

Project Summary

Project Title: Illinois Preschool Development Birth through Five Renewal Grant
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The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) is applying for \$27 million to implement the Preschool Development Birth through Five (PDG B-5) Renewal Grant. The grant will enable us to build on the initiatives and infrastructure developed during the previous PDG B-5 grant cycles and continue to advance Illinois' newly centralized early childhood system under the new Illinois Department of Early Childhood (IDEC). We envision Illinois as a place where every young child – regardless of race, ethnicity, income, language, geography, ability, immigration status, or other circumstance – receives the strongest possible start to life so our children can grow up safe, healthy, happy, ready to succeed, and eager to learn. The PDG B-5 Renewal Grant will help all our children prosper.

Our goal is to invest in, develop, and sustain an early childhood system that prioritizes racial and linguistic equity enlightened by stakeholder engagement, particularly our state's parents and families. These federal dollars will significantly impact children ages birth to 5 across Illinois' diverse Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) system, their families, and their communities, as well as the dedicated child care workforce that is the backbone of the work. We will be able to significantly expand services to children who have been "least well-served" by our current system, namely those with disabilities and special needs, those from multilingual homes, those with limited access to high-quality care (especially rural and low-income), and those at greatest risk of exclusion from high-quality programs.

Families and providers will experience simple, easy access to details about ECEC programs with the ability to seamlessly enroll in services that best meet their needs, thanks to the new systems Illinois will create under this project. We also will deliver a unified funding model and processes to better identify and support underserved children. We will identify these needs and groups by engaging families, providers, and the community as we develop policies and processes that impact a wide variety of ECEC services. Workforce members will benefit as we improve and pilot a variety of programs pertaining to compensation, benefits, career pathways, professional growth opportunities, and well-being supports.

This investment in systems and structures allows us to reconceptualize ECEC services into one, unified, strategic agency dedicated to serving Illinois children with the highest-quality ECEC programs. We envision that this structure will enable us to develop more robust data systems and make targeted investments in strengthening programs that serve traditionally marginalized communities. Ultimately, this grant will enhance equity for children, families, and the child care workforce; it will expand access to high-quality early childhood care and education from birth through 5, and better prepare children to enter kindergarten and succeed in their ongoing education.

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Table of Abbreviations

AIR	American Institutes for Research	IDEC	Illinois Department of Early Childhood
CBO	Community-Based Organizations	IDHS	Illinois Department of Human Services
CCAP	Child Care Assistance Program	IDOI	Illinois Department of Insurance
CCDBG	Child Care & Development Block Grant	IECAM	Illinois Early Childhood Asset Map
CCDF	Child Care and Development Fund	ILDS	Illinois Longitudinal Data System
CCR&R	Child Care Resource and Referral	INCCRRA	Illinois Network of Children Care Resource and Referral Agencies
CIT	Community Inclusion Teams	ISBE	Illinois State Board of Education
CQI	Continuous Quality Improvement	ISD	Illinois Schools for the Deaf
CREA	Culturally Responsive Evaluation & Assessment	ISVI	Illinois School for the Visually Impaired
DAI	Data, Analytics, and Insights	IWERC	Illinois Workforce and Research Collaborative
DCFS	Department of Children & Family Services	LEA	Local Education Agency
EC	Early childhood	LPF	Latino Policy Forum
ECCS	Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems	MIDAS	Management Information Database Accounting System
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care	MLF	Multilingual family
ECIDS	Early Childhood Integrated Data System	MLL	Multilingual learner
ECSE	Early Childhood Special Education	PD	Professional development
EI	Early Intervention	PDG	Preschool Development Grant
ELC	Early Learning Council	SBM	State-Based Marketplace
FERPA	Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act	SDB	Service Design Blueprint
FFN	Family, Friend, and Neighbor	TAC	Transition Advisory Committee
FRIS	Financial Reimbursement Info System	UIC	University of Illinois Chicago
HV	Home Visitors	UIUC	University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign
IAC	Integration and Alignment Committee	UNSS	Universal Newborn Support System
IAFC	Illinois Action for Children		
IBHE	Illinois Board of Higher Education		
ICCB	Illinois Community College Board		

Need for Assistance

Illinois is a leader in developing a high-quality mixed delivery system for ECEC for children birth to 5, but access to high-quality ECEC services is still uneven across race, ethnicity, income, geography, children’s individual needs, and age. The results of our parent listening and engagement work for the PDG B-5 Planning Grant are clear: Families and providers find navigating the system complex and inefficient. (See Activities 1 and 2 for discussion.) Without a more family-centered and aligned governance structure, inequities will remain for families and the workforce despite progress to improve ECEC programs across three state agencies (i.e., ISBE, the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), and the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS)).

Lack of access to high-quality ECEC contributes to low levels of kindergarten readiness in Illinois. In the fall of 2023, only 20.5% of low-income children and 29.9% of all Illinois children demonstrated full readiness across language/literacy, math, and social-emotional domains when they entered kindergarten. There are significant disparities in readiness by race, with 23.7% of Black and 18% of Hispanic students demonstrating full readiness as compared to 38% of White and Asian students.

Lawmakers agreed that a “siloe” system puts an unnecessary burden on families and providers and limits the state’s ability to equitably and efficiently provide ECEC services. Thus, in June 2024, Governor JB Pritzker established the IDEC with bipartisan support from the Illinois General Assembly; the bill enacted recommendations from the bipartisan Illinois Commission on Equitable Early Childhood Education and Care Funding (EC Funding Commission or (ECFC) funded by a prior PDG B-5 grant. IDEC will unite ECEC programs from ISBE and other agencies by July 1, 2026, to make ECEC services simpler, better, and fairer for

families with young children and the providers that serve them. Illinois will use PDG B-5 funding to anchor parent, family, and provider voice as we centralize the ECEC systems to increase clarity, accessibility, equity in funding,

Expected Outcomes

Illinois will redesign its programs and service delivery as it transitions to IDEC. We will design and build a new state agency for ECEC with parents, families, providers, the workforce, and others to make ECEC services more equitable and efficient. This will enable Illinois to meet the needs of families, particularly those least well-served by our system. This stronger, well-aligned mixed delivery system will be better able to target investments in the workforce and in the high-quality ECEC services that parents want for their youngest children.

Approach

This historical change in ECEC governance will enable Illinois to strengthen the design of critical state infrastructure to better serve providers, children, and families across the state, particularly those least well-served by the current system. In collaboration with communities and families, Illinois will reimagine – through working groups, data analysis, governance improvements, and developing a more equitable unified funding approach – and implement a state early childhood system that will create brighter futures for children and families. We will improve recruitment and retention of the workforce by increasing salaries and access to health care and providing better opportunities for higher education and professional development, particularly those focused on serving those currently underserved by our system.

Table 1: Illinois Strategies to Achieve Outcomes

Outcome 1	Outcome 2	Outcome 3
Families and caregivers in Illinois are more engaged and can better access the ECEC services, funding, and resources they need.	The ECEC workforce will be more adequately supported through compensation, benefits, professional growth opportunities, and systemic well-being support.	Illinois’ ECEC mixed delivery system will be positioned for long-term sustainability and success.
Strategies (Activities)	Strategies (Activities)	Strategies (Activities)
<p>Create systems and services that make it easier for families and providers to access information about ECEC programs and enroll in the services that best meet their needs. <i>(Activity 3.1)</i></p> <p>Develop a unified funding model that is data-informed, family- and provider-guided, and equity focused. <i>(Activity 5.1)</i></p> <p>Create processes to better identify and integrate children who are most marginalized in the ECEC system, particularly children at risk or with various disabilities and children from multilingual homes. <i>(Activities 3.1, 5.2)</i></p> <p>Engage families, providers, and the community in developing policies and processes that impact the diversity of ECEC services options. <i>(Activities 3, 5.2)</i></p>	<p>Support statewide pay efforts to increase provider pay and benefits. <i>(Activity 4.1 and Bonus Option 1)</i></p> <p>Strengthen professional development and career pathway opportunities for Illinois’ early childhood workforce that integrate multilingual learning, disability inclusivity, and workforce mental health with early childhood degrees and credentialing. <i>(Activities 4.2, 4.3, 4.4)</i></p> <p>Incorporate approaches into higher education that help the workforce address their mental health needs. <i>(Activity 4.4)</i></p> <p>Map existing system assets in higher education and disseminate across system. <i>(Activity 4.3)</i></p>	<p>Realign and streamline structures to improve equitable access to early childhood services, reduce the burden placed on families and providers to access early childhood services, and plan for sustainability. <i>(Activity 3.1, 5.1)</i></p> <p>Incorporate approaches that help providers address the mental and social-emotional development of young children. <i>(Activity 5.2, Bonus Option 2)</i></p> <p>Deepen our understanding of Family, Friend and Neighbor care, including costs and needs, to better support providers as part of the ECEC system. <i>(Activity 5.2)</i></p> <p>Integrate data and conduct research to inform decisions and manage the statewide ECEC mixed delivery system. <i>(Activity 5.1)</i></p>

Activity 1: Update Comprehensive Statewide B-5 Needs Assessment

ISBE assures that over the last five years, the agency, the state of Illinois, and state agency partners have conducted reviews and/or updated our state’s comprehensive Birth to Five needs assessment; the state confirms that this assessment reflects our current needs and will guide our proposed programs approach. ISBE commissioned a Family Needs Assessment report by the American Institutes for Research (AIR), a global research firm that supports state agencies to ensure that states achieve equity in access, opportunity, and outcomes for students. In January 2022, AIR was tasked to facilitate the update to the 2020 Illinois Needs Assessment. Illinois

families were key partners in the update; AIR engaged 83 parents in focus groups, 94 parents through surveys, and many others through 10 family-focused stakeholder organizations. Below are key findings from the assessment and PDG Renewal Activities that will address these needs.

Table 2: Summary of Needs Assessment Finding and Illinois Work

Need	Findings	Illinois and PDG Renewal Activities
System Navigation	Families struggle to find adequate information about enrollment or eligibility, encounter confusing instructions, and feel they need to piece together care across multiple providers. This was a particularly significant issue for families whose primary language is not English and/or families with children who have multiple needs (e.g., language barriers and disabilities).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Transition to a new single state agency to reduce complexity and burden in processes across agencies and programs (<i>Throughout</i>) ▪ Family Portal & Service Design Blueprint (<i>3.1</i>) ▪ Intermediary alignment and governance (<i>5.1</i>) ▪ Parent surveys (<i>3.2</i>) ▪ Work groups with additional parent voice in the decision making to inform and address these concerns about access and navigation, including a Multilingual Families Working Group (<i>Throughout</i>) ▪ Resources for interpretation and translation in the budget (<i>Throughout</i>)
Cultural Competency	Although parents reported feeling generally welcomed by ECEC service providers, they shared concerns about the extent to which services are culturally competent and inclusive of all children.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Multilingual Family Working Group, cost model, pilot projects (<i>5.2</i>) ▪ Multilingual higher education pathway and PD (<i>4.2, 4.3</i>) ▪ Supporting children with special needs work group, cost model, pilot projects, and PD (<i>3.1, 4.2, 5.2</i>) ▪ Co-design, human-centered, anti-bias training for state agency staff (<i>3.2</i>) ▪ Parent surveys (<i>3.2</i>) ▪ Unified Funding model that prioritizes equity and quality (<i>5.1</i>)
Cost	Cost continues to be a major barrier.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Unified Funding model that prioritizes equity and quality (<i>5.1</i>) ▪ Funding Equity Map (<i>5.1</i>) ▪ Cost modeling for quality services for MLF inclusions, Social-Emotional Development, program settings, etc. (<i>3.1, 5.1, 5.2</i>) ▪ Smart Start initiative to reduce service deserts (<i>5.3</i>)
Barriers to Access	Families are encountering barriers to enrolling in and using ECEC services. Opportunities to access services vary depending on geographic location, race/ethnicity, income, and whether the child requires special needs services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Moving to a single agency to reduce complexity and burden in processes across agencies and programs (<i>Throughout</i>) ▪ Family Portal and & Service Design Blueprint (<i>3.1</i>) ▪ Intermediary alignment and governance (<i>5.1</i>) ▪ Unified Funding model that prioritizes equity and quality (<i>5.1</i>) ▪ Smart Start initiative to reduce service deserts (<i>5.3</i>) ▪ Pilot to support equity and inclusiveness in community-based settings (<i>3.1</i>) ▪ Home visiting and early intervention workforce collaboration to increase referrals (<i>3.1</i>) ▪ Data consultants and work groups to identify gaps and policy and implementation recommendations (<i>5.1</i>)

Need	Findings	Illinois and PDG Renewal Activities
Basic Needs Support	Most families (74% of survey respondents) need support with at least one basic need, including housing (31%), health care costs (30%), and food (30%). 39% of survey respondents reported needing help with three or more needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Unified funding model that prioritizes equity and quality thereby improving stability and adequacy across ECEC settings and the state (5.1) ▪ Benefits activities to connect workforce with insurance and other benefits (4.1, Bonus)
Lingering COVID-19 Effects	Many families left care altogether and are having to reenroll; the resulting economic recession and wage stagnation are contributing to financial stress on families; providers are still rebuilding their capacity after mass staff exodus from the field. Families report struggling to find appropriate behavioral and mental health services, especially as their children’s social and emotional development suffered during the pandemic.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SEL work group and cost modeling to develop a continuum of SEL support (5.2) ▪ Subgrants to support children’s social-emotional and mental health needs, particularly those impacted by trauma (Bonus) ▪ Increasing knowledge and skills of home visitors and early intervention specialists to support children’s mental health (3.1) ▪ Unified Funding model that prioritizes equity and quality (5.1)
Recommendations	Families’ recommendations to Illinois fall into six categories: (1) Augment funding for programs. (2) Increase staff wages. (3) Engage more with parents and the local community. (4) Provide more professional development for staff serving children with special needs. (5) Help programs hire diverse staff. (6) Increase availability and access to ECEC services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Unified Funding model that prioritizes equity and quality (5.1) ▪ Smart Start Workforce Grants (4.1, 5.3) ▪ Parent surveys and work groups with more parents (3.2 and Throughout) ▪ Inclusion PD COP (4.2) ▪ Higher education bilingual pathway project (4.3) ▪ Professional development for workforce supporting multilingual learners, children with special needs, children with mental health and significant social-emotional needs (4.2) ▪ Family Portal and Service Design Blueprint (3.1)

Activity 2: Update Comprehensive Statewide Birth to Five Strategic Plan

ISBE assures that in the last five years we have developed or updated the statewide Birth to Five strategic plan that meets the requirements outlined in Activity 2 and that the strategic plan guides our proposed program approach. The state reviewed its statewide Birth to Five strategic plan and confirms that this strategic plan reflects our current needs. This *Illinois Statewide Strategic Plan Preschool Development Grant Birth Through Five* was completed in 2020 with AIR. Developing the strategic plan included the following: (1) Analyzing findings from a

statewide needs assessment; (2) Requesting input from the Illinois Early Learning Council (ELC) ad hoc strategic plan work group and the Governor’s Office of Early Childhood Development local planning work groups; (3) Reviewing existing statewide strategic plans; and (4) Collecting input from constituents and stakeholders.

The strategic plan guides Illinois’ overall approach to ECEC. It has three main goals – access, quality, and resources – and a wide range of objectives and strategies. Many, but certainly not all, of the objectives and strategies in the plan are represented in this proposal.

Table 3: Strategic Plan Elements to Be Addressed

Strategic Goal	PDG B-5 Strategy (Activity)
<p>Access Raising family awareness and enrollment in ECEC programs, implementing cross-system coordination, and expanding equitable service pathways; maximizing family engagement, participation and choice of program.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Transition to a new single state agency to reduce complexity and burden in processes across agencies and programs (<i>Throughout</i>) ▪ Creation of the Family Portal and Service Design Blueprint (<i>3.1</i>) ▪ Alignment and governance of intermediary structures (<i>5.1</i>) ▪ Parent surveys (<i>3.2</i>) ▪ Work groups that prioritize families least well-served by the system to inform policies and systems (<i>Throughout</i>) ▪ Unified Funding model that prioritizes equity and quality (<i>5.1</i>) ▪ CIT Inclusion pilot (<i>3.1</i>) ▪ Updated and comprehensive cost modeling (<i>3.1, 5.1, 5.2</i>) ▪ Bilingual educator pathways (<i>4.3</i>)
<p>Quality ECEC will employ an adequate, stable, well-qualified workforce that reflects the communities and cultures, including a bilingual/bicultural workforce, leading to high-quality outcomes for children and families.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Creation of a new agency, IDEC (<i>Throughout</i>) ▪ Design of a new data system (<i>5.1</i>) ▪ Multilingual learner identification, support and cost modeling (<i>5.2</i>) ▪ Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) Care quality recommendations and cost modeling (<i>5.2</i>) ▪ HV and EI collaboration projects (<i>3.2</i>) ▪ New higher education pathways and programs to support upskilling the workforce (<i>4.3</i>) ▪ ECACE Scholarship (<i>4.3</i>) ▪ SEL continuum of service and cost modeling (<i>5.2</i>) ▪ Workforce Compensation supports (<i>4.1, 5.3</i>)
<p>Resources Parents and families experience the benefits of equitable data-driven resources for ECEC programs and services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Unified Funding model that prioritizes equity and quality (<i>5.1</i>) ▪ Data-focused working groups and data consultants (<i>5.1</i>) ▪ Updated and comprehensive cost modeling (<i>3.1, 5.1, 5.2</i>) ▪ Development of new datasets (<i>5.1</i>) ▪ Family engagement through parent surveys and working groups to assess need and interest in services (<i>3.1, 3.2 and Throughout</i>) ▪ Multilingual working groups, PD and pilots to better support language accessibility (<i>4.2 5.2</i>) ▪ Multilingual Higher Ed pathways to support language accessibility (<i>4.3</i>)

Activity 3: Maximize Family Participation and Engagement in the Birth to Five System

Illinois will improve and expand on several existing programs and systems to maximize family knowledge about, and enrollment in, the state ECEC and B-5 programs. We will create systems and services that **make it easier for families and providers to access information about ECEC programs and enroll in the services** that best meet their needs. These will increase participation of children across Illinois equitably, identify and fill accessibility gaps, and involve families in designing and implementing our approach.

Activity 3.1 – Maximizing Family Enrollment and Involvement in the Birth to Five System

As noted previously, the 2021 EC Funding Commission (ECFC) made recommendations on governance, funding goals, and funding mechanisms that provide equitable access to high-quality ECEC services. As part of these transformation efforts, Illinois launched Birth to Five Illinois to create action and family councils in each region of the state called Birth to Five Councils. These councils inform policy around Birth to Five programs, serve as regional advocacy bodies to influence local policy, and support the state in targeting funding opportunities in service deserts. Last year these councils helped the state award over 5,800 new preschool seats.

Building on the work of these councils and the ELC, a public-private partnership created by statute in 2003 that strengthens, coordinates and expands programs and services for children birth to five, Illinois will increase family enrollment in ECEC services through three initiatives described later in detail: (1) Designing a Family Portal and Early Childhood Service Design Blueprint to help us determine needed services; (2) Realignment and streamlining of intermediary structures and developing a framework; and (3) Implementing projects that increase

involvement of underserved children and families in Illinois (UNSS, CITs, and HV/EI collaboration).

Family Portal and Service Design Blueprint: Continuing a PDG B-5 planning project, Illinois will help design a responsive and seamless family portal and service delivery process. Illinois will develop the family portal through a robust, co-design process with families to ensure inclusivity and a high-quality user experience. The portal will include an application, eligibility, and enrollment system that **increases access to high-quality programs and services**; it will also look at ways to include mental health, nutrition, and other family support services. This will ensure that regardless of the type of service families inquire about or how they inquire, families are directed to relevant services for which they are eligible. Illinois will work with ChiByDesign to develop the portal; ChiByDesign is a Chicago-based design firm committed to disrupting and dismantling racism by co-creating interventions with the people most impacted — in this case, ECEC families and providers. Its process ensures stakeholders have agency and autonomy to define their unique needs and, ultimately, co-create programs and services at the new agency with the state. ChiByDesign brings anti-racist tools and a trauma-informed lens centered on understanding systemic trauma experienced by EC families, workers, and providers, allowing Illinois to understand our program’s impact, and designing for healing and recovery. ChiByDesign will start by convening diverse stakeholders to understand the conditions, policies, practices, and experiences that shape a family’s experience with early childhood services, or lack thereof. Design decisions focus on accounting for the lived experiences of parents and caregivers. **Participation by families in need of early childhood special education services and multilingual families with young children will be central to the design** of Illinois’ Family

Portal because a primary barrier to enrollment identified by our Family Needs Assessment was language inaccessibility for families who do not speak English.

In addition, Illinois and ChiByDesign will use the same tools to build upon the work started in our PDG B-5 Planning Grant with the ELC Integration and Alignment Committee to engage local and regional intermediary and advisory structures. This will allow us to map how the current array of intermediary early childhood structures is aligned with the Service Design Blueprint (SDB). Development of the SDB is a separate project between IDEC and ChiByDesign; it is aligned with the Family Portal and PDG B-5 but funded by the state. The SDB will be developed using the same processes and priorities of the new state agency.

The SDB and Family Portal will **increase access for all children, but especially those who have experienced systemic marginalization** due to race, ability, language, income, or other factors. The SDB maps family/parent needs and the opportunities or challenges for providers to deliver services equitably and simply. This will serve as a map for the technical assistance and support regional intermediaries provide.

Realignment and Streamlining: As part of the transition to IDEC, we will build on our PDG Planning Grant intermediary project to realign and streamline intermediary structures and to develop a framework to ensure ongoing alignment to guiding principles. This project will be supported by Wendy McCullough, LLC, a Chicago-based management consultant focused on leading systemic and organizational change that supported the earlier phase of this work. Primary activities will align to the transition to IDEC and include: (1) Developing guiding principles for implementation; (2) Developing and implementing a stakeholder engagement plan that mitigates potential conflicts of interest and prioritizes recommendations that center on families; (3) Identifying dependencies in staff capacity, funding alignment and integration, and other factors

needed in the implementation of recommendations; (4) Developing a proposed implementation timeline; and (5) Finalizing the implementation plan, including identifying “low hanging fruit” projects that can be initiated prior to the start of state fiscal year 2027. **Families will be engaged throughout the process** via focus groups, co-creation, and user testing to identify design changes to regional intermediary structures to ensure they are more accessible for families from underserved and Illinois’ priority populations.

Projects that Increase Involvement of Underserved Children and Families: Illinois will **increase access to ECEC opportunities for infants and toddlers** by planning, testing, and evaluating a statewide Universal Newborn Support System (UNSS). This is a targeted expansion of an Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems grant received by IDHS. It braids funding with PDG B-5 renewal funding to finalize the UNSS strategic plan, which will pressure test its recommendations with communities and include long-term sustainable solutions for scaling UNSS across Illinois. UNSS will create a universally accessible touchpoint for Illinois families to receive personalized screening/assessments and coordinated referrals to community services upon the birth of their child in the immediate postpartum period. It promotes **family well-being and children’s social-emotional development and mental health** and increases parents’ tools to nurture parent-child relationships. This project will be implemented by IDHS and Start Early. PDG B-5 will support the following: (1) Documentation and analysis of governance systems in other states; (2) Five implementation planning grants for local partners (health departments, hospitals, or other UNSS hubs) to support start-up costs needed to operationalize the UNSS program at a local level; (3) Ongoing implementation engagement and analysis (supported by an external consultant engaged through Start Early); and (4) Final implementation plan recommendations.

Illinois will also **increase the inclusion of children with or at risk of disabilities** in community-based settings by supporting Community Inclusion Teams (CITs) – a group of program personnel, family members, and others devoted to high-quality inclusive ECEC settings where children with disabilities participate as full members. CITs build awareness of the **importance of early childhood inclusion for children with disabilities** and help guide programs in adopting evidence-based practices, accessing resources (including funding), and building capacity and skills to ensure that all children succeed. Ultimately, the goal is to support families so they can keep their children in their setting of choice while receiving special education services. As a result, we intend to see a reduction in suspension, expulsion, and exclusionary practices over time.

Our PDG B-5 project will build on our current PDG B-5 Early CHOICES preschool initiative, which promotes high-quality inclusive education for every preschool-aged child, increases the number of children with disabilities receiving services in general education, and provides technical assistance and professional development to families and professionals. Supported by ISBE and PDG funding, planning and preparation for CITs is underway in three diverse communities – Collinsville, Peoria County, and the Quad Cities. Such work includes action plans for increasing access to inclusive early childhood education. These CITs have been dedicated to building relationships and planning the necessary steps to integrate special education services into Community-Based Organizations (CBOs).

With West 40, an intermediate service center serving 38 school districts and three co-ops in West Cook County, this initiative will be implemented in these three sites and begin to integrate two additional communities. This includes monthly meetings with a CIT facilitator, a statewide Community of Practice, and collaborative learning. Including CIT sites in rural and

non-rural communities will enable ISBE to learn more about these models and their support requirements in different settings.

To inform our approach to scale, Illinois and West 40 will bring together CBOs and Local Education Agencies (LEAs) to work together and replicate this model. From our previous work, we have learned this process is not fast; it needs an initial year for orientation and recruitment to build relationships and engage local planning before moving to implementation. Communities need to work through issues regarding LEA borders, equity of access, communication norms, data collection, and more. West 40 also plans to partner with Illinois Action for Children (IAFC) to **survey parents statewide about their experiences finding and using child care for their children with disabilities to inform policy and tool development.** This work is separate from our Parent Survey (3.2) and will help the state to better support the CITs and CBOs.

ISBE will share draft Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) and agreements, lessons learned, and toolkits from these piloting communities at state conferences and with other interested parties. This project is complemented by the Community of Practice (Activity 4.2) to support professional development to enhance ECEC providers' understanding and implementation of inclusive practices for young children with developmental delays or disabilities.

The work of the CITs — as well as other projects in this proposal — will be informed by the Families with Children with Special Needs Work Group. This existing group promotes **inclusion of children with special needs in their natural/least restrictive environments** and transitions from EI to ECSE and K-12 special education services. As such, the work group will identify opportunities for structural program alignment and ways to support professional

development around disability inclusivity, access, and skills. This will ultimately advise our Unified Funding Model (Activity 5.1) and be central to the transition to the new agency.

Finally, PDG funds will support an HV and EI Collaboration Pilot. HV and EI providers in Illinois have shared that there is little opportunity for interaction or identifying efficiencies. PDG B-5 will fund Shine Family Services (Shine), a Peoria-based pediatric therapy services provider, and area HV and EI providers (e.g., workforce members) to pilot collaborative work. This will enable them to better serve children and families through **increased referrals, increased efficiencies of shared visits, and improved provider skills** in reflective practice and consultation. Pilot work will include shared activities including planning and, when waivers are in place, discussions about shared clients. Shine will also create communities of practice, developmental playgroups with opportunities for family support, and professional development, particularly around reflective consultation.

Activity 3.2 – Expand Meaningful Family Participation and Leadership

Illinois believes that parents know best what their children need. As we transition to a new agency, Illinois has an opportunity to **prioritize and address the unique needs of children and families that have been least well-served by our system**, including multilingual families and families with children with special needs. We will co-design and align programs and service delivery using participatory methods (Section 3.1) and expand opportunities for involving families and caregivers in state and program decisions about policies, practices, and plans.

As a result of our PDG B-5 Planning Grant work with ChiByDesign and NORC to improve parent engagement processes in the new agency, Illinois is not only implementing the planning grant and needs assessment recommendations, but we are also expanding our approach. Illinois launched two work groups on supporting families with young children with special needs

and multilingual families, as well as plans to launch work groups to build aligned systems for our workforce, funding, data, social-emotional supports, and FFN providers, and more. These will continue to inform our work through the transition to IDEC and beyond. We have implemented several practices — including accessible meeting times, stipends, language interpretations, and cohort support — to better serve these valuable resources. We also **engaged parents and families in reviewing and selecting projects** for this PDG application, which were submitted by providers, policymakers, community members, and stakeholders from across Illinois.

Through PDG renewal, we will continue to **include, refine, and expand upon family engagement**, and we will develop an approach to ensure our entire structure aligns with and is responsive to parents as we transition to IDEC.

Master Classes: In addition to expanding projects and processes (Activity 3.1), ChiByDesign also will train staff at ISBE, IDEC, IDHS, and DCFS on co-design and human-centered design facilitation. These “master classes” will support staff in developing the mindsets, practices, and methods for co-design, anti-racist design, and trauma-responsive design.

Parent Surveys: Illinois will incorporate family feedback by deploying and analyzing a series of family-focused surveys. We will work with IAFC to develop and distribute quarterly surveys to families with young children (including those without children in ECEC programs) to help Illinois continue to **identify and meet the needs of families**, including those currently underserved. IAFC will administer quarterly, online surveys in English and Spanish to a panel of 600 parents over the three-year grant period. Parents will receive completion incentives. This project builds on IAFC’s experience administering the Illinois Parent Survey Panel, which provided new insights into the priorities, hopes, and challenges for families raising young children.

Approach to Measuring Progress and Results: The success of these efforts will be measured by the performance evaluation, quarterly project reports, and the state’s new Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS) (Activity 5.1). In general, Illinois will measure the progress and results in three ways: (1) Regular updates to our applicable work groups, Transition Advisory Committee (TAC), and inter-agency meetings to review progress, obstacles and lesson learned, and identify mid-course corrections; (2) Work with ECIDS and data consultants (Activity 5.1) to collect and analyze relevant data, disaggregated by priority and target populations and geography; and (3) Work with our program evaluator to provide quality assurance to all data and evaluation products. Throughout, we will continue to focus on children least well-served by our system including multilingual learners, children with special needs, and children in rural communities.

Activity 4: Support the B-5 Workforce

Illinois is supporting and will continue to support the B-5 workforce by improving and piloting several programs to support the workforce through compensation, benefits, career pathways, professional growth opportunities, and well-being supports. **These initiatives will help us develop an early childhood pipeline for a much-needed industry.**

Activity 4.1 – Increased Pay and Benefits

Equitable Pay: Illinois is currently working to address **recruitment and retention challenges** by increasing wages for the child care workforce through innovative grants to providers. In the future, these grants will become part of an aligned unified funding model (Activity 5.1). Building on previous PDG grants, IDHS launched the Smart Start Workforce Grants (SSWG) in 2024 to offer child care programs stable, ongoing funds that they need to cover costs and invest in quality staff without burdening families by raising tuition or Child Care

Assistance Program (CCAP) co-pays. Those who receive grant funds are required to adhere to an established wage floor (required baseline hourly wage), equating to an average two to three dollar per hour raise per classroom staff member.

The wage floor for SSWGs, the grant program’s cost model, and other innovative grant initiatives were developed with the child care salary scale as a starting point. In 2022, Illinois developed a salary scale for child care programs that provides parity with K–12 educators, uses living wage assumptions, accounts for years of experience, reflects wage differentials across geographic boundaries, and includes “add-on” rates for educators with additional credentials. Illinois is updating the salary scale to include post-pandemic data and additional positions, such as HV and EI practitioners, to ensure Illinois increases pay in equitable and data-informed ways. Updating the child care salary scale will support Illinois in **creating and sustaining programs that increase pay and benefits, thereby supporting the recruitment and retention of qualified staff.**

Benefits Navigators and Impact Study: To improve benefits for the ECEC workforce, Illinois will engage health care benefits navigators in Year 2 to support early childhood workforce enrollment in the new State-Based Marketplace (SBM). In June 2023, Illinois passed legislation to implement a Health Benefits Exchange by 2026 that will provide an opportunity for Illinois to improve the customer experience, increase resident enrollment, offer residents cost savings, and exercise more control over the Affordable Care Act insurance marketplace. Based on the data from the state’s ECEC workforce registry, we believe many child care professionals can access health insurance at little to no cost while others may access insurance at a capped rate based on income. Illinois Department of Insurance (IDOI) will leverage associated SBM statewide marketing campaigns to support benefits navigators to specifically serve the child care

workforce. This is an opportunity to **increase health care benefits for the child care workforce** and share best practices with ECE providers and workforce members. The work of the benefits navigators will be informed by the Benefits Task Force (Bonus Option 1).

IDEC will conduct a study to better understand the relation between the benefits navigators and the workforce enrollment in health insurance plans. Information from the study will: (1) Inform continuous improvement of implementation, and (2) Be shared with the performance evaluator to build into the state evaluation. We will measure the success in part based on the uptake of health insurance. We also will seek opportunities to share learnings and best practices more broadly with early childhood providers through presentations at advisory meetings, working group meetings, and conferences.

Activity 4.2 – Strengthening Professional Development Opportunities

The American Academy of Pediatricians (AAP) reports that hearing and sight are critical to how children learn to communicate and engage with their world. It recommends frequent screening to detect progressive loss that can happen in early childhood. Parents and providers who are trained in the hallmarks of normal development and hearing and sight loss can be key to getting children sensory disability screening, supporting inclusion, and avoiding further impacts to learning. ISBE and IDHS will work with Illinois Schools for the Deaf (ISD) and Illinois School for the Visually Impaired (ISVI) to **provide wide-spread virtual trainings and mentoring for public school, EI and HV personnel about screening, identification, and intervention for children with a sensory disability**, which will be an important way to **share best practices with the ECEC workforce**. This will not only provide resources to support students with sensory disabilities but will also ensure Illinois is responsive to Americans with Disabilities Act requirements.

ISD/ISVI also will implement a train the trainer model for a program that supports the mental and social-emotional health of children with low-incidence disability and their families. Mental health and social-emotional development supports are critical, as children with severe language delays and lack of sensory access can experience complex trauma at a young age.

In addition, ISD/ISVI will provide training, supervision, and ongoing mentoring for practicing early intervention developmental therapists (vision and hearing). This will include topics such as becoming a developmental therapist hearing/developmental therapist vision, video visits, resources, community outreach, and monitoring for progressive or late-onset conditions. This will support providers or those interested in this field to strengthen their career pathways and professional development opportunities.

Developing the Workforce to Support Multilingual Learners: Illinois is committed to ensuring multilingual learners in early childhood programs (including children birth to five) have access to teachers, assistants, and others who speak their languages and are trained to support multilingual learners. As part of a broader body of work to **identify and support multilingual learners** (Activity 5.2), Illinois will work with the Illinois Workforce and Research Collaborative (IWERC) and its partners to provide training to teachers on screening, identification, and evidence-based classroom practices for multilingual learners through the free Illinois Gateways to Opportunity platform. In addition, IWERC and their partners will provide stipends for 40 teachers to take three English as a second language (ESL)/bilingual education courses that will lead to an ESL/bilingual credential. These teachers will also receive a salary stipend upon the completion of the credential.

Community of Practice for Professional Development Providers: Illinois will work with West 40 to support a virtual Community of Practice for professional development providers

statewide to **enhance their understanding of and share evidence-based inclusive practices for young children with disabilities.** The project’s collaborative nature will leverage the collective knowledge and experiences of all participants, thereby expanding the capacity of professionals to support all young children regardless of the program or service they access. This will also ensure a cadre of professional development providers able to **share best practices broadly with the ECEC workforce.**

Activity 4.3 – Strengthening Career Pathways Opportunities

Over the past three years, the Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity (ECACE) – a consortium of 62 Illinois colleges and universities – has worked to increase access, persistence, and completion of credentials and degrees for the early childhood workforce in Illinois to address the workforce shortage and ensure a pipeline of qualified workforce members. ECACE, which is administered by the Community College Board (ICCB) and Board of Higher Education (IBHE), centers on ensuring the success of historically marginalized working adults and is built on the idea that together the consortium can transform systems and increase equitable access to degrees. Participating institutions have reduced transfer challenges and ensured courses are available when, where, and how students need them by increasing availability and flexible hours of courses. This continues to be a major vehicle to both innovate and share best practices. As part of this PDG application, we plan to build on this success, including through work with Afton Partners to update the strategic plan, build out the infrastructure of the Consortium, support the Consortium to work collectively, and revise the Consortium guiding principles as ECACE moves into “Phase 2”.

