

Program Standards Alignment Overview

Monday, March 16, 2026



Program Standard Alignment | 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.

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**

The workgroup includes representation from a wide range of roles, program experience and geographic diversity

Alberto Roman – Parent/caregiver	Rep. Joyce Mason – Illinois House of Representatives
Ariel Chaidez – Sr. Program Manager, Parents As Teachers State Leader, Start Early	Julian Lomax -- ECE teacher, Christopher House
Brandi Granse – Director, Champaign County Regional Planning Commission/Head Start & Early Head Start	Madison Wekony – Parent/caregiver
Bridgett Vance – Owner, Family Child Care	Marilyn Rodriguez – Home Visitor, Glenbard Parents As Teachers/ CASE DuPage
Brynn Seibert – Child Care and Early Learning Division Director,SEIU	Marla Willard – Executive Director, West Central Child Care Connections, CCR&R
Cerathel Burgess Burnett – Deputy Commissioner, Children Services Division, City of Chicago/Department of Family and Support Services (DFSS)	Miranda Lin – Higher Education Faculty, Illinois State University
Cindy Agredo – Parent/caregiver	Nicole Van Hise – Program Director, Regional Office of Education #13/Child & Family Connections Early Intervention
Dara Cohen – President and CEO, Family Focus	Pat Chamberlain - Consultant
Donna Emmons – Associate Head Start State Collaboration Director, IL Head Start Association	Rachel Mika – Physical Therapist, Early Intervention
Erica Larkin – Parent/caregiver	Sally Peterson – Pre-k Classroom Coordinator, Glencoe Park District
Erin Gutiérrez – Executive Director, Governors State	Theresa Atchley – President, Illinois Association of Infant Mental Health
Jill Wardlow – Pre-K Director, Regional Office of Education #1	Tom Layman – Senior Fellow, Center for Early Learning Funding Equity (CELFE)
Jon Korfmacher – Senior Research Fellow, Chapin Hall	

Timeline for first phase of program standard alignment workstream (Oct - June 2026)

DISCOVERY AND FACT FINDING (OCT – NOV 2025)

- ✓ 1-1 engagement with stakeholders to understand current state standards and implementation
- ✓ Build a knowledge base of best practices (current research, national standards, state examples)
- ✓ Complete preliminary analysis of stakeholder input

MAP CURRENT STANDARDS (NOV – JAN 2026)

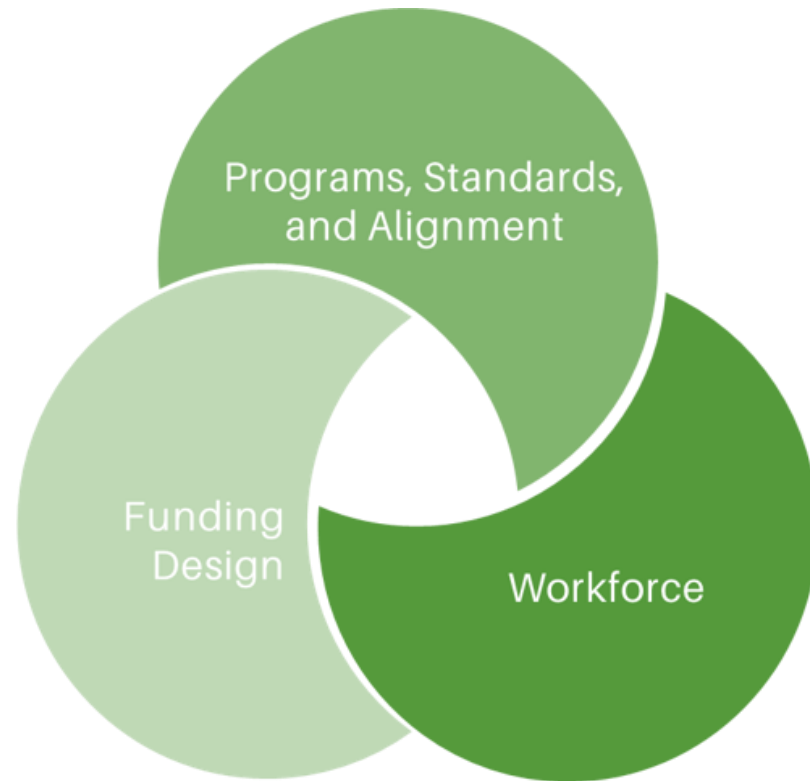
- Map current program standards
- Conduct cross-state benchmarking
- Develop brief and resources of the current state to inform workgroup
- Continue 1-1 engagement as needed

ENGAGE WORKGROUP (DEC – JUNE 2026)

- Engage workgroup in deeper thinking and decision points
- Explore gaps and opportunities for revision and alignment
- Coordinate with other transition workgroups and the Transition Advisory Council (TAC) to capture dependencies and expand thinking
- Draft and share final deliverables

We are here!

The current context for the work requires keeping track of multiple workstreams and identifying intersections and dependencies



This work intersects with considerations in other workstreams (funding design and alignment considerations, workforce, etc.)

Approach for Crosswalking Program Standards

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

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 (State and Federal requirements)	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)
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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)	Head Start/Early Head Start Home Visiting
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Early Intervention

Federal Requirements: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part C	Illinois Approach (state law, guidance, and administrative rule)
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A fully developed crosswalk will provide an at-a-glance view of current alignment, strengths, gaps, and the level of effort required for change

Working definition of alignment

Alignment is the intentional coordination of program standards to ensure expectations across programs are clear, complementary, and mutually reinforcing — without requiring programs to be identical.

What Alignment *Is*

- Using **common language** where possible
- Clarifying **what is shared vs. what is different**
- Reducing **duplicative or conflicting requirements**
- Supporting **smooth transitions** for children and families
- Making it **easier for providers to operate** across funding streams

What Alignment *Is Not*

- One set of standards replacing all others
- Ignoring federal or statutory requirements
- Eliminating program-specific strengths
- Forcing all programs to operate the same way

** **Level of effort required for change:** e.g., a standard required by an administrative rule would be medium effort/high possibility for change, while a standard required by a federal regulation or statute would be high effort/low possibility for change*



Closing

- **Next Program Standards Alignment Workgroup meeting**
 - Thursday, March 26, 4:30 – 6:00 PM