting, and Maternal and Child Health programs, as well as DCFS day care licensing and the ISBE Early Childhood Block Grant.

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Additional Engagement: Family Child Care Deep Dives

IDEC engaged two Spanish-speaking FCC providers through funding deep dives.

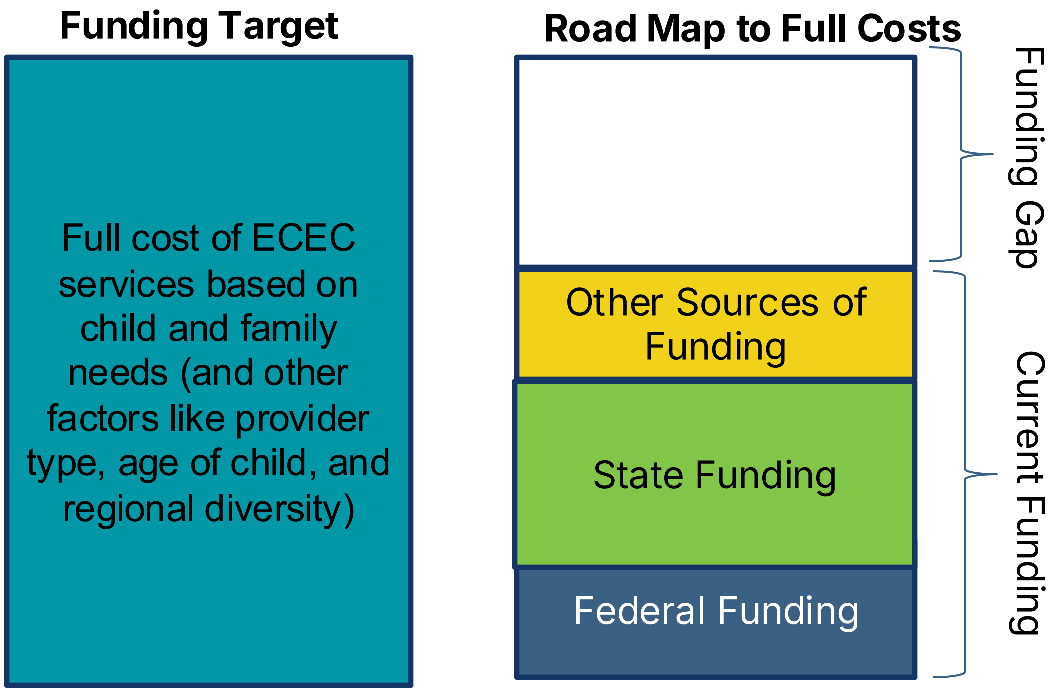
- Interviewed FCC providers face **high administrative burden** to meet the various requirements across funding streams.
  - Manage 3+ funding streams (SSWG, CCAP*, CACFP) and had to meet separate requirements and paperwork for each
  - Complete paperwork and trainings outside of their typical work hours
- **Unpredictable payments destabilize budgeting and staffing.**
  - Delayed CCAP payments require programs to maintain reserves or pull from personal funds
- Providers most valued having a **consistent and timely payment**, within a week of providing care.
  - Concerns that advanced payment could require returning funds if a child left their program

*Both providers received CCAP funding through site-administered contracts

Head Start/ Early Head Start Cost Modeling: Interview & Focus Group Themes

Head Start is a critical part of the ECE system and adequacy framework. Understanding costs will help to define funding targets

Visualizing the Funding Target & Road Map to Full Costs (Illustrative):



Where does Head Start fit in this road map?

Objectives for Head Start Cost Modeling

Better understand costs associated with Head Start (HS), Early Head Start (EHS), and Migrant/Seasonal Head Start (MSHS) program models

Improve IDEC's understanding of the costs associated with unique program standards to inform adequacy targets and evaluation of funding gaps

Gather input from HS, EHS, and MSHS providers about the costs they face

Through interviews and focus groups, provide opportunities for HS/EHS/Migrant and Seasonal HS providers to share their experiences with cost factors such as personnel and family support services

Identify areas for further exploration

This preliminary process will provide directional cost estimates and may need to be supplemented with additional research and/or data collection in the future

There are a total of 51 grantees in the State with 551 Head Start sites which are a mix of grantees, delegate agencies, and partner sites

Head Start Grantees

- Programs receive funding directly from the federal government
- May operate services directly and/or subgrant to Delegate Agencies and/or Partner Sites

Of the 51 grantees, 11 are in Chicago

Head Start Delegate Agencies

- Programs receive funding from Head Start grantees
- Operates full Head Start program and must meet full Head Start standards
- Overseen by Grantee and federal/state monitors

Head Start Partner Sites

- Programs receive funding from grantees or delegate agencies
- Shares or supports delivery of services
- Overseen by Grantee and federal/state monitors

48% of HS/EHS funded enrollment is in Chicago

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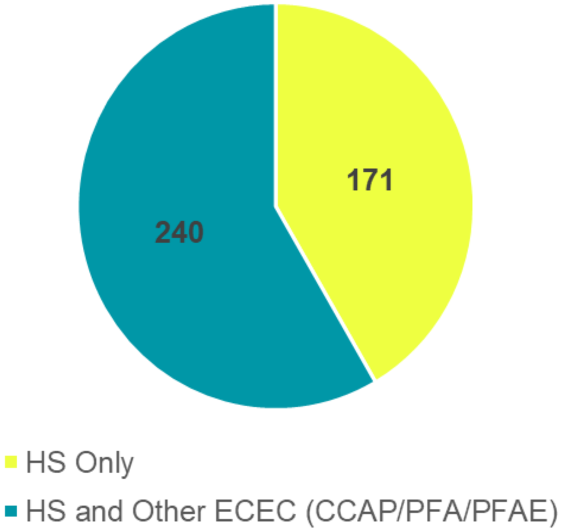
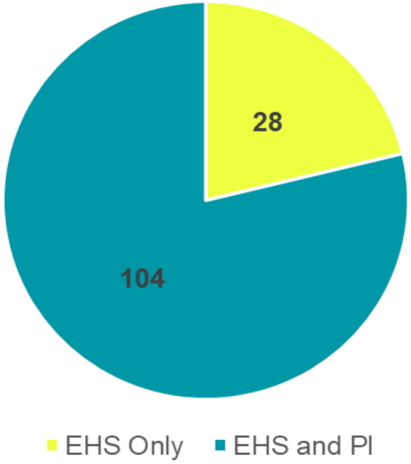
Most EHS/HS sites blend and braid with state funds, but a substantial minority (27% for EHS, 42% for HS) only use EHS/HS funding

Sites with Head Start



Sites with Early Head Start



Notes:

- Each chart shows an unduplicated count of provider sites. Some providers overlap between HS and EHS.
- Need further investigation of partnership with FCCs
- *Source: IECAM Landscape of Early Childhood Funding*

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Focus Group Representation & Approach

- **Participants (N=42):**
  - All Head Start and Early Head Start operators were invited to participate
  - Head Start and Early Head Start **grantees and delegates** who participated in three hour-long focus groups (Nov–Dec).
  - Approximately **85–90% held senior leadership roles** (Executive Directors/CEOs, HS/EHS Directors, Chief Program Officers), with system-level responsibility for budgets, staffing, enrollment, facilities, and compliance.
  - Approximately **52% of participating programs served Cook County**, and **48% served non-Cook counties**, including suburban, rural, and multi-county regions—allowing comparison across urban, suburban, and rural contexts.
- **Program Structure:** Roughly ~**60% represented directly operated programs**, and **~40% represented delegate or mixed delivery models.**
- **Scale:** Programs ranged from **single-site providers to large, multi-site systems**, with funded enrollment spanning **fewer than 200 to more than 1,000 children**.
- **Models & Calendars:** Included Head Start, Early Head Start, and Child Care Partnership models operating **school-year, year-round, or mixed calendars**, with **full-day schedules predominating**; home-based options were limited.
- **Migrant and Seasonal Head Start data collection** was done separately with a semi-structured interview with the director of the Migrant & Seasonal Head Start (MSHS) program at DHS.

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Focus Group Approach

Strengths

- Provides rich, contextual insight into cost pressures, staffing tradeoffs, and operational decision-making.
- Captures system-level perspectives from senior leaders with direct responsibility for budgets, staffing, and compliance.
- Enables cross-program comparison across Cook and non-Cook, urban, suburban, and rural contexts.
- Surfaces emerging challenges and adaptive strategies not visible in administrative data.

Limitations

- Reflects self-reported leadership perspectives.
- Emphasizes themes and patterns, not precise cost or outcome estimates.
- Self-selected participants; may not represent all program viewpoints in the state.

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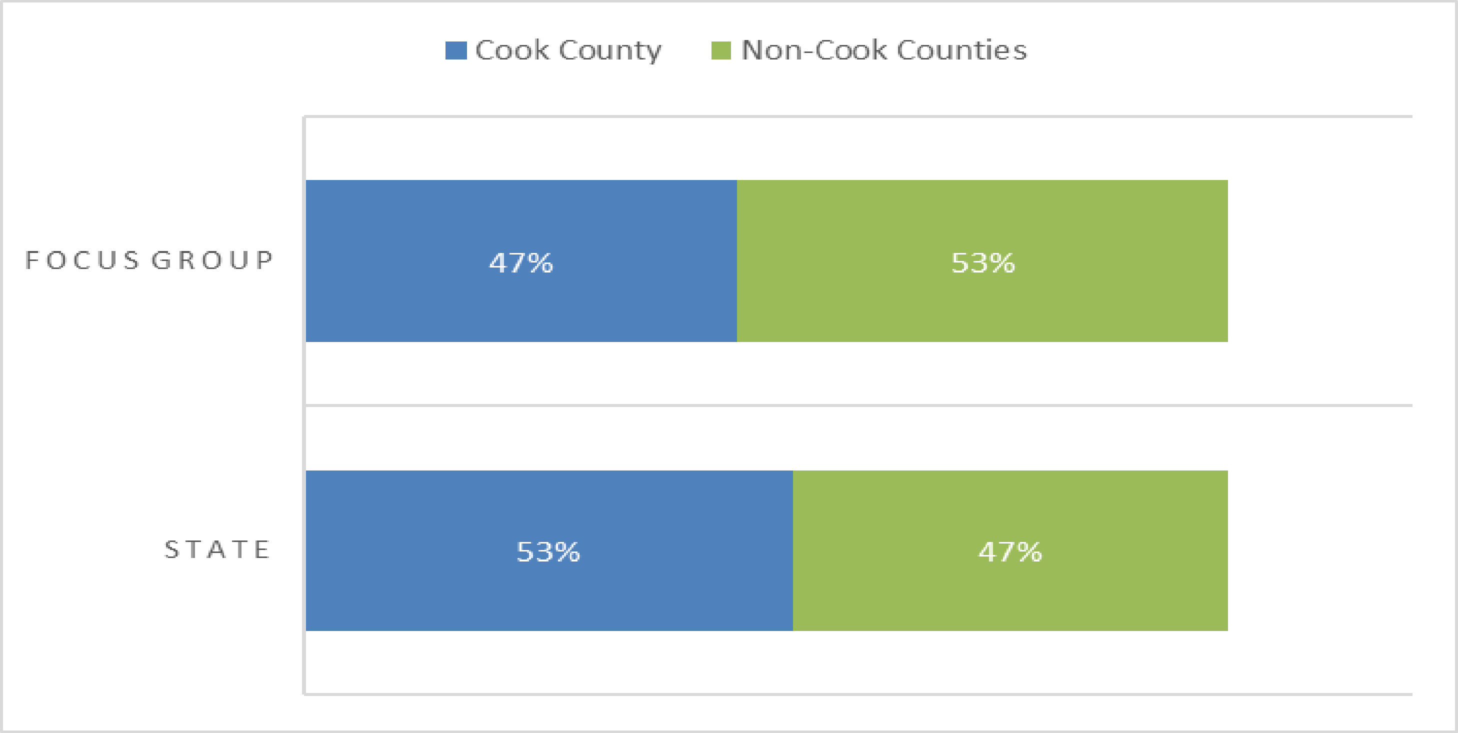
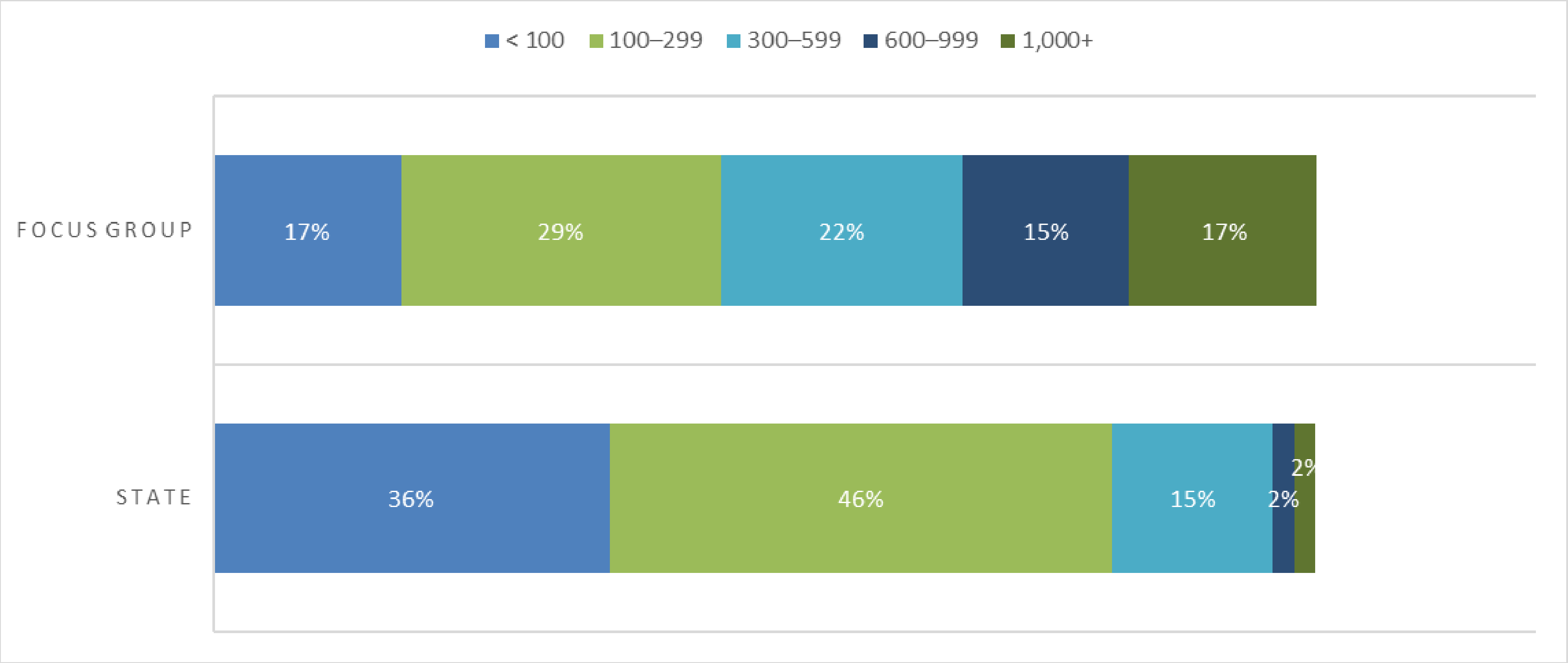
Focus groups are broadly representative of Illinois Head Start programs by geography



Source for State data: [Head Start Program Information Report (PIR)](), 2024

Focus groups included a larger share of medium- and large-sized Head Start programs compared to the state



Source for State data: [Head Start Program Information Report (PIR)](), 2024.
Reflects total enrolled children at the grantee level. – self reported

Overall Findings from Focus Groups

Program Structure:

- Urban and rural geographies have different trends in program governance, structure, and cost drivers
- Some Head Start programs are reducing their funded enrollment to keep up with rising costs.
- Head Start programs report increased uncertainty in the federal funding environment, leading to more conservative staffing, hiring and enrollment decisions.

Staffing Needs and Costs:

- Behavioral, social-emotional, and disability-related needs have increased, especially since the pandemic
- Programs prefer to staff with more adults than required by Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS), although funding does not always allow for this practice
- Recent Federal regulations call for Head Start programs to move toward pay parity with school districts; center-based Head Start programs cannot raise salaries without structural tradeoffs.

Additional Cost Pressures:

- Non-personnel costs—including facilities, insurance, food, transportation, technology, interpretation, compliance systems, audits, and professional development—have risen significantly since the pandemic.
- Rising fringe benefits costs- e.g. health insurance- are driving scope and enrollment changes as intentional strategies to stabilize staffing and program level budgets

Focus Group Findings: Program Structure & Scale

- Across the state, most programs offer **full-day services**, with some amending their scope to move from double-session to single-session programs
- In Cook County, Head Start grantees are predominantly **large, multi-site systems** serving hundreds to thousands of children
    - Extensive use of **delegates and community partners** across many locations and program models, leading to high internal complexity within a single Head Start grant
    - More likely to offer **year-round services**
    - **Braided funding** models are common, using PFA/E, CACFP, CCAP, and other funding sources
- Outside of Cook County, more **small- to mid-sized programs**, often serving fewer children across fewer sites
    - Greater prevalence of **directly operated sites**, with fewer delegate agencies
    - **Geographic spread** adds operational complexity even at smaller scale
    - **Variation in calendars** between school-year and year-round services
    - Some programs rely primarily on Head Start funding, limiting flexibility to extend hours or absorb cost increases.

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Focus Group Findings: Staffing Needs and Costs

- **Many programs prefer to staff with three adults per classroom** due to behavioral and supervision needs, which is more staff than required by HSPPS.
  - Additional aides/floaters, social/emotional specialists, and internal coaches are also used to address behavioral needs
- **Programs strive for school district parity**, but do not have commensurate funding
  - In Chicago area, Chicago Public Schools pay parity is the reference point but mostly unattainable
- **Benefits are "comprehensive but costly,"** with fringe commonly around 25–30% of salaries
  - Health insurance costs are rising quickly (often 10–25% annual increases), crowding out money for wages and program expansion
- Rural areas see severe challenges with **recruitment, travel time, transportation, and coverage across multiple counties**.
- Some programs have revised grant scopes and reduced enrollment within the same budget to afford higher staff and benefits costs

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Focus Group Findings: Additional Cost Pressures

- **Non-personnel costs**—including facilities, insurance, food, transportation, technology, interpretation, compliance systems, audits, and professional development—have **risen significantly** since the pandemic.
- Programs in rural areas face particular challenges:
  - In these areas, providing **transportation** to children is the norm, which is a significant cost
  - **Travel time** for staff who serve multiple sites can be a “hidden” cost
  - Some rural programs operate single classrooms at multiple sites, which can create challenges for operational and staffing efficiency

Interview Findings: Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Program

- Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs must meet HSPPS and operate on shortened **26-week program cycles** due to the seasonal nature of families' agricultural work
- Many programs hire staff seasonally and may lay off employees between service cycles.
- Transportation is typically provided and often involves long rural routes, early morning pickups, and in some cases cross-state travel.
- **Cost pressures include:**
  - **Transportation,** including Commercial Drivers' License staffing shortages
  - **Staffing costs:** long hours, fluctuating schedules, wage parity expectations
  - 26-week service window increases **training costs** and reliance on unemployment
- Costs vary widely by site
- Overall, **higher cost per slot** due to seasonal, mobile, and extended-hour operations

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Head Start Cost Model

Considerations for Head Start Cost Modeling

- **Translating standards, data, and provider input into cost assumptions**
  - Program standards define **required functions and minimum requirements**, including classroom staffing ratios, but do not specify how non-classroom staff should cover required functions
  - Recent regulations require programs to **work toward K-12 wage parity**
  - Focus group input informed assumptions related to:
    - Classroom staffing intensity beyond minimum ratios
    - Use of floaters, administrative support, and family service roles
    - Differences in operating context by geography and program size
- **Model structure and boundaries**
  - Site-level assumptions reflect classroom staffing, wages, benefits, and required support roles
  - Grantee-level assumptions reflect administrative, compliance, and governance functions
  - Wage assumptions are anchored to administrative and labor market data and adjusted for regional variation

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Differences in Head Start Cost Structure

Compared to other EC settings, center-based Head Start programs face additional costs:

- **Requirements for comprehensive services and family supports:**
  - Including positions such as Family Engagement Specialist, Family Engagement Director, and Health Services Manager
  - Contracted or staff supports, including mental health and nutrition consultation
- **Grantee-level administrative functions:**
  - Finance and grant compliance management
  - Grant requirements for auditing and data collection
  - Policy Council coordination and governance

Comparison to PFA/PFAE:

- PFAE requires comprehensive services, including mental health supports, health and dental referrals, family needs assessments, and family education
- Grantee-level administrative responsibilities are typically absorbed by school district infrastructure under PFA/PFAE

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Differences in Early Head Start Costs

In addition to Head Start costs, center-based Early Head Start programs require:

- **Smaller group sizes compared to other EC settings**
    - Early Head Start allows a maximum of **8 infants or toddlers per classroom**, compared to *12 infants and 15 toddlers* under Illinois DCFS licensing standards and PI.
- **Two lead teachers per classroom**
    - **Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS)** require **two teachers** in Early Head Start classrooms; other early childhood cost models typically assume **one teacher and one assistant teacher** per classroom.

Head Start, ECBG, and Licensing Ratios & Group Size

- This table compares **minimum classroom ratios and group sizes** across Head Start / Early Head Start, PFA / PFA-E / PI, and Illinois licensing standards by age group.
- Ratios and group sizes shown for Head Start and Early Head Start reflect **Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS)** and are used as the **baseline assumptions** in the cost model.
- While some programs staff above these minimums in practice, the baseline model does **not assume enhanced staffing patterns** unless explicitly modeled as a scenario.

Age Group	Head Start / Early Head Start	PFA / PFA-E / PI	IL Licensing Standards
Under 3 Years	1:4 (8)	1:4 (12) for infants, 1:5 (15) for toddlers, 1:8 (16) for 2-year-olds	1:4 (12) for infants, 1:5 (15) for toddlers, 1:8 (16) for two-year-olds
3 Year Olds	1:8.5 (17 children, 15 for double session class)	1:10 (20)	1:10 (20)
4 Year Olds	1:10 (20 children, 17 for double session class)	1:10 (20)	1:10 (20)

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Staffing Patterns

- Classroom staffing reflects HSPPS requirements; enhanced staffing patterns can also be modeled
- Focus group input was used to inform additional roles
- Administrative data (e.g. Gateways Workforce Registry) informed wage assumptions for site-level staff
- Bureau of Labor Statistics data for similar roles informed wage assumptions for grantee-level staff

Grantee Level Staff

- Executive/Program Director
- Finance Director
- Education Manager
- Health Services/Nutrition Manager
- Family Engagement Director
- ERSEA/Compliance Manager
- Policy Council Coordinator

Site Level Staff

- Director
- Lead Teachers
- Assistant Teachers
- Floaters (1 per 5 classrooms)
- Administrative Assistant (1 per 10 classrooms)
- Additional professional staff (e.g. enrollment support, bilingual liaison) (0.25 per site)
- Family Engagement Specialist (1 per 40 families)

Further Exploration Needed

- **Staffing Patterns:** Providers consistently reported staffing classrooms with **more adults than required** by federal standards (3 full-time instead of 2) to support supervision, coverage across the day, and behavioral needs
- **Grantee-Level Structure and Scale:** Grantee-level administrative and support staffing varies widely by **organization size, number of sites, and scope of services**
  - Limited information is available on how grantee-level roles **scale with total classrooms, sites, or children served**
- **Transportation:** Reported as a significant cost for programs **outside of Cook County**
  - ISBE reports K-12 school district spending on transportation: average cost of $751 per child, per year for non-Cook counties and $1,013 per child, per year in Cook County
  - **Costs for ECE are likely higher** (smaller group sizes, potentially less efficient routes)
- **Data and Engagement Limitations:** Engagement was conducted primarily through focus groups, which limited the ability to collect detailed, quantitative program-level data, including:
    - Head Start–specific job titles and staffing structures
    - Exact salaries, wage schedules, and benefit costs by role
    - How grantee-level staff scale with the number of sites, classrooms, or children served
    - Non-personnel costs, such as data systems, insurance, and professional services
  - Cost assumptions therefore rely on **qualitative provider input and external benchmarks**

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Key Takeaways

- **Programs in Cook County operate differently than programs in the rest of the state,** with implications for how costs are considered
- **Head Start programs incur substantial administrative and wraparound costs** (e.g. health, family support, etc.) beyond the classroom to meet federal program requirements
- **Early Head Start's small group sizes materially increase per-child costs** relative to Head Start and other early childhood programs such as PI and other DCFS licensed programs
- **Programs are working toward K–12 parity in compensation**, though current wages remain similar to those in other early childhood settings
- **Providers commonly staff classrooms above minimum requirements** to address behavioral, supervision, and operational needs
- **Cost and revenue estimates represent a starting point** and can be refined through future, more detailed data collection

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Small Group Discussion Questions

Reactions and Reflections

Did anything stand out as surprising or significant?
Do these findings resonate with your experience?
What questions do you have?

Connections Across Funding Design

How do these findings connect to other parts of our funding design work? How do they relate to the family-driven cost factors identified by the fall subcommittees?

Future Directions

What else do we need to know?
How can we learn more?

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Introduction to Programs Standards Alignment Workgroup (PSAW)

Program Standard Alignment | Proposed goal and activities

Goal: To develop **recommendations *for aligning* birth–to–five program standards and expectations** for programs transitioning to the Illinois Department of Early Childhood (IDEC), with a vision of a *continuum of quality* that supports all children's development and *successful transition to kindergarten*.

Activities include:

1) ***Informing a vision for standards based on what children and families want and need*** from high-quality early childhood services, ***and what providers need*** to deliver on those wants and needs.

2) ***Reviewing current program standards and requirements*** for programs transitioning to IDEC, and the extent to which there is alignment, discrepancies, and/or gaps in standards and requirements across similar services (i.e., within early care and education, within home visiting, within early intervention).

3) Identifying opportunities to ***articulate a common set of developmentally appropriate best practices*** that are research-based, culturally inclusive, and support seamless experiences for children and families across services.

4) Identifying opportunities to ***remove undue administrative burden, redundancies, or barriers*** for families to access high-quality programs, and for providers to engage in high-quality standards.

The workgroup will inform four key deliverables between now and June 2026

1

A **unified vision and guiding principles** for program standards

2

Crosswalk of program standards highlighting alignment, discrepancies, and/or gaps in standards and requirements

3

Draft a set of recommendations for standards alignment across key areas based on workgroup input, values, and guiding principles, that is informed by an analysis of risk, benefit, and implementation feasibility.

4

Draft recommendations to inform if and how **IDEC could revise, adapt, and apply the state's child development standards** (IELG 0-3 and IELDS 3-5).

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How are we defining Program Standards?

Program Standards serve as the foundation for program quality, safety, and accountability and focus on *what programs must do* in terms of environment, staff, operations (and in some cases curriculum philosophy) to support children's development.

Providers must meet various standards and requirements in order to…	
1. Operate Legally (e.g., licensing standards)	☑
2. Receive Public Funding (e.g., State Pre-K, Child Care Subsidy, Home Visiting, Head Start)	
3. Participate in Quality Systems (e.g., ExceleRate, National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and National Association of Family Child Care (NAFCC) accreditation)	

**Program standards and requirements are informed by State Standards (State Early Learning Guidelines or Development Standards), federal requirements, transitioning state agency theory of action, and funding requirements*

Generally required for all

Required to receive certain funding

Optional to demonstrate quality

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Relevant resources: The number of program standards included in the review process differs across ECE, HV, and EI, reflecting the unique governing structures and funding streams within each sector

Early Care and Education

Child Care Licensing	Child Care Assistance Program	ExceleRate Illinois	Preschool for All/Expansion and Prevention Initiative Center Based	Head Start, Early Head Start, and Migrant Seasonal	License Exempt (FFN, Non-traditional programs)

Home Visiting

Early Childhood Block Grant – Prevention Initiative Home Visiting (ECBG – PI HV)	Illinois Department of Human Services – Home Visiting (IDHS-HV)	Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV)	Maternal Child Home Visiting (MCHV)

Early Intervention

Federal Requirements: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part C	Illinois Approach (state law, guidance, and administrative rule)

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Role of the Program Standards Alignment Workgroup

Provide context and background on the current state to inform **program standards crosswalk**

Inform **vision and guiding principles**

Provide feedback to develop **recommendations for standards alignment**

Identify potential **risks** and **mitigation strategies**

Discussion Questions

What resonates or what questions do you have with the approach for program standards alignment?

How should the Program Standards and Funding Design Workgroups work together and inform each others' work?

Public Comment, Next Steps & Close

Public Comment

To join the line to provide public comment, please raise your hand via Zoom.

Next Steps & Close

- Post-meeting survey
  - For all public attendees
  - For workgroup members to provide feedback
- Next Workgroup meeting: at 4:30pm

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