Multilingual Educator Pathway: ECACE, with the Competency-Based Network (C-BEN), will design and build a competency-based early childhood pathway to degrees and

credentials for Spanish speakers, which will result in a bilingual credential (at the associate level) and teacher licensure in both early childhood and bilingual education. C-BEN is a national organization that supports the creation of infrastructure and systems based on competencies and was a key partner during the PDG B-5 planning grant.

This pathway will address **the need for more Spanish-speaking teachers**, prepared in culturally and linguistically appropriate practices, in schools and community-based programs by **providing opportunities for workforce members to gain credentials and degrees** in a learning environment that is more accessible and inclusive. A Multilingual Pathways Working Group of ECACE, supported and guided by C-BEN, will collectively map the pathway, develop courses and competency-based assessments, and begin to pilot the pathway on a rolling basis. With two- and four-year institutions working together, the pathway will be designed to allow for a seamless transfer from community colleges to bachelor's degree programs. Higher education institutions will begin to pilot in Year 2; the pilot will expand and be evaluated through Year 3. The working group will provide updates to the full consortium and state's Multilingual Family (MLF) Work Group (Activity 5.2) on a regular basis and will make recommendations for next steps and broad-scale adoption across consortium institutions, as appropriate. Additionally, ECACE will seek venues to share best practices more broadly in developing and implementing bilingual pathways.

ECACE Scholarship: This year, Illinois is launching a state-funded scholarship to support the incumbent workforce to attain credentials and degrees. The state has supported a scholarship program known as the Gateways Scholarship for many years through a nonprofit organization. For the last three years, the state offered the ECACE scholarship, funded with one-time federal Covid-19 relief funds, which are no longer available. The state recognized the need

for and potential impact of the ECACE scholarship to **address workforce shortages, retain providers, and advance the governor’s vision to address preschool deserts**, so it officially created the ECACE scholarship in state statute and is providing \$5 million in inaugural funding for FY 2025.

Consortium Asset Map: The ECACE Consortium, under the guidance of a working group, will create an asset map to document and share assets held at each of the 62 institutions. The asset map will allow us to identify higher education early childhood program deserts and where gaps might exist in the system. The map will incorporate a repository of tools and resources shared by consortium institutions, **allowing institutions to share best practices and to benefit from the work of their partners**. This project will impact institutions and their students across the state, including those in our rural and under-resourced communities. The work of the ECACE and pertinent findings will be shared via an annual report as required by state statute allowing us to measure the results of ECEC workforce activities.

Evaluation of the Early Childhood Apprenticeship Program: In collaboration with IDHS and participating community-based organizations and institutions of higher education, the University of Illinois Chicago (UIC) is piloting an apprenticeship program for early childhood educators. Apprentices receive classroom instruction, on-the-job training, and mentorship with wage increases as workforce members early credentials. Illinois will work with UIC to engage an evaluator to assess the implementation and outcomes of the pilot program. The evaluation will help inform feasibility, cost, potential impact, and appropriateness of scaling the pilot. Results from the evaluation will be shared broadly with state agencies, providers, the State Workforce Working Group, and various advisory committees.

Activity 4.4 – Supporting the Mental Health and Well-Being of the Workforce

To support workforce mental health and well-being, ECACE will convene a Mental Health Working Group of colleges and universities to explore, develop, and pilot ways to better infuse workforce mental health and well-being into higher education. The ECACE Mental Health Working Group will present and make recommendations to the consortium for consideration for broader adoption in early childhood higher education programs. This may include: (1) Integrating supports for adult learners into curriculum and coursework (e.g., managing stress, addressing burnout); (2) Identifying training and resources to support faculty and academic advisors to identify and assist students’ burnout and mental health challenges through changes to education programs or referrals to other services; and (3) Identifying ways to leverage other institutional supports, such as services, supports, and expertise of other departments. Increasing student and workforce members mental health will support workforce persistence toward degrees and retention in workplace settings. Success of the project can be measured by results from the pilot, which may include feedback from students and faculty about their perceived efficacy in supporting workforce well-being. ECACE will share information with IDEC’s Social-Emotional Supports Work Group (Activity 5.2), which will explore ways to better support mental health of both young children and the workforce.

Information about all ECACE work will be published in an annual report, shared with the legislature, Governor’s Office, the ECACE Advisory Committee, and others. IBHE and ICCB will work with NIU to ensure we have data on the incumbent workforce to measure and report on the impact of ECACE efforts. Lastly, we will hold an in-person convening of the 62 Consortium institutions to share findings and present recommendations.

Approach to Measuring Progress and Results: In general, Illinois will measure the progress and results of these activities in three ways: (1) Regularly update applicable work groups, TAC and inter-agency meetings on progress, obstacles, and lessons learned, and identify mid-course corrections; (2) Work with our ECIDS and data consultants (Section 5.1) to collect and analyze relevant data disaggregated by priority and target populations and geography; and (3) Work with our performance evaluator to review and provide quality assurance to all data and evaluation products. Furthermore, the annual reports will help bring transparency to progress and results. (See Program Performance Evaluation Plan.) If the work is successful, we anticipate seeing a substantial uptick in workforce members with health insurance. The Consortium will have built and piloted bilingual pathways and mental health supports and will have recommendations for scale across all 62 institutions. And the state will have evidence and recommendations for whether our apprenticeship pilot feasible, opportune, and affordable to scale.

Activity 5: Support Program Quality Improvements

Activity 5.1 – Improving The Quality of ECEC Programs

Illinois’ transition to a new state agency is an historic opportunity to provide a holistic approach to systems management and aligned and integrated services across the state’s ECEC mixed delivery system. It also presents a moment to address some of the foundational conditions that can enable increased access to quality supports for all families. These include governance and decision-making structures, aligned and equitable funding models, and robust data and research systems.

Governance and Decision Structure: To build a simpler, better, fairer ECEC system, the internal agency governance structure must be designed to deliver the supports providers need

to deliver the services families want, equitably and efficiently. The co-design work, work groups, and collaboration with the TAC is vital to informing agency governance. To do this, Illinois will build on our PDG planning grant work to process co-design work and feedback across the different advising bodies. IDEC will engage Foresight Law and Policy (Foresight), a nationally recognized expert in the development and design of early childhood systems, to facilitate meetings with stakeholders and agency staff. Foresight will consider legal and regulatory changes needed to successfully operationalize the SDB and other feedback into recommendations for agency structure, program operation, and to maximize equity and efficiency in our mixed delivery system in Illinois. This will include work with ISBE, IDHS, and DCFS on the continued partnership parameters with IDEC. Foresight’s primary activities will be to facilitate and participate in work groups, draft framing documents, and recommend how to build programs and governance structures.

Furthermore, Foresight will support the state in developing and implementing a process to designate an advisory body to counsel IDEC as the primary ECEC department. This will ensure IDEC aligns with the requirements of the law enabling the establishment of the department that “functions with transparency, operates with a commitment to centering racial equity, and to meaningful inclusion of parent, early childhood service provider, and other public stakeholder engagement, feedback, and counsel, including the creation of committees or working groups, and devotes appropriate attention to data collection and timely public reporting.”

Unified Funding Model: Illinois will also develop a unified funding model that will equitably distribute funding ensuring providers and underserved communities are able to provide quality supports. As noted previously, the EC Funding Commission report outlined recommendations for improving how the state funds our ECEC system. Our investment in the

2022 Funding Equity Map allowed Illinois to assess and compare the equity and adequacy of ECEC funding across different geographic regions and demographics. This analysis revealed that funding streams intended to serve low-income children varied widely in overall amount per priority-eligible child and did not correlate to the concentrations of low-income children. As a result, in 2023, Governor Pritzker announced Smart Start Illinois, a plan to: (1) Eliminate preschool deserts for families with low incomes through targeted increases in seats; (2) Stabilize the funding infrastructure for child care providers and workforce members through grants funding increased compensation; (3) Invest in new expanded early childhood facilities; and (4) Reach more vulnerable families with early support through investments and expansion of HV and EI services.

Responding to the ECFC’s report, the state also updated cost modeling for our state pre-K, child care, HV, and EI funding. However, we know that these models can be improved to better take into account supports for multilingual families (Activity 5.2); inclusion activities and models (Activity 3.1); social-emotional supports (Activity 5.2); and family, friend, and neighbor (FFN) programs (Activity 5.2). Illinois needs a strategic approach to more effectively distribute ECEC funding *and* reduce burden and complexity for parents and providers. Illinois will work with Afton Partners, a national leader in supporting meaningful change in communities by transforming public policies to be more effective, sustainable, and serve those who need it most, to design a **unified funding system that is equitable, efficient, and better sustains providers of services parents and families want, especially families from priority populations**. This effort will focus on reducing the complexity of aligning our funding streams and distributing dollars to providers. As a result, Illinois will be able to target quality services for priority and historically underserved populations for families and communities.

This work will be guided by a new Funding Work Group made up of parents, providers, intermediaries, state officials, elected officials, advocates, and academics from across the ECEC ecosystem and representing the diversity of the state. The Funding Work Group will be charged with reviewing and evaluating the data and implications of the updated Funding Equity Map (developed by Afton Partners for the state). It also will oversee the development of the new funding model that is aligned to Illinois priorities to **expand access, reduce inequity, and support the diversity of ECEC options that serve families in our state**. This will include a **racially equitable, inclusive, family-centered system of quality choice and fair resource distribution** for all types of providers and the ECEC workforce. The group’s work also will support **stability and opportunity for families, providers, and the workforce**, as well as sustainability through **clear, balanced priorities and effective use of available funds**. The Funding Work Group also will support and advise work across our program delivery, system redesign, and structural implementations with cost modeling and priority guidance.

Robust Data and Research Systems: As Illinois aligns data and funding streams in the new agency, the potential ability to use data to achieve our goals grows exponentially. We must be able to provide a more holistic view of the current ECEC system with more robust data to guide targeted decisions on investments, services, delivery, and program design. Illinois has made progress bringing data together for our Funding Equity Map and Illinois Longitudinal Data System (ILDS). However, much ECEC data is still spread across multiple programs, agencies, and data sets, which continues to result in siloed, fragmented, and lagging data.

IDEC will use PDG funds to build an integrated ECIDS. This will enable us to perform more timely data analysis to inform our system building decisions and opportunities for further exploration with local partners. Notably, ECIDS will be used to measure the results of proposed

projects in Activities 3, 4 and 5, including examining trends in enrollment, families' ability to access programs, and the improvements in the workforce.

IDEC will identify data consultants to support the acquisition, cleanup, management, and analysis of specific datasets needed for ECIDS and for PDG B-5. In addition, state data consultants – IWERC, Illinois Early Childhood Asset Map (IECAM), UIC, UIUC, and Illinois Network of Children Care Resource and Referral Agencies (INCCRRA) –will support project activities and data integration on an ongoing basis. Each data consultant will help steward different data sources, including data from the various programs, provider and workforce data, and data on multilingual learners and children with special needs. We will also contract with Northern Illinois University (NIU) and Afton Partners for one-time technical assistance for data governance; database management; and data modeling.

The data consultants will support Illinois by providing niche expertise to track data in a more actionable manner and help build the capacity to run the Funding Equity Map analysis (Activity 3.2) regularly. The disaggregated data by priority population (e.g., multilingual learners, children with special needs, children from low-income households, rural families) also will inform work group activities (Activities 3.2, 4.3, 5.1, 5.2), cost modeling, and overall distribution and quality of services.

Finally, the ongoing work of ensuring that data, analytics, and insights are broadly made accessible to early childhood stakeholders will be supported by our Data, Analytics, and Insights (DAI) Work Group. Supported by the PDG planning grant, DAI Work Group is facilitated by CK Strategies and comprises more than 65% parents, providers, and workforce members, in addition to advocates, academics, higher education, intermediaries, and state staff. The work group will

extend its activities (with state funds) and continue to inform how data will be used to guide the agency transition (as well as activities in this proposal) over the next three years.

During that same period, Illinois will use state funds to modernize its ECEC data and technology infrastructure that includes creating ECIDS. Doing so incorporates (1) Ongoing measurement requirements of the PDG activities; (2) Existing dashboard prototypes developed with previous PDG funds; and (3) Existing database and analytical modeling.

Activity 5.2: Programs That Serve Traditionally Marginalized Communities

Illinois believes that if we start anchoring integration and redesign efforts by addressing the wants and needs of those children and families least well-served by our current system (e.g., multilingual learners, children at risk or with special needs, children in service deserts, including rural communities), we will improve the overall quality of our ECEC programs and services. In addition to the initiatives above, we will expand and improve screening and supports for multilingual children, strengthening the FFN provider system in our state, and a Social-Emotional Support Work Group to develop a continuum of SEL supports.

Screening for Multilingual Children: Outside of public school-based programs, there is no requirement or standard definitions and identification process for multilingual learners before entering kindergarten. Furthermore, no tools and procedures exist for children birth to three. Consequently, neither state nor local systems have a strong understanding of where to target quality, specialized services, and supports for multilingual families. We also have no unified approach for policy recommendations to ensure that multilingual families have equitable rights and representation across the ECEC service continuum. Nor are they afforded the protections and opportunity to equitable access. These factors make multilingual children one of our least well-served and most marginalized populations.

Illinois will work with IWERC, the Latino Policy Forum (LPF), Meeker Consulting, and EC-Reach to create a process to identify, screen, and support more multi-language children from birth to 5 in a variety of community-based child care settings in 28 sites across the state. This will enable us to better **support equitable and culturally responsive practices of providers across the mixed delivery system for all children and families — including those who speak multiple languages or come from historically marginalized communities.** Through the PDG planning grant, Illinois piloted a model to identify and screen 3- and 4-year-old multilingual learners in state-funded pre-K settings. We will validate the identification and screening in non-state pre-K settings, pilot and expand tools to birth to 3 children and non-urban communities, provide training and higher education to teachers, and increase appropriate linguistic programming.

Data from the project will be shared with the state’s DAI and Multilingual Families (MLF) Work Groups. The MLF Work Group is currently supported by our PDG planning grant and consists of approximately 20 members, representing families and caregivers, service providers, advocates, and subject matter experts. This work group is facilitated by All Children Thrive. Its scope will be to advise and recommend changes or new approaches to **reduce exclusion, improve kindergarten transitions, and provide insight into the lived experiences of multilingual children and their families** to inform the governance, systems, and structures of the new IDEC. IWERC and its partners, MLF Work Group, and Afton Partners (Activity 5.1) will work to update the state’s cost model to be inclusive of recommendations for services and supports for multilingual families. This work group will also advise on future structure and funding design to support inclusion of multilingual supports, resource equity, greater efficiencies, and transparency.

Stronger Supports for FFN Providers: We will develop a more comprehensive understanding of how to resource and support quality service and update our cost model for FFN providers. FFN providers are often a first choice for families, since providers are often trusted adults who know and love the children in their care. Additionally, FFN care may fill a void in services available for families working non-traditional hours or families working more than one job. Black and Latino families and those with low incomes are more likely to utilize FFN care, and it is a significant part of the ecosystem for rural communities.

Illinois will use PDG B-5 renewal funding to partner with IAFC and Home Grown, a child care and early childhood advocacy and project facilitator, to convene an FFN work group to better understand how to support, scale, define, and foster quality FFN care. The work group will review research and interventions from around Illinois and the United States; conduct focus groups; administer parent/provider surveys to form recommendations to improve state supports and services; and update the cost model for FFN settings. The work group will consist of FFN parents and providers from representative geographic settings and services (e.g., off-hours, provider home-based, family home-based) and will represent the diversity of lived experience, languages, races, and ethnicities in Illinois, as well as academics, community advocacy groups, and state policymakers. Home Grown will facilitate the FFN work group and Afton Partners will conduct cost modeling for fiscal alignment and implementation.

Social-Emotional Support Work Group: Illinois led the nation in 2017 by passing legislation to curb the high rates of expulsion among infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. We found that five years after the law took effect, children are being “transitioned” to other providers (instead of being expelled), and we still see disproportionately high rates of removals for children of color, children with disabilities, multilingual learners (MLL), and children within the

child welfare system. This leads to increased risk of behavioral issues, decreased school performance outcomes, high levels of family stress, and high rates of teacher turnover.

Much of this is rooted in systemic issues that fail to support ECEC teachers and families. Illinois' ECEC system is complex and split across multiple agencies, so there is not a clear home, approach, or quality improvement support. We have multiple programs advised and directed by different leadership teams. These supports include many high-quality forms of professional development, such as training and Pyramid Model, and assistance, such as Infant Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation, and operate under different funding streams that may limit the types of ECEC programs they support. In addition, they vary in their supply and capacity across the state and are not coordinated in ways that allow programs to quickly and easily access supports tailored to their needs. As a result, some programs are left without any support when they have children struggling with challenging behavior, leading to teachers' use of exclusionary practices. Other programs have difficulty accessing supports best suited to their needs, leading to suboptimal impacts on ECEC quality.

Under our PDG B-5 renewal, we will convene a Social-Emotional Support Work Group to **identify and recommend approaches that promote the mental health and well-being of children, families, and providers and address trauma and adverse childhood experiences.** They will review research and data, conduct a national landscape scan, and examine mental health consultation resources, inclusion supports, and SEL supports and services across our ECEC to develop policy and structural recommendations for the state.

This work group will have approximately 20 members and include parents and providers, in addition to advocates, academics, and coaches/consultants. Through this work, Illinois will be

able to support more providers to use evidence-based and best practices to address trauma, **support children’s mental health needs, and address their own mental health needs.**

Activity 5.3 - Adding to and Aligning with Other State Efforts to Improve Programs

Illinois strongly believes that a better coordinated system of ECEC services will allow the state to more equitably and efficiently serve high-need families. To do this, we will focus on what parents want and need from our system while simultaneously reducing the administrative burden on providers to make it easier for them to connect families with services. Over the past year, Illinois has embarked on a significant effort to authorize and launch a new unified agency to move to a system that is simpler, fairer, and better for families and providers. We deliberately built in a two-year transition so that the state can take the time to integrate, build on, and redesign our policies and programs to better meet the needs of families. Our proposal aligns with significant efforts already underway by the state to prioritize and address the unique needs of children and families that have been least well-served by our system, including multilingual families and families with children with special needs.

Furthermore, the activities and projects in this proposal complement or build on existing efforts to improve programs funded by the Child Care & Development Block Grant (CCDBG), other federal funds, or state funds; a few examples of these are noted throughout this proposal and in Table 4. They are also well-aligned to Illinois’ CCDF state plan.

Table 4: Examples of Other State Efforts to Improve Programs Funded by State or CCDBG Funds

Initiative	Purpose
Smart Start Illinois	A multi-year plan to provide every child with access to preschool, increase funding to child care providers to raise wages and quality, and reach more vulnerable families with early support.
ECACE	Ensuring the success of historically marginalized working adults and is built on the idea that together the consortium can transform systems and increase equitable access to degrees.
Birth to Five Councils	Statewide regional infrastructure of 39 councils that amplify input from communities in the development of policies and funding priorities
Apprenticeship Program Pilot	For early childhood educators where apprentices receive classroom instruction, on-the-job training, mentorship while earning a salary.
TA/PD Supports for the Workforce	Includes new curriculum for child care providers related to trauma-informed care, SEL development, positive behavioral outcomes, and healthy child development.
IECAM	Information about statewide early childhood services along with demographic characteristics of families with young children and census data, with CCR&R, Child Care Advisory Council, and ELC.

Activity 5.4 - Approach to Measuring Results

In general, Illinois will measure the progress and results of these activities in three ways:

(1) Bringing regular updates to our applicable work groups, TAC and inter-agency meetings to review progress, obstacles, lessons learned, and identify mid-course corrections; (2) Working with our ECIDS and data consultants (Section 5.1) to collect and analyze relevant data and disaggregated by priority and target populations and geography; and (3) Working with our program evaluator to implement our evaluation project, and review and provide quality assurance to all data and evaluation products.

Activity 6: Subaward to Enhance Quality and Expand Access to Programs and Services

Illinois is proposing to implement several subgrant activities to pilot wider access and improved quality. Projects were selected with input from over 200 stakeholders. Each proposal aligns with our focus to prioritize families and children least well served by our current system, expands upon previous work, and/or address our needs assessment findings and transition work. We decided not to make additional subgrants, despite a number of exciting proposals, until we

better determine – with families and providers – where we are heading as we transition to one agency and how we are going to get there. We will ensure quality through our continuous improvement cycle of oversight, feedback and support. Explicitly, subgrants will be overseen by the project director and guided by the applicable work groups discussed throughout our proposal (e.g., MLF Work Group, Families with Children with Special Needs Work Group). As noted in our program evaluation, our external evaluator will work project leads to refine the collection of data (inputs, outputs, outcomes, etc.) and support real time cycles of continuous improvement. In total, we have allocated 20.7% of our three-year budget (11.11% in Year 1, 22.67% in Year 2, and 28.28% in Year 3).

Note: Subgrants below have been described in detail in other sections of the proposal.

Table 5: Subgrants To Enhance Quality And Expand Access

Project, Scope of Work, Type of Award A: Test strategies to expand access to existing programs & services B: Pilot new programs C: Improve quality of existing programs	Continuing Activities Post PDG Renewal	Focus and Need
<p>3.2 Home Visiting and Early Intervention Collaboration Pilot</p> <p><i>Type of Award: C</i></p> <p>Bring together EI and HV in Peoria/Tazwell County to collaborate, learn from one another, share resources, and implement cross-program activities; this will improve practice, increase referrals, and lead to program efficiencies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ This project is coming from a community that recognizes a need and will support ongoing collaboration and relationships. ▪ Learnings will inform relevant Work Groups policy recs and will inform cost model and unified funding structure. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Focus on high-need communities and at risk children; -40% of children under five are at or below 200% federal poverty line ▪ Through the grant, providers will increase identification and services and better support parents. This innovative model will set the stage for future state collaborations.
<p>5.2 Identify, Screen, And Support Multilingual Children In Birth To Five Settings</p> <p><i>Type of Award: C</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The work will support the state to develop better methods to identify, and therefore serve, MLLs ▪ Learnings will help inform policies and services to how to best support MLLs. This 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 28 home and center-based programs in urban, rural, suburban settings identified through IECAM as having significant numbers of multilingual families and children (least well served by our system)

<p>Project, Scope of Work, Type of Award</p> <p>A: Test strategies to expand access to existing programs & services B: Pilot new programs C: Improve quality of existing programs</p>	<p>Continuing Activities Post PDG Renewal</p>	<p>Focus and Need</p>
<p>Implementing identification and screening protocols, collecting data, and training teachers.</p>	<p>will inform our cost model and unified funding structure.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Targets programs with multilingual learners, including those from low-income households
<p><i>3.1 Increase the Inclusion of Children With or At Risk of Disabilities in Community-Based Settings</i></p> <p><i>Type of Award: C</i></p> <p>Children in CBOs often either lack access to special education services or must leave their program to access it. This work brings together CBOs and LEAs to collaboratively focus on inclusion in CBOs, expanding access to underserved children and families.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learnings from this pilot will inform cost model and the state’s unified funding approach Sample materials (e.g., MOUs) will be used for future work and scaling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pilot targets children at risk or receiving special education services Collinsville CUSD 10, Peoria County, & Quad Cities are moving from planning to pilot grants Two additional communities (prioritizing rural settings) will be selected to inform ongoing replication and scaling
<p><i>3.1 Universal Newborn Support Services</i></p> <p><i>Type of Award: A</i></p> <p>UNSS’ goal is to create a universally accessible touchpoint for all families in Illinois to receive personalized screening/ assessments and coordinated referrals upon the birth of their child. While supports are for all children, universal implementation will ensure reaching disadvantaged families.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of governance recommendations for the statewide infrastructure Continued state and federal funding of screening services Medicaid and private insurances 	<p>UNSS sites will be selected by the existing advising group and Start Early with a focus on communities with high-need populations and readiness. Sites under consideration include Jo Daviess County: 180 births; Lake County: 6,858 births; Winnebago County: 3,283 births; Sangamon County: 2,063 births; Cook County (excluding Chicago): 25,206 births. Selection includes low income and rural communities.</p>
<p><i>4.1 Benefits Navigators & Implementation Study</i></p> <p><i>Type of Award: A</i></p> <p>Health care benefits navigators will support enrollment in the new SBM. Also, a study to assess implementation and impact. Navigators will work with child care staff in urban, rural, & suburban settings, first in CBOs receiving state funding (e.g., CCAP, state PreK).</p>	<p>Illinois intends to maintain navigators for the state; this work (including the planned evaluation) will inform how IDOI supports navigators going forward</p>	<p>According to a recent study, x % of child care employers offer these benefits.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 52.4% health insurance, 50.5% retirement / pension, 43.4% life insurance 44.9% dental insurance, 39.3% disability insurance. <p>The child care workforce is just under 50% women of color, many in low wage roles. Considering there are 60,479 individuals in the registry working in licensed child care centers in Illinois, this could impact thousands statewide.</p>

Potential obstacles or anticipated barriers: ISBE worked closely with subgrantees in defining scope and expectations as we developed this PDG proposal. In addition, we have worked with most of these entities as prior subgrantees, collaborators on other projects, or alongside in serving children and families in our state. As such, we anticipate very few process barriers to completing our subgranting activities within the three-year project period.

The complexity of the work may present a potential obstacle as we work with West 40 to support inclusion in CBOs (See Activity 3.1) and through the Multilingual Screening and Support project (Activity 5.2). These are projects require significant change to systems and processes. Parent and community buy-in are essential, which is why we are engaging work groups and taking the time for the community input described earlier in the proposal. ISBE will carefully and thoughtfully manage communications with regards to privacy, stigma, and inclusivity of our projects as we work with children with disabilities, language barriers, and other special needs. Finally, some of these projects involve external interdependencies with processes—namely Benefits Navigators (Activity 4.1) and establishing UNSS (Activity 3.1), which could affect the timeline if they are delayed upstream. We will address this with strong project management to keep projects moving forward.

Bonus Options

Bonus Option 1: Increase Workforce Pay and Benefits

Benefits Task Force and Utilization Study: Illinois will establish a Benefits Task Force to explore options for expanding access to benefits for child care workers. Such access varies significantly by type of benefit and worker classification (full-time vs. part-time). A recent study indicated that about 95% of child care providers offer paid vacation days to full-time staff, and about 54% to part-time staff. Fewer offer health insurance, about 55% to full- and 10% to part-

time staff. The ELC Quality and Workforce Committee has been exploring ways to increase access to benefits. The committee realizes that more expertise is needed, and in-depth analyses should be conducted to fully consider the state's options.

Pillars Research + Strategy (Pillars) – a nationally renowned consulting firm that provides strategic planning, research, and analysis support – will support this work. Pillars will facilitate the task force and provide recommendations on health care, retirement, and other benefits that can not only support the workforce's well-being but improve **recruitment and retention of the early childhood workforce**. To support the work of the Benefits Task Force, Pillars will research work of other states and regions, such as Washington State; Washington, DC; and Colorado. Pillars will also conduct a utilization study to analyze the degree to which child care workers and ECEC small businesses are accessing health care insurance and other benefits, such as retirement and short- and long-term disability insurance.

Bonus Option 2: Support Social-Emotional Development and Mental Health

Community Subgrants for Social-Emotional Development and Mental Health:

Illinois will launch subgrants in Year 2 to expand **services to communities that are underserved** by our current patchwork of providers and consultants. To support this effort, we will offer providers and workforce members a continuum of services that **address the SEL and mental health needs of children and the workforce in ECEC settings**. Through the Social-Emotional Support Work Group (Activity 5.2) we will identify the current gaps in services and inform priorities. These three to five subgrants will prioritize communities with limited or no access to services and high need (as defined by the work group), including our rural communities and areas that continue to see high rates of expulsion or suspension. Findings and outcomes of the pilots will be brought back to the Work Group to inform the state's long-term planning.

We will partner with our program evaluator to develop and implement metrics to assess outcomes and learnings. For the mental health community pilots, success metrics will be specific to the target audiences of children or workforce members. In such a short time, we may be able to see outcomes such as workforce members reporting lower levels of stress but are unlikely to see an actual impact on turnover. We may also see outcomes such as workforce members reporting they feel more confident supporting children’s mental health needs or more referrals for services.

General Activity: Strengthen ECEC Systems

As we create the IDEC, Illinois is undertaking innovative work to integrate and redesign our early ECEC system. We are strengthening ECEC to be simpler, better, and fairer for the full diversity of parents and providers across rural, urban, and suburban areas. Illinois’ ECEC programs, services, and systems will transform from a siloed approach to one that is aligned and comprehensive. The proposed scope of PDG B-5 projects explicitly contributes to our state’s mixed delivery system by embracing an expansive mindset; maximizing family engagement and supports (e.g., parent surveys, work groups with parents, and parent stipends to participate); conducting regional infrastructure analysis, addressing workforce compensation, developing needed post-secondary pathways, and improving data. The EC Funding Commission recommended a single ECEC agency and unified funding approach that includes attention to MLLs and children with special needs, which we are proposing to advance through this proposal. Many of the PDG renewal projects learn from and advance our PDG planning grants’ work, including MLL identification, West 40 CIT inclusion model, ChiByDesign engagement work, and work groups. But all the projects build on years of PDG grant and state-funded work to improve Illinois’ ECEC system.

Projects in this proposal also build on current state investments through Smart Start Illinois (a \$350 million initial investment in FY24, with a commitment to increase by \$75 million each year for three years); Birth to Five Councils (\$18 million in FY25); data systems; ECACE Scholarship (\$5 million in FY25); and state investment in IDEC to support such efforts as the Service Design Blueprint, system integration, and technology build out of the Family Portal (\$14 million). These efforts span all ECEC programs and services and will enhance quality of other state and federal investment in our ECEC system (e.g., early childhood block grants, HV, EI, and CCAP). Also, through the co-design of the Service Design Blueprint and Family Portal and our investment in ECIDS, Illinois' proposed work with data consultants and DAI work group (See Activity 5.1) will integrate and redesign an early childhood data information system across programs. This will enable us to then begin to explore links to other services that parents want and need (e.g., nutrition, maternal health).

Importantly, Illinois starts with the belief that parents know best what their children need. As reflected throughout this proposal, Illinois is committed to centering the voice of parents in our efforts and identifying approaches to help them better access ECEC services.

Illinois provides assurance that we have worked closely with the Illinois' Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) lead agency (IDHS) in the development of this funding application. If we are selected for funding, we will continue to collaborate with IDHS (or a future CCDF lead agency) as we implement this award to: (1) Maximize collaboration and data sharing across programs, (2) Ensure that PDG funding is used to inform CCDF planning over the long-term.

Project Timeline and Milestones

Table 6: Project Timeline and Milestones

Task	Responsibility	Milestones/ Evidence of Achievement	Year 1				Year 2				Year 3			
			1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Project implementation and start-up														
Grant team onboarding	ISBE	Grant agreements signed; internal systems aligned to grant activities	x	x										
Hire two staff	ISBE	NA	x	x										
Contracts, IGAs	ISBE	Final agreements signed	x	x										
Data sharing agreements	ISBE	Final agreements signed		x	x									
Quarterly reporting	ISBE, projects	Quarterly reports submitted	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Activity 1: Update comprehensive statewide B-5 needs assessment – complete														
Activity 2: Update comprehensive statewide B-5 strategic plan – complete														
Activity 3: Maximize family participation and engagement in the B-5 system														
Family Portal	CBD	Design of business specification for Family portal	x											
	CBD	Design of business specification for Family portal		x	x	x								
	IDEC	Design technology specification for Family portal					x	x	x	x				
	IDEC	Launch Family portal									x			
Realign and streamline intermediary structures	Wendy McCullough	Develop guiding principles		x										
	TAC, ELC	Conduct engagement		x	x	x								
	Wendy McCullough	Identify dependencies in implementation of recommendations			x									
	Wendy McCullough	Develop proposed implementation timeline					x							
	Wendy McCullough	Share with work groups			x	x								
	Wendy McCullough	Finalize implementation plan for recommendations					x							
Equity Map Update	Afton Partners, IL	Funding Work Group	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
	Afton Partners	Funding equity cost modeling (FFN, Social-Emotional/MH, and MLF)		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x			

Task	Responsibility	Milestones/ Evidence of Achievement	Year 1				Year 2				Year 3			
			1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
	Afton Partners	Initial funding model plan											x	
	Afton Partners, IL, Funding Work Group	Funding model review												x
	Afton Partners, IL, Funding Work Group	Funding model final implementation plan												x
UNSS	Start Early	Documentation and analysis of governance systems in other states	x											
	Start Early, Committee	Recommendations for implementation and governance		x										
	Start Early	Community presentations (town halls)				x	x	x						
	Start Early, IL	Disseminate town hall results							x					
	Start Early	UNSS evaluation consultant contracted & framework complete						x	x					
	Start Early, IDHS	UNSS pilots								x	x	x	x	
	Start Early	Share with work groups		x				x					x	
	Start Early, IDHS, IL	Disseminate pilot results												x
CIT expansion	IAFC	Families with special needs survey			x	x								
	West 40	CITs work in identified communities	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
	West 40	Public awareness and outreach about CITs	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
	West 40	Identify additional CIT communities					x	x						
	West 40	Consensus building in new communities							x	x				
	West 40	New CIT community launch and activities								x	x	x	x	
	West 40	Share with work groups				x			x				x	
Parent Surveys	IAFC	Recruit families, create surveys	x											
	IAFC	Conduct surveys		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
	IAFC	Disseminate individual survey results				x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
	IAFC	Disseminate collective survey results							x				x	
HV + EI Collaboration	Shine Family Services	Surveys, engagement, organize partners	x	x	x									
	Shine Family Services	Engage workforce through COP			x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
	Family Groups	Family Groups				x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

Task	Responsibility	Milestones/ Evidence of Achievement	Year 1				Year 2				Year 3			
			1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Staff training on co-design	CBD	Master class trainings to provider cohort #1					x	x						
	CBD	Master class trainings to provider cohort #2							x	x				
Families With Children With Special Needs Work Group	All Children Thrive	Extended Supporting Children With Special Needs Work Group	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
	IDEC, All Children Thrive	Work group meetings, recommendations, deliverables.	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Activity 4: Support the B-5 workforce														
Training and mentoring to support children with low-incidence disabilities	IDF, ISVI	Develop webinars	x	x										
	IDF, ISVI	Deliver trainings			x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
	IDF, ISVI	Develop train the trainer modules	x											
	IDF, ISVI	Deliver train the trainer modules		x	x		x	x			x	x		
	IDF, ISVI	Share with work groups				x			x			x		
Training to identify and support multilingual learners	IWERC, Meeker, LPF, EC-Reach	Deliver training on current identification tools			x	x		x	x					
	IWERC, Meeker, LPF, EC-Reach	Develop additional models for training (incorporating lessons from validation)					x	x						
	IWERC, Meeker, LPF, EC-Reach	Implement training on identification tools										x	x	
	IWERC, Meeker, LPF, EC-Reach	Share with work groups			x			x				x		
Community of Practice PD Providers	West 40	Recruit for communities of practice (COP)	x				x				x			
	West 40	Annual engagement and learning plan		x				x			x			
	West 40	Convene COPs	x	x	x		x	x	x		x	x	x	
	West 40	Annual review of activities and lessons learned				x			x					x
	West 40	Share with work groups		x				x				x		
Multilingual educator pathway	ECACE, C-BEN	Establish pilot Multilingual Pathways Working Group of the consortium	x	x										
	ECACE, C-BEN	Build bilingual pathway	x	x	x	x	x	x	x					
	ECACE, C-BEN	Pilot test pathways, rolling implementation					x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
	ECACE, C-BEN	Evaluate and adjust pathways						x	x	x	x	x	x	x
	ECACE, C-BEN	Share progress and feedback with consortium and state work groups			x			x			x			x

Task	Responsibility	Milestones/ Evidence of Achievement	Year 1				Year 2				Year 3			
			1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Evaluation of the early childhood apprenticeship program	UIC	Develop evaluation plan and review	x	x										
	UIC’s Research Partner	Develop evaluation protocols		x	x									
	UIC’s Research Partner	Data collection and evaluation	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x			
	UIC	Share with work groups			x			x			x			
	UIC	Final report and recommendations											x	x
Mental Health in Higher Education Working Group	ECACE	Establish MHHE Working Group of the consortium	x	x										
	ECACE	Identify best practices and priorities			x	x								
	ECACE	Recommendations for curriculum modifications, additions			x	x								
	ECACE	Pilot and beta test recommendations			x	x	x	x						
	ECACE	Share with other work groups				x				x				
	ECACE	Final report and recommendations				x			x	x				
Asset mapping	ECACE	Establish Asset Map Working Group of the consortium	x	x										
	ECACE	Collect, analyze, map data; collect resources, develop repository		x	x	x								
	ECACE	Share outcomes and recommendations with consortium, advisories, state work groups			x			x						
ECACE Strategic Planning and Outcomes Work	ECACE /Afton Partners	Strategic plan; guiding principles; work groups, recommendations, infrastructure, reporting		x	x	x								
	ECACE, NIU	Data to demonstrate workforce impact		x	x	x								
	ECACE	Convening to share, make recommendations				x								
State Workforce Work Group	Pillars	Work Group meetings, deliverables, recommendations			x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Activity 5: Support program quality improvement (Advisories, Contractors, Subrecipients)														
Unified Equitable Funding Model	Afton Partners, IDEC (Data consultants)	Funding equity map update		x	x	x								
DAI Work Group.	IDEC, CK Strategies	Engage in data cleaning, data analysis, and TA for ECIDS and work groups	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
	IDEC, CK Strategies	Extend work group	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

Task	Responsibility	Milestones/ Evidence of Achievement	Year 1				Year 2				Year 3			
			1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Multi-language learner identification validation and implementation	IWERC, Meeker, LPF, EC-Reach	Solicit/ review feedback on screening tool	x	x										
	IWERC, Meeker, LPF, EC-Reach	Collect participant data			x	x								
	IWERC, Meeker, LPF, EC-Reach	Collect student data					x	x						
	IWERC, Meeker, LPF, EC-Reach	Analyze student and participant data							x	x				
	IWERC, Meeker, LPF, EC-Reach	Share with work groups			x			x				x		
	IWERC, Meeker, LPF, EC-Reach	Report on identification instrument validity										x	x	
Multilingual Family (MLF) Work Group and cost modeling	IDEC, All Children Thrive	Extended supporting MLF work group; meetings, recommendations and deliverables	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
	All Children Thrive Afton Partners	Disseminate state survey		x										
	IL, All Children Thrive Afton Partners	Analyze survey and report			x	x								
	IL, All Children Thrive Afton Partners	Communication launched					x							
	IL All Children Thrive Afton Partners	Feedback loops				x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
	Afton Partners	Cost model			x	x	x	x						
FFN Work Group and cost modeling	IAFC	Recruit for work group	x	x										
	Afton, IAFC	FFN background report			x									
	Home Grown	Work Group meetings				x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
	Afton, IAFC	FFN data collection				x	x	x						
	Afton	Preliminary FFN cost model						x						
	Afton, Work Group	Final FFN cost model recommendations								x				
Social-Emotional Support Work Group	IDEC, TBD consultant	Recruit for work group	x	x										
	IDEC, TBD consultant	SEL/MHC monthly work group			x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
	Work group	Initial recommendation for continuum of supports				x								

Task	Responsibility	Milestones/ Evidence of Achievement	Year 1				Year 2				Year 3			
			1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Governance structure feedback	IDEC (work group),	Final recommendations for continuum of supports					x							
	Afton, IDEC (work group)	Cost modeling						x	x	x				
	Foresight	Advise groups as required	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
	Foresight	Review assets and recommendations	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x				
	Foresight/ Illinois	Recommendations for an advisory body structure					x	x	x	x				
Bonus 1: Increase workforce pay and benefits														
Healthcare Benefits Navigators	DOI	Incorporate priority in funding RFP					x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
	DOI	Deploy navigators around the state						x	x	x	x	x	x	x
	DOI	Analysis of impact of navigators							x	x	x	x		
Benefits Task Force and utilization study	DOI	Benefits Task Force established	x	x	x	x	x	x	x					
	Pillars	Analysis of ECEC benefits in other states	x	x	x									
	Pillars	Benefits utilization study	x	x										
	Pillars	Benefits report and recommendation							x	x				
Bonus Option 2: Support social-emotional development and mental health														
Pilots to support social-emotional needs and mental health of children and workforce members	ISBE	Make subgrants informed by SE Supports Work Group input					x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
	SE Supports Work Group	Provide additional feedback on continuum of supports based on subgrant analysis and or additional data collected										x		x
Monitoring, evaluation, and data for use in continuous improvement (Contractors, subrecipients, and agency partners: ISBE, UIUC/CREA, project leads, data consultants)														
Project quarterly reporting	Project Leads, Evaluator		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Review/monitor projects (minimum)	Project Leads, Evaluator													
Annual Report	ISBE, Project Leads evaluator					x				x				

Organizational Capacity

ISBE Personnel Experience and Expertise: ISBE is qualified to lead the administration and implementation of the PDG B-5 Renewal Grant. The agency is responsible for administering public education and ECEC programs throughout Illinois, including IDEA Part B Section 619; PFA, home visiting, and center-based birth to 3 programs funded through the ECBG; Title I of ESEA; and the Child and Adult Care Food Program. ISBE awards subgrants to non-federal entities such as LEAs, institutions of higher education, and nonprofits and is well-positioned to implement work needed to achieve the project goals. ISBE has extensive experience managing federal mixed delivery system grants as a lead agency, partner, and fiscal sponsor, including administration and oversight roles in the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) and four prior PDG B-5 grants. For all projects, ISBE has maintained compliance and achieved goals and objectives in collaboration with other state agencies and the Governor’s office (See Oversight of Federal Awards for fiscal management capacity).

The organizational chart in the attachments details the grant oversight structure and the breadth and scope of the ISBE infrastructure, which spans all project functions. The PDG B-5 Renewal Grant will be managed by ISBE’s Early Childhood Department. A portion of ISBE leadership staff time will be dedicated in-kind to the grant, including time from the ISBE EC Director for grant oversight.

Staff qualifications are listed below; ISBE anticipates hiring for two positions: an additional early childhood lead and a data specialist. Qualifications for these staff will be a minimum of a bachelor’s degree and three years of experience in a similar role. Position descriptions will be developed during the planning period and posted upon the award of funds. The hiring process is estimated to take at least 90 days and will consist of the job posting and

recruitment (October 2024), the selection of candidates (January 2025), and the onboarding and training of PDG B-5 grant staff (March 2025). In the interim, current ISBE staff within the Early Childhood Department will directly coordinate and implement the grant activities in alignment with the budget and workplan. The program performance evaluation plan will be developed with the Center for Culturally Responsive Evaluation and Assessment (CREA), which is well qualified to lead project evaluation and continuous improvement efforts. (See Program Performance Evaluation Plan).

ISBE will collaborate with numerous agencies and organizations that will support Activities 3-6 and the bonus activities. Each contractor/consultant has been actively engaged in current and/or previous Illinois PDG B-5 projects or in the ECEC mixed delivery system, where they have gained the requisite experience necessary to successfully implement PDG B-5 tasks.

The project team (including interim staff) are highly qualified to implement the project.

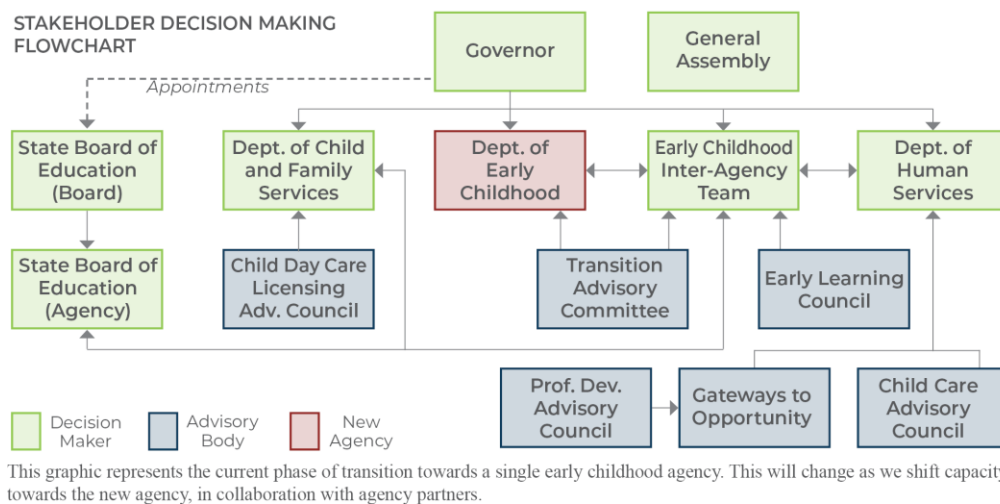
Table 7: Staff Qualifications Table

Incumbent	Role	Qualifications
Carisa Hurley Davis , ISBE Director of Early Childhood	PDG B-5 Project Director; oversees all project implementation and management functions	MA, Education, specialization in ECE; 35 years in center-based and home visiting programs; oversees approximately \$550M in grant funding for EC education; seven years in current role; oversees current PDG Planning grant
Nicole Craft , Early Childhood Lead	PDG B-5 Project Manager; manages all activities	BA and MA, Social Work; MA, Education and Human Development. 20+ years public sector, incl. the field of EC development and mixed service delivery system; manages current PDG Planning grant
Alicia Lynch-Deatherage , EC Budget and Data Supervisor	Fiscal oversight and budget support	MBA; 21 years with ISBE providing fiscal oversight and budget support for grants, including state ECBG and federal Race to the Top-ELC and multiple PDG B-5 grants and task oversight
Norma Moore , Workforce Supervisor	Assist with oversight of PDG B-5 Activity 4 projects	BS, Organizational Management; MA Education, specialization in EC; 20 years in EC and workforce issues
Jason Bednar , Early Childhood Lead	Provide technical assist to contractors and subrecipients; support PDG B-5 monitoring and implementation	EdD and MA, Educational Admin.; MEd, Teaching and Learning, BA English degree in English; 20+ years working in public school roles; three plus years at ISBE, supporting ECBG grantees including CBOs and LEAs

Incumbent	Role	Qualifications
Jennifer Metcalf , Principal Consultant	Assists in oversight of grant, specifically support systems development and Activity 3 projects	BS, Child Development; MA, Education; 14 years in early education, ECCE workforce professional development roles; integrating systems for families and children
Paula White , Principal Consultant	Provide technical assist to early childhood (EC) staff and admins; review documents; primary contact for program admins; assists with issues regarding EC programs; review and recommend grant apps; manage and support PDG B-5 implementation	BA, Psychology; 24 + years EC including overseeing ISBE-funded Prevention Initiative Grant supporting families and children
Taylor Seal , Principal Consultant	Support PDG implementation, department liaison for the ELC	BS, EC Education; nine years in EC education; experience working with grant recipients
Beth Malinis , Principal Consultant	Provide technical assist to EC staff and admins in federal and state grant projects; liaison to project vendors; manage and support PDG B-5 implementation	BS, EC Education; MA Teaching and Leadership; MA Grant Writing, Management and Evaluation; 22 years EC education, as teacher & instructional coach in preschool for All & Head Start programs; experience at ISBE working with grantees, providing TA, monitoring; overseeing work of vendors.
Kristina Doan , Principal Consultant and Illinois 619 Coordinator	Assist in oversight of grant, specifically support for inclusion related projects	BS, Communication Sciences and Disorders; MS, Communication Sciences and Disorders; MEd Educational Administration; 16 years in education
Data Specialist (TBD)	Data coordinator for EC department as it relates to PDG B-5 grant project implementation; monitors EC project budget and amendments; collects, analyzes, and reports project & fiscal data; supports monitoring and evaluation efforts	TBD minimum of a bachelor's degree and three years of experience in a similar role
Early Childhood Lead (TBD)	Oversees and administers federal PDG; maintains strong project management and coordination between projects, across ISBE departments, and with other agencies; represents ISBE in work groups, committees and other meetings	TBD minimum of a bachelor's degree and three years of experience in a similar role

How Decisions are Made in Illinois: As Illinois transitions ECEC program governance from three agencies into one, our decision structure is shifting. The chart that follows provides a graphic of the current state of decision making in Illinois. This chart will evolve significantly over the next two years. The Governor's office is leading initial transition efforts, supported by an inter-agency team of relevant agencies, the TAC, the ELC, and work groups. State agencies,

the transition team, and others meet weekly to coordinate and maintain alignment during the transition. Many of the activities and projects outlined in this proposal will help inform and shape the future governance structures of IDEC and how ECEC services and supports are administered in Illinois.



