

**Program Standards and Alignment Workgroup (PSAW)
Meeting 2**

January 29th, 2025, 4:30 PM - 6:00 PM CST

https://aftonpartners.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_DCCFTJhMSy-tOykvpKQUHg

In attendance: 53

Workgroup members: Ariel Chaidez (Start Early), Brynn Seibert (SEIU), Cindy Agredo (Parent), Donna Emmons (Illinois Head Start Association), Erica Larkin (Parent), Erin Gutierrez (Child Care Provider - Governors State University), Jill Wardlow (Child Care Provider – ROE 13 school district), Representative Joyce Mason (Legislator – House of Representatives), Julian Lomax (ECE teacher - Christopher House), Marla Willard (CCR&R - West Central Child Care Connections), Miranda Lin (Illinois State University), Pat Chamberlain (Advocacy), Theresa Atchley (Illinois Association of Infant Mental Health and Birth to Five), Tom Layman (Center for Early Learning Funding Equity)

State Agency Members and Consultants: Ann Whalen (IDEC), Maya Portillo (IDEC), Paige Greenwood (IDEC), Rachel Oppenheimer (IDEC), Siri Smillie (Afton Partners), Beza Bulega (Afton Partners), Kristen Garcia (Afton Partners), Aressa Coley (Afton Partners), Megan Bock (Afton Partners), Crystal Roman (Afton Partners), Erin Arango-Escalante (All Children Thrive)

Interpreter: German Barrios (Interprenet)

Members of the public (28): Rowan Atwood, Laura Beavers, Marianne Bernadoni, Cindy Berrey, Jennifer Brown, Katherine Buchanan, Lori Carroll, Susan Connor, Nicole Craft, Julissa Cruz, Lori Davie, Sarah Doyle, Catherine Enright, Britt Gordon-McKeon, Sandra Hall, Robin Hayes, GERALYN Johnson, Tammy, Johnson, Tammy King, Aman Kothadia, Cathy Mannen, Laurel Mateyka, Erika Mendez, Lori Orr, Beata Skorusa, Tracy Small, Bob Spatz, Bri Stormer, Joanna Su, Teresa Weed, Karen Yarbrough

Minutes

1. Welcome & Introductions – Maya Portillo, Siri Smillie

Maya Portillo (IDEC) greeted the room and welcomed all members to the meeting. She also went over meeting expectations and norms. She shared instructions for accessing interpretation and encouraged participants to be on video, mute themselves when not speaking, and to use the raise hand feature to share verbally. She encouraged people to reach out to Crystal Roman (Afton Partners) with any technical issues. Maya also welcomed public participants and previewed that the meeting will have space for public comment and public engagement in small group discussions.

Siri Smillie (Afton Partners) shared the meeting goals and agenda:

Meeting goals

- Build community and establish community agreements
- Review program standards workstream and workgroup charge and timeline
- Share key takeaways from 1-1 conversations
- Discuss proposed vision and draft guiding principles for program standards alignment

Agenda

- Welcome
- What we are learning
 - Emerging themes from 1:1 conversations and other engagement
 - Full group discussion
- Draft vision and guiding principles
 - Small group discussion
 - Full group share-out
- Public comment
- Next steps

Siri invited all workgroup members to share what their favorite winter activities are in the chat as the community builder.

Siri shared the workgroup norms that were discussed at the first meeting and asked if any workgroup members had anything to add to the workgroup norms. None did.

Review of goals, activities, and timeline

As a reminder, Siri gave the workgroup an overview of the Program Standards Alignment Workstream goal and key activities, timeline and phases of this workstream, and the role of the workgroup. For a full list of the workgroup's goals, key activities, timeline, and phases, please see Meeting 1 or Meeting 2 presentation slides located on the [IDEC website](#).

No workgroup members had questions about their role.

2. What we are learning – Beza Bulega

Beza Bulega (Afton Partners) provided an overview of key learnings from program standards discovery conversations. The purposes of these conversations were to:

- Build knowledge of early childhood program standards
- Understand from the interviewee's perspective how program standards impact children, families and providers
- Inform the vision and guiding principles for the program standards alignment workstream
- Surface alignment considerations
- Inform priorities for engagement with the workgroup

Beza shared that today's conversation will include a summary of key learnings from the discovery conversations and preview sector-specific takeaways from programs transitioning to IDEC, including family and provider experiences and current structure of programs and program standards.

There were a total of 27 conversations completed with a wide range of stakeholders, covering representatives from all programs and services transitioning to IDEC. A high-level summary of the discovery findings for early care and education, Home Visiting, and Early Intervention is below. For the full presentation, please visit the [IDEC website](#).

Early Care and Education

- Families are eager for comprehensive early childhood services. However, families do not consistently or equally find these services.
- Children and families benefit from programs meeting higher quality standards; however, the shortage of qualified staff, lack of funding, and professional support are barriers to engaging in quality.
- Providers report that current standards around class sizes and ratios are not responsive to higher levels of challenging behaviors and increased needs for more trauma-informed care.
- Children and families benefit from early screening to get appropriate services and stronger transition support.
- Providers who receive multiple funding streams navