

**Program Standards and Alignment Workgroup (PSAW)
Meeting 3**

February 26th, 2026, 4:30 PM - 6:00 PM CST

https://aftonpartners.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_HEb296zeQoCnLXkQ0eedOw

In attendance: 70

Workgroup members: Ariel Chaidez (Start Early), Brynn Seibert (SEIU), Cerathel Burgess Burnett (Department of Family & Support Services), Cindy Agredo (Parent/Caregiver), Donna Emmons (Illinois Head Start Association), Erica Larkin (Parent/Caregiver), Erin Gutierrez (Center-Based Provider, Governors State University), Jill Wardlow (ROE 13 School District), Jon Korfmacher (Chapin Hall), Marilyn Rodriguez (Home Visiting Provider), Julian Lomax (Christopher House), Marla Willard (Child Care Resource & Referral Agency), Miranda Lin (Higher Ed Faculty, Illinois State University), Nicole Van Hise (Child & Family Connections), Rachel Mika (Early Intervention Provider), Sally Peterson (Glencoe Park School District), Theresa Atchley (Illinois Association of Infant Mental Health), Tom Layman (Center for Early Learning Funding Equity)

State Agency Members and Consultants: Maya Portillo (Illinois Department of Early Childhood), Paige Greenwood (Illinois Department of Early Childhood), Aaron Beswick (Illinois Department of Early Childhood), Trish Rooney (Illinois Department of Early Childhood), Siri Smillie (Afton Partners), Beza Bulega (Afton Partners), Kristen Garcia (Afton Partners), Aressa Coley (Afton Partners), Megan Bock (Afton Partners), Crystal Roman (Afton Partners), Kaitlyn McGovern (Afton Partners), Andy Gomm (Afton Partners), Erin Arango-Escalante (All Children Thrive)

Interpreter: Daniel Morel, Cristobal Azpilcueta (Interprenet)

Members of the public (38): Angela Farwig, Lindsay Meeker, Lori Orr, Bri Stormer, Elizabeth Koch, Cindy Berrey, Britt Gordon-McKeon, Jennifer Brown, Lauren Doyle, Michelle Sands, Marianne Bernardoni, Jean Davis, Joanna Su, Jocelynn Thorpe, Dan Harris, Toni Porter, Viviana Deltas, Kayla Goldfarb, Jess Lovera-Matter, Tracy Small, Connie Shugart, Teresa Weed, Aman Kothadia, April Morris, Amy Gipe, Emily D, Katherine Buchanan, Ireta Gasner, Rosario Hernandez, Nicole Craft

Minutes

1. Welcome & Introductions – Maya Portillo, Beza Bulega

Maya Portillo (IDEC) welcomed all workgroup members and members of the public to the meeting. She shared instructions for accessing interpretation and voiced over the meeting norms, encouraging participants to be on video, mute themselves when not speaking, and use the raise hand feature to share verbally. She also encouraged participants to reach out to Crystal Roman (Afton Partners) with any technical issues.

Maya previewed that the meeting would have opportunities for public engagement through Padlet, public comment, and small group discussions. Crystal shared a public comment Padlet for members of the public to use throughout the meeting: [Program Standards Alignment Public Comment](#) (Note: The Padlet boards for this meeting will remain open for comment through Friday, March 13).

Beza Bulega (Afton Partners) shared the meeting goals and agenda:

Meeting goals

- Build community and establish community agreements
- Share revised vision and guiding principles for program standards alignment, and discuss how to apply these to the alignment work
- Share framework for program standards crosswalk and gather feedback on
 - Crosswalk framework
 - Priority categories for Spring 2026 discussions

Agenda

- Welcome
 - Connection question
 - Recap goals, activities and timeline
 - FY 27 Budget update
- Vision and guiding principles
 - Feedback summary and revisions
 - Small group discussion: applying the vision and guiding principles
- Program standards crosswalks
 - Overview of crosswalks framework
 - Small group discussion: deep dives by sector
 - Early Care and Education
 - Home Visiting
 - Early Intervention
- Public comment
- Next steps

As a community builder, Beza asked workgroup members to respond to the following question in the chat: “If you had 25 hours in a day, how would you spend the extra time?”

