

**Integration & Alignment Committee, Illinois Early Learning Council**  
**Minutes – April 17, 2023, 3:00 – 5:00 PM**

**Present:**

CO-CHAIRS: Shauna Ejeh and Bethany Patten

GOECD: Tom Layman, Nicole Craft, Jamilah R. Jor'dan

Josie Yanguas, Kayla Goldfarb, Kristy Doan, Lori Morrison-Frichtl, Phyllis Glink, Trish Rooney, Cerathel Burgess-Burnett, Robin Steans, Karen Berman, Denise Monnier, Maria Cuevas, Bryan Stokes, Tracy Small, Jean Davis, Wendy McCullough, Cicely Fleming, Naomi Black, Deyanira Cabrera, Kisha Davis, Marcy Mendenhall, Donna Emmons

**Welcome and Introductions**

Shauna Ejeh welcomed attendees. Committee members and other participants put their names and affiliations in the Chat. Bethany Patten read the Racial Equity Definitions and Priorities and the IAC Charge and Priorities.

**Update: Advancing Preschool Inclusion in Community Based Early Childhood Education Programs**

Kristy Doan reported on findings from the Public Consulting Group study on this topic, funded through the previous PDG B-5 grant, and on plans for next steps. The full report can be found at: <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/IL-Inclusion-Report.pdf>. The project was initiated because children with IEPs enrolled in community-based programs often must leave the program to receive Early Childhood Special Education (ECSSE) services from the school district. The study included a review of Illinois data, focus groups and interviews, surveys, and peer state interviews. One national study found that in general, traditional segregated classrooms showed a higher cost than services provided in inclusive settings. The report looked at potential service models and cost drivers of itinerant early childhood special education (IECSE) in inclusive community-based programs. Service model options could include:

- A. Itinerant services within school district boundaries
- B. Same as A but include MOUs for out of district children served in Community Based Organizations (CBOs)
- C. Regional coop arrangements
- D. Alternative funding: \$ follows child instead of district

The cost drivers across all of those models include staff, staff mileage, collaborative planning time, pay for placement, and professional development. Recommendations for next steps include: develop policy guidance, conduct a cost study, and explore Medicaid funding. Future steps include piloting strategies, convening an advisory body to evaluate outcomes and share data, and identifying needed policy changes.

More information on the launch of Community Inclusion Teams can be found at <https://www.eclre.org/planning-tools/implementation-of-inclusion-project/>, including an opportunity to register for the launch event on April 28.

Discussion included the suggestion to include Early Intervention (EI) in the community conversations, particularly regarding the transition of children from EI to preschool.

**Early Childhood Block Grant Update and Overview of the RFP process**

Carisa Hurley-Davis reported on the Early Childhood Block Grant (ECBG) RFP. The FY24 RFP was posted today, April 17. The Governor's proposed budget for FY24 includes \$75 million in new ECBG funding for Year 1 of Smart Start Illinois, which would bring the total ECBG grant appropriation to nearly \$673

million. This represents an additional 5,000 new PFA slots plus expansion of Prevention Initiative (home visiting and center-based), and the Preschool for All Expansion model (PFAE). 25% of the new funds will be spent on infant-toddler services. Quality increases are included for existing programs. Priority will be given to programs in child care deserts listed on the ISBE website. In these areas, fewer than 80% of the needed seats are currently available. The application window has been increased from 45 to 60 days. The RFP specifies that community-based organizations and family child care providers (through intermediaries) may apply; not just school districts. The Birth to Five regional teams are doing outreach to increase awareness of the RFP. Applicants may propose start-up later in FY24 if they will not be ready on July 1, 2023.

Discussion included the need for Birth to Five to coordinate with CCR&Rs, and the question of PEL teacher supply. ISBE has recommended that the current alternative pathway for PEL be extended. Beyond that, ISBE has not proposed a new teacher development strategy.

Now that the FY24 RFP has been posted, ISBE will be working toward a round of planning grants to help programs apply in future years.