Unobligated Balance of Any PDG B-5 Award: Illinois has \$890,000 (or 18.3%)

unobligated from the PDG Planning Grant. ISBE is well on track to spend funds on time. Amendments to contracts are in process to address unobligated funding. ISBE PDG Team is working closely with project leads to ensure funds are spent in a timely fashion.

Plan for Oversight of Federal Award Funds and Activities

In addition to the programmatic oversight through the Early Childhood Development Department, the Finance Center at ISBE includes six departments that perform a range of services to identify, procure, and provide fiscal oversight and monitoring for funding that will support the PDG B-5 Planning Grant. The departments are: Funding and Disbursements, Fiscal Support Services, Procurement Services, Budget and Financial Management, State Funding and Forecasting, and School Business Services. The Early Childhood Development Department worked closely with the Departments of Budget and Financial Management, Funding and

Disbursements, Fiscal Support Services, and Procurement Services in its work with previous PDG grants.

The FY25 budget for ISBE is approximately \$17.47 billion. Nearly all of that is for specific grant programs, including \$6.4 billion in appropriation authority for federal grants. The Early Childhood Development Department houses 15 staff who manage grants and reporting activities. The PDG B-5 EC budget and data coordinator within ISBE's Early Childhood Development Department will be responsible for the PDG B-5 fiscal activities. The grant funds will be managed in accordance with federal payment processes. Working together with the project staff, the fiscal department will monitor and analyze the project status monthly.

The partnership between the Early Childhood Development Department and other departments is central to maintaining fidelity with federal grant processes and ensuring funds/revenue is drawn from the federal granting authority based on the amount granted and expenditures by the agency related to a specific grant. (See Organizational Capacity Section for more information on roles and responsibilities of key staff who will be responsible for maintaining oversight of program activities, staff, contractors, consultants, and subrecipients.) Collaboration ensures appropriate use of funds and accuracy of allocation through the quality review process. To this end, all federal financial reports for the PDG B-5 grant will be completed and submitted through the Funding and Disbursements Department, including reports of revenues drawn down and expenditures by the programs. A PDG B-5 program implementation staff and department staff work closely with the PDG B-5 fiscal staff to ensure data are correct and accurately reflect project activities. The oversight of federal awards is governed by fiscal policies and procedures approved by ISBE that comply with 45 CFR part 75, Subpart D.

ISBE uses Management Information Database Accounting System (MIDAS) as its official accounting system. Amounts in MIDAS are reconciled to the Illinois Office of the Comptroller's Statewide Accounting Management System monthly and used for the agency's financial reporting. ISBE also uses the Financial Reimbursement Information System (FRIS) to process state and federal grant or claim-based disbursements to ISBE grantees. All vouchers processed in FRIS are simultaneously processed within MIDAS. Vouchers approved by Funding and Disbursements management are sent to Fiscal Support Services for processing and then to the State Comptroller for payment. ISBE undergoes an annual independent audit, and the results are shared with the state board and posted publicly. The agency has received an unmodified opinion for each of the past 20 years. ISBE also implements procedures to evaluate subcontractors including an eligibility vetting process that includes an assessment of the contractor's financial stability, previous audit findings, and compliance during the term of previous grants as well as current term after the first year of funding.

The Procurement Services Department is a conduit between the Early Childhood Development Department, ISBE Legal Department, and the State Procurement Office to ensure that all federal procurement regulations are followed and that processes are transparent and ethical. Required reporting is compared to invoices to ensure accuracy and the allowability of expenses. Should evidence suggest questions regarding appropriate use of funding, the Federal and State Monitoring Department and ISBE work with the grantee and/or contractor to address any issues related to non-compliance.

Program Performance Evaluation Plan

Center for Culturally Responsive Evaluation and Assessment (CREA) at the University of Illinois Urbana Champaign (UIUC) to evaluate Illinois' project performance, support ongoing

monitoring toward the project’s goal, and contribute to continuous quality improvement. CREA is a resource center, research and evaluation service provider, and international community of scholars and practitioners who promote a culturally responsive stance in all forms of systematic inquiry including evaluation, assessment, policy analysis, applied research, and action research. Dr. Melissa Goodnight of CREA will be the principal investigator and will coordinate with the evaluation leads at ISBE and project leads; oversee implementation of the evaluation; and provide quality assurance for all data and evaluation products.

To evaluate the project and contribute to continuous quality improvement, the evaluation team will employ five broad strategies with ISBE grant leadership and project providers.



In the formative evaluation phase, CREA will support projects to build and refine metrics that align to theories of change. In the SWOT phase, CREA will conduct an analysis of projects’ emerging strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Following that will be an implementation evaluation and finally work to look at outcomes for projects and priority populations. During the mapping to EC systems work, CREA will look at gaps in services and ways findings can inform IDEC and the broader ECEC system. CREA will implement these activities and support the state to measure inputs, activities, and outcomes on the timeline noted below.

Table 8: Performance Evaluation Strategies

Year	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4
1	<i>Performance evaluation preparation:</i> Hiring, reporting/meeting scheduling, document analysis	<i>Performance evaluation design:</i> Protocol creation, institutional review board, literature review	<i>Strategy 1:</i> Formative evaluation and feedback	<i>Strategy 1:</i> Formative evaluation and feedback

Year	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4
2	<i>Strategy 2: SWOT analysis</i>	<i>Strategy 2: SWOT analysis</i>	<i>Strategy 2: SWOT analysis</i>	<i>Strategy 4: Priority population assessment</i>
	<i>Strategy 3: Implementation evaluation</i>	<i>Strategy 3: Implementation evaluation</i>	<i>Strategy 3: Implementation evaluation</i>	
3	<i>Strategy 4: Priority population assessment</i>	<i>Strategy 4: Priority population assessment</i>	<i>Strategy 5: Mapping project connections and ECE system</i>	<i>Strategy 5: Mapping project connections and ECE system</i>

Project progress will be measured through a variety of qualitative and quantitative tools, appropriate for each individual project selected. Throughout the project year, both the evaluator and project leads will provide reports at least quarterly; these reports will be reviewed at least quarterly by the ISBE team and evaluator to assess timeliness of implementation, successes and opportunities, and inputs and outputs/outcomes of the project to date. Project implementation staff and ISBE grant leads will collect project data and compile it for review by the grant team, inter-agency team, transition team, and others. **The insights and feedback collected will inform the improvement of funded activities by allowing ISBE to self-correct when necessary.** Ultimately, the performance evaluation will prioritize the collection of actionable data that substantially contributes to continuous improvement of funded projects.

Data Collection, Management, Storage: ISBE will employ our data collection systems and reporting processes, including the use of primary and secondary data stored in electronic spreadsheets and data systems such as, but not limited to: ILDS, IECAM, INCCRRA, and ECEC workforce datasets. ISBE does not anticipate collecting any personally identifiable information for this project. ISBE is compliant with federal requirements regarding the protection of human subjects, protection of sensitive information, and the confidentiality of information that is identifiable to a person. The agency has policies and procedures for confidentiality protocols, the retention and disposal of data, and disciplinary actions for violations of procedures. Adherence to

confidentiality protocols will be monitored by the staff in the Early Childhood Department at ISBE with support as necessary from the departments of Data Strategies and Analytics and Legal.

In terms of data security for our evaluator, UIUC/CREA will, through the Institutional Research Board (IRB) process, craft protocols to address key aspects of the ethics, safety, and quality of the performance evaluation, including (1) human subjects' privacy and confidentiality, (2) consent processes, and (3) data monitoring and security. UIUC's Office for Protection of Research Subjects provides guidelines for data and safety monitoring. A combined data and safety monitoring plan will be developed if IRB determines to be greater than minimal risk to minimize threats to human subjects' welfare or safety.

Any paper records will be kept in a locked and secure location, and electronic records will be kept on a system that is compliant with UIUC policy and Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and is password protected and behind the UIUC firewall. UIUC personnel with an evaluation role or access or who collect human subjects' data for the performance evaluation will undergo the university's human subjects and research ethics and security training.

Potential Obstacles: Potential obstacles to successful evaluation, continuous improvement, and data management tasks that may emerge include inconsistency in the use of reporting forms and changes in staffing. The challenges will be addressed through the review of reporting forms during Continuous Quality Improvement meetings with ISBE staff and the evaluator and by providing training to all staff that report, manage, or evaluate data on the reporting processes and protocols for the collection and reporting of accurate data. The other potential obstacle is a delay to start depending on the contracting process from federal to state and state to contractor.

Project Sustainability Plan

Approach to sustaining key elements of the project after the period of funding ends:

By streamlining and simplifying our process and systems as we transition to IDEC, Illinois will realize efficiencies in time, capacity, and resources that will help us sustain this work moving forward. Many of our projects, such as ECEC Services Design Blueprint and the development of the Unified Funding Model, are one-time investments and will not need additional funding. *In addition to the continuation plans outlined in Section 6, Illinois plans include the following.*

Table 9: Key Elements of Sustainability (See Activity 6 for Sustainability of Subawards)

Activity	Sustainability Plans	Key Support Roles	Sustainability Funding
3.2 Family Portal	One-time effort	IDEC administration and portal management staff	Continued state and federal funding of administrative duties
3.2 Equitable Funding Model Development	One-time effort	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
3.2 Work Groups and Surveys	Integrate Family Involvement activities into ongoing state-level strategies (B-5 Councils, Start Smart, etc.) and organization structure of IDEC. This will be complemented by the staff training with CBD (3.1)	Policymakers and stakeholders Family buy-in	IL continued commitment to ongoing investment in B-5 Councils and family involvement
4.2 Sensory Disability Mentoring and Training	Integrate professional development activities into ongoing state-level strategies	Policymakers and stakeholders	Continued commitment to ongoing investment
4.2 Community of Practice for Professional Development Providers	Integrate COP activities into ongoing state-level strategies. This will be informed by work group recommendations and intermediary structure recommendations	Policymakers and stakeholders	IL continued commitment to ongoing investment in B-5 workforce
4.3 Multilingual Educator Pathway	One-time effort with recommendations to Consortium institutions to implement and scale	ECACE	Not Applicable
4.3 Evaluation of the Early Childhood Apprenticeship Program	One-time effort	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
4.3 Asset Map	One-time effort	ECACE	Not Applicable
4.4 Mental Health in Higher Ed	One-time effort with recommendations to Consortium institutions to scale	ECACE	Not Applicable

Activity	Sustainability Plans	Key Support Roles	Sustainability Funding
5.1 Streamline Intermediary Structures	One-time effort	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
5.1 ECIDS	One-time effort; ECIDS will be part of IDEC's data and technology infrastructure	IDEC administration, data, and research	Continued state-funding of administrative duties
Bonus Option 1 Workforce Compensation	One-time effort to inform state policy	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Bonus Option 2 MH/SE Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cost modeling to support work ▪ Integration of activity into Equitable Funding Model 	Policymakers and stake holders	Continued state and federal funding of mental health and SE Support initiatives

Maintaining Collaboration and Cooperation with Key Project Partners After

Federal Funding Ends: Execution and sustainability of this work will rely heavily on partnerships and coalitions across the ECEC and other adjacent systems. During and after the renewal period, Illinois will leverage the ELC, Birth to Five Councils, TAC, and state work groups to ensure sustainability in the grant strategies that have been effective in improving practices and outcomes and the incorporation of these practices into any comprehensive restructuring and unification of the ECEC. Representation in the ELC, TAC, work groups, and Task Force includes state agency leadership and personnel, ECEC parents, providers, and educators that represent roles and the diversity of the state, advocacy organizations, higher education, Child Care Resource and Referral agencies (CCR&Rs), intermediaries, and researchers.