After reading through some responses, Beza shared the full [membership list](#) for the Program Standards Alignment Workgroup, sharing that workgroup members bring a wide range of expertise and lived experience. She welcomed new members and invited them to say a few words:

- Nicole Van Hise – Child & Family Connections 22; she is excited about three buckets of program standards the workgroup is focused on (early care and education, early

intervention, home visiting) and is excited to have common language, increased coordination, and reduced administrative burden.

- Rachel Mika – Early Intervention provider (physical therapist) in Will and Kendall County; is excited to have the Early Intervention program modernized.
- Sally Peterson – School Social Worker, Children’s Circle Preschool; is curious about the crosswalks and what it would illuminate.
- Brandi Granse (not in attendance) – Director, Head Start and Early Head Start

Beza also shared workgroup “norms” for the group to ground their time together:

- Take Space, Make Space
- All Voices Matter: Encourage and respect diverse perspectives, recognizing the value of different roles and lived experiences. Prioritize parent and provider experience
- Listen to Understand: Approach discussions with curiosity and openness
- Assume Positive Intent: Approach members’ questions, comments & feedback as contributions made in good faith
- Lean into Discomfort: Challenge and discomfort can lead to insight and progress

Review of Goals, Activities, and Timeline

Beza gave an overview of the workgroup’s charge, goals, and intended outcomes. (See [meeting materials](#) or [Spanish meeting materials](#), slides 10 – 11)

The goals of discussion for this meeting included:

- Discuss Vision and Guiding Principles
 - Review updated vision and guiding principles
 - Gather input on a proposed approach for applying the guiding principles to emerging program standards alignment considerations
- Discuss Program Standards Alignment Crosswalk
 - Review approach for mapping program standards
 - Identify topics to prioritize for workgroup discussions between March and June 2026

Fiscal Year 27 Budget Update

Maya Portillo gave an overview of Governor Pritzker’s proposed FY27 budget. FY27 marks the Illinois Department of Early Childhood’s (IDEC) inaugural budget for early childhood programs and services under the new agency. She thanked staff at IDEC, the governor’s office, and legacy agencies for making the budget possible. She noted that FY27 is a “maintenance” budget and does not propose major programmatic changes. Instead, it provides operational infrastructure to merge people, process, and technology to provide more efficient and equitable services over time.

She shared an email address with the group for additional questions related to the budget: dec.budget@illinois.gov

2. Revised Vision and Guiding Principles – Siri Smillie

Siri gave an overview of vision and guiding principles' purpose and context. She emphasized that the vision and guiding principles:

- Reflect workgroup input, 1-1 discovery conversations, the Transition Advisory Committee, and prior engagement feedback. They have been updated to reflect input from the workgroup's January meeting.
- Will remain in "DRAFT" form as we continue to gather and incorporate your feedback as well as input from Family Service Workgroups, Transition Advisory Committee, and other groups.
- Will never be written in stone. We can continue to adapt and strengthen these as we learn more.

She also gave a summary of the feedback the workgroup provided at their last meeting:

- General appreciation for guiding principles speaking to equity and the interconnected early childhood system
- Suggested ways to streamline language and make the guiding principles more approachable
- Ensure language throughout is asset-based, clarifying that the burden is on the state rather than the family or child
- Suggested that "care" should be broadly defined and include the importance of early relationships and identifying needs
- Named the importance of meeting providers and the workforce where they are and supporting movement toward quality
- Suggestions for language tweaks to ensure language is inclusive and representative of all stakeholders (e.g., "linguistically inclusive")

Opportunities to clarify meaning include establishing a shared understanding of Kindergarten readiness allows families, early childhood providers, and schools to work together to support a strong start for children. Feedback also emphasized balancing developmentally appropriate outcomes and individualized learning.

Siri reviewed the updated vision statement and guiding principles for Program Standards Alignment (see slides 17-19 of the [meeting materials](#) or [Spanish meeting materials](#)). Workgroup members and members of the public were given an opportunity to provide feedback, make suggestions, or ask questions about the language included in the vision and guiding principles via Padlet, coming off mute, or using the chat.

- [Workgroup Padlet](#)- Vision and Guiding Principles, Reflection tool
- [Workgroup and Public Padlet \(Spanish\)](#) - Vision and Guiding Principles, Reflection tool

- [Public Padlet](#) – Vision and Guiding Principles, Reflection tool

Workgroup member comments:

- A workgroup member suggested adding language about inclusivity for children with disabilities or developmental delays. She also shared that language can be added in the guiding principles around the importance of keeping children in their “least restrictive environment” for educational inclusivity.
- A workgroup member supported that feedback. He suggested that there are a lot of variation in what families want and need (such as Head Start, 2-generation approach, comprehensive services, child care during nontraditional hours, etc.), and a continuum where families are able to choose between a variety of high quality services among a larger continuum is the type of continuum the workgroup wants to center in their discussions.
- A workgroup member suggested “educationally inclusive?” into the chat.
- Another workgroup member offered: “developmentally inclusive?” in the chat.
- Related to the language in Guiding Principle #3, a workgroup member wondered if developmentally appropriate “progression” should be prioritized before developmentally appropriate “outcomes.” She shared that outcomes would be in the Early Learning Developmental Standards (ELDS) and Early Learning Guidelines (ELGs) but the group should prioritize developmental progressions before outcomes.
- A workgroup member offered that in Guiding Principle #3, “outcomes” refer to outcomes for families as well. Taking a holistic notion of children to include families is central to early intervention and home visiting models and is important to include.

Applying Vision and Guiding Principles – Proposed Approach (small group discussions)

Siri thanked the group for their additional input on the vision and guiding principles for program standards alignment. In the coming months, the workgroup will dive into specific topics to begin deep dive conversations around areas where there are opportunities to strengthen program standards alignment. Siri shared that in this meeting, there would be an opportunity for workgroup members to give input on what those topics may be specific to early care and education, home visiting, and early intervention.

Siri transitioned to sharing a proposed approach and process for operationalizing the guiding principles and ensuring emerging program standards alignment considerations continue to stay grounded in equity through a reflection tool. She shared that deep dive conversations will surface current program standard misalignment and opportunities for improvement. The vision will serve as an anchor to the north star of the early childhood experiences we want for our children and families, and guiding principles serve as an opportunity to check for gaps and unintended consequences of various alignment considerations.

Siri gave an overview of the program standard alignment workgroup’s goal and role. She shared how a reflection tool can center equity, support transparent decision-making, prevent unintentional harm, and strengthen IDEC’s accountability.

Siri described that the intent of a reflection tool is to examine each recommendation through the lens of the workgroup’s guiding principles and consider what recommendations would require of children, families, providers, and systems in practice. She shared the draft reflection questions and workgroup members were divided into small groups to discuss the following questions:

- Do these reflection questions help determine whether an alignment consideration aligns with the workgroup’s guiding principle?
- How can they be improved?
- What other reflection questions should be added to each guiding principle?

(See [meeting materials](#) or [Spanish meeting materials](#), slides 21-27 for additional context and the draft reflection questions.)

Members of the public were able to join a public breakout room and provide input via Padlet:

- [Public Padlet](#) – Vision and Guiding Principles, Reflection tool
- [Workgroup and Public Padlet \(Spanish\)](#) - Vision and Guiding Principles, Reflection tool

Once workgroup members came back into full groups, facilitators provided a brief recap of their conversations:

- Group 1 (Guiding Principles 1, 2, and 3): There was broad agreement that the reflection questions were helpful to center equity. They emphasized that discussions should consistently begin with children’s needs and made suggestions to assess whether alignment builds on existing community strengths.
- Group 2 (Guiding Principles 2, 3, and 4): Discussed the importance of striking a balance between families, children, *and* providers across all reflection questions. They also made recommendations to balance growth and development and add “parental education” and “individualized supports” throughout.
- Group 3 (Guiding Principles 4, 5, and 6): Emphasized that reflection questions should be as clear as possible and wondered how supports for family child care providers can be explicitly stated. They had trouble with the language “those the state has the hardest time serving” to describe historically underserved communities.
- Group 4 (Guiding Principles 6, 7, and 1): Made requests to simplify the language in guiding principles 6-7 and emphasized the importance of focusing on one concept per sentence. They wondered what is meant by “supports” and to suggested adding language around “professional well-being” to guiding principle 5.
- Group 5 (public attendees; Guiding Principles 4, 5, and 6): Shared that reflection questions are important to understand whether additional unintended consequences may

occur despite the intent of the recommendations. They gave the example that some children are unintentionally excluded when families in poverty do not meet work requirements.