### **Analysis of Regional Intermediaries**

The co-chairs introduced Wendy McCullough, the IDHS consultant facilitating the new PDG B-5 work to assess and align the work of regional intermediaries. The goal of the work is to support family choice, knowledge about the system, and access to a mixed delivery system of high-quality ECCE options. The project has 4 phases: (1) agree on scope and goals [January – April], (2) gather information and perspectives [May – July], (3) formulate and prioritize options [August – September], and (4) form recommendations [October – December].

Question 1 for discussion: How do we want this work to improve the experience for different stakeholders?

Wendy described four stakeholder groups – Children & families, service providers, State governance, and local & regional intermediaries. Participants made comments in the Chat, including:

- Open door for universal access
- More equitable services
- Include face-to-face opportunities for parents to access information
- Easier navigation and successful connections for families
- Be mindful of different language needs
- Equity
- Equitably funded systems to fully support children’s and families’ needs
- Use language and definitions that parents understand, and in multiple languages
- Recognize that all parents might not be comfortable with printed text and materials
- Simplify families’ experience without overwhelming them

Wendy reviewed the comments and noted an emphasis on equity. Participants expanded on this theme, recommending that we approach this work by taking a family-centered view of services [see Question 3 for more].

Question 2 for discussion: Which regional intermediaries are in scope?

Previously, the group defined regional intermediary as: A State-funded, regional entity providing a direct service to families and ECCE service providers. One participant asked, “What if a regional entity is providing service but not funded by the State?” Examples included Head Start, the City of Chicago, and other municipalities. Also, most community collaborations are not state funded. Others asked if the entity needs to be statewide.

The regional entities current on the project’s list are:

- Regional Offices of Education and Intermediate Service Centers

- CCR&Rs
- Birth to Five Illinois Action Council
- Child and Family Connections (CFC) offices (Early Intervention)
- All Our Kids Networks
- Coordinated Intake (Home Visiting)
- Early Childhood Collaborations (to be discussed with the Community Equity and Access Committee)

Additional comments included:

- Add Local Interagency Councils (LICs) that are funded through Early Intervention but different from CFC offices
- Add Family Connects community alignment boards (now active in Chicago, Peoria County, and Stephenson County)
- There might be regional coordinating bodies funded through IDPH
- Every Head Start program has a Policy Council that is a community or regional collaboration
- Possibly add MIECHV because of its Coordinated Intake work (even though it is not statewide)

The group felt it was difficult to answer the question of which intermediaries should be involved without knowing what we hope to accomplish. One participant suggested we need a vision and a strategy for addressing it, including the roles of the intermediaries. Another suggestion was to focus on the function of each intermediary within the four stakeholder groups and then determine what is left out. The group decided to move to Question 3, which addresses these issues, before Question 2 could be answered.

Question 3 for discussion: What do we want to compare and contrast between these regional intermediaries?

Comments included:

- Each of the four stakeholder groups has different needs. We should compare and contrast those needs with existing supports to determine where there are gaps.
- We need to know what the current expectations are for collaboration. For state funded intermediaries, what is in their contract or deliverables?
- MIECHV is compiling profiles of collaboration between WIC, the AOK networks, Coordinated Intake in Home Visiting, and Family Case Management. Kayla Goldfarb offered to share the results when they are available.
- We need an aspirational alignment model that places families in the center. What is the ideal progression for families and who does each part of it? Local > regional > state.

Discussion returned briefly to the project's definition of intermediary as a State-funded, regional entity providing a direct service to families and ECCE service providers. One participant asked if each of the listed intermediaries has contact with parents, particularly noting ROEs. Another suggested we should consider whether to define intermediaries as structural elements in our system of family engagement, but not necessarily having direct contact with parents, or as entry points for families (which would include school districts, some ROEs, etc.)

Bethany said the committee will come back to the question of what we mean by alignment, probably at the next meeting.

### **Public Comment and Announcements**

Shauna invited public comment. No comments were made beyond the discussion already held. There was one announcement: The Research, Evaluation, and Data Committee has invited participation in its next meeting to discuss the Geographic Equity Asset Mapping project (GEAM). Afton Partners and the Center for Early Childhood Funding Equity will present. The meeting will be held on April 27, from 1:00 – 2:30. The meeting link is on the GOECD website.