Workgroup members were invited to share additional input via Padlet:

- [Workgroup Padlet](#)- Vision and Guiding Principles, Reflection tool
- [Workgroup and Public Padlet \(Spanish\)](#) - Vision and Guiding Principles, Reflection tool

3. Program Standards Crosswalks – Beza Bulega

Beza thanked the group for their thoughtful discussion on the reflection tool. During this section, Beza shared the approach and process for mapping and developing a crosswalk of the various program standards and requirements for the programs and services transitioning to IDEC. She also shared a proposed approach for conducting an alignment analysis and how the workgroup would use this information to engage in deep dive conversations in the coming months. She gave a high-level overview of the process, and workgroup members and members of the public had time to break out into early childhood sectors (early care and education, home visiting, early intervention) to discuss the following:

- When you think about aligning birth-to-five program standards and expectations that support a continuum of quality, which topics come to mind as most essential for us to discuss first?
- What key tensions, challenges, or opportunities could the workgroup surface to inform alignment considerations for the topics you mentioned?

Workgroup members and members of the public were also invited to share input via Padlet: <https://padlet.com/croman65/spanish-2-26-psaw-aplicar-la-visi-n-y-los-principios-rectore-w9hj8wuek8ws46h2>

- [Public Padlet](#) - Crosswalk
- [Workgroup Padlet](#) – Crosswalk
- [Workgroup and Public Padlet \(Spanish\)](#) – Crosswalk

Once workgroup members came back into full groups, facilitators provided a brief recap of their conversations by sector:

- Early care and education (Groups 1 & 2): These groups emphasized that aligning program standards should reduce duplicative monitoring requirements, center program purpose and family needs, and create a more coherent birth-to-five system rather than fragmented silos. Workgroup members shared their experiences meeting various funding requirements and juggling multiple monitoring visits at once. They also stressed that flexibility in allowances and alignment across monitoring visits is important to help providers meet standards and focus on the purpose of the standards. Rather than aligning to the most “restrictive

standard,” the workgroup suggested aligning to the “highest standard” to ensure compliance with all other standards and to reduce administrative burden for both providers and monitors, as is done in Chicago. Some of the categories mentioned as potential priorities included: staffing, quality improvement, program management, eligibility, monitoring, and reporting.

- Home visiting (Group 3): Workgroup members elevated the importance of ensuring that program model flexibility and tailoring to community need. This is a key aspect of HV in the current state and should remain possible within aligned program standards. Some of the categories mentioned as potential priority topics included: program purpose, program management and quality improvement, service delivery, education and child development, funding, and program curriculum.
4. Early intervention (Group 5): Workgroup members discussed topics including credentialing and staffing qualifications and topics that intersect with other early childhood sectors such as service coordination, efficient coordination with school services, and Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) development. Some ideas elevated through the conversation included better coordination of IFSP development timeline, strengthening communication, alignment with HV and ECE services/providers, and ability to align consent forms and consent process shared across services

5. Public Comment, Next Steps & Adjournment – Siri Smillie

Siri gave a brief overview of the timeline of workgroup activities through June 2026. She gave members of the public an opportunity to provide public comment by raising their hand via Zoom.

- One member of the public, Teresa Weed, had a question about key challenges and opportunities in defining Kindergarten readiness.

After public comment, all participants were given a feedback form for additional considerations for the work ahead. The next meeting is on Thursday, March 26th from 4:30-6pm CT.

Appendix A: Padlet Comments

Public comment Padlet

- Where did the emphasis on impact over inputs go? I thought that was important.
- How about "equitable and inclusive of all learners (language, culture, disability, etc.)"
- Have we defined "standards" - that may be called different things across EC programs e.g. policies and procedures, rules, statutes, regulations, policy memos
- Please change reference to "hard to serve" to "priority populations."

Discussion: Apply the Vision and Guiding Principles

Workgroup members

- Please share any additional feedback on the vision and guiding principles
 - Wondering if Principle #4 can be re-worded to be family centered. A couple of ideas: Ensure inclusion of all children and families, particularly those with the most unmet needs. Or Ensure inclusion of all children and families, particularly those who are underserved.
 - Wondering if #3 could be re-worded. This may help differentiate that outcomes are focused on the child and family versus program outcomes.: Prioritize (optimal) developmental progress (or growth) and child and family outcomes.
- Do these reflection questions help determine whether an alignment consideration aligns with our guiding principle?
 - For Guiding Principle #6-- add a question that speaks to ensuring quality expectations are attainable and workforce is supported in reaching them-- "Are standards attainable for incumbent workforce with appropriate/available supports?"
 - #7: Advance equity through equitable design and process centered on those the state has the hardest time serving. Seem duplicative with equity and equitable. Recommend wordsmithing

Members of the public

- Please share any additional feedback on the vision and guiding principles
 - Where did the emphasis on impact over mandating specific inputs go? I thought that was important.
 - To the wonderful points Donna E. raised, we need to specifically call out how program standards will ensure high-quality inclusive services that ensure children with disabilities can be supported across a range of settings in the least restrictive environment
 - On the vision of the guiding principles there absolutely must be a notation to value what children and families bring to the table, including home languages. We know that seems niche, but when it is smashed in with all other "categories" it often gets lost as a need and should be an asset with services and supports for English Language Development as a need also being specifically called out.
 - Most of the early childhood programs, including center based and home visiting programs utilize a 2 generational approach to support children and families. Along with standards around children, there are standards around family/parent outcomes that should be represented in these guiding principles.
- Do these reflection questions help determine whether an alignment consideration aligns with our guiding principle?
 - For Guiding Principle #6 I have been working with Latino Policy Forum and IWERC to look at PD/Coaching/Support over time and we have a lot of feedback from center directors on how that learning was made accessible. A mix of modules, webinar, in-person, train-the-trainer and coaching/technical assistance on site with

virtual trouble shooting using a common set of training materials has been successful for most and we are now offering Spring coaching and can share how that goes.

- It is essential that program standards explicitly call out inclusive EL/Bilingual and Special Education services and that we nurture our experts/build capacity in our community care and education, including family providers instead of only relying on our LEAs, we need to nurture relationships across professionals. Head Start has been inclusive long before inclusion was cool and now it's time to provide equitable resources that are available to LEAS.

Discussion: Deep Dives by Sector

Workgroup members

- Early Care & Education
 - I worry that the role of Family Support Specialist in centers have diminished. They have the valuable role of connecting families to the classroom and bringing the classroom to the home to support that parents as their child's most important teacher. As of late, the role is being diluted, and they tend to be used as floaters, substitutes, receptionist or kitchen duty. How do we support and lift up this valuable role?

Members of the public

- Early Care & Education
 - While it might be the most simple item to consider, things like ratios and group size carry significant cost impacts.
 - How do we align standards in many of these areas while resisting the tendency to make them identical? Making requirements identical may seem simpler, but there are often tensions and tradeoffs there, particularly around imposing standards that are not necessary for all providers to meet yet add additional burdens. Can we instead establish a continuum of standards in these areas that work cohesively together?
 - One other way to approach this is rooted in the cross model from some years ago - thinking of a continuum of programs from comprehensive full day, to less comprehensive and more part day and thinking aspirationally; about what standards we think are appropriate for each? And then think about how current standards intersect with that vision? Are we really exploring current state here and trying to align or are we envisioning program models and standards we aspire to? (also I have shared with IDEC staff a few older crosswalks and other docs - presumably you have them. even though we've not done a great comprehensive one.

- We know that children are often cross identified and when we do mapping, we need to make sure we are not eliminating one service by providing another. The articulation between children with disabilities and multilingual learners needs to be upfront to ensure we don't under/over identify. Also, multilingual learners cannot focus on preschool only, language starts prenatal - feel free to ask about tools being developed with Latino Policy Forum and IWERC that help identify birth to 3.
- To ensure alignment and quality, we should examine the current professional development and coaching efforts across Head Start, STAR NET, ECPL, Early Intervention, and related programs. By identifying shared priorities, areas requiring specialized support, and existing strengths, we can leverage the expertise already within our system to create a more collaborative and inclusive service model. Currently, funding silos can create barriers to serving children and families across the early childhood landscape. Reducing these barriers would allow us to better center cultural and community wealth, build on what is already working, and eliminate unnecessary duplication of effort.
- Kinder needs to be child and family ready - articulation across the two spaces will be essential especially with grade level band changes recently in ISBE.
- Home visiting
 - There are a good number of existing recommendations that have been developed over the years when we were trying to align across DHS and ISBE - but would inform this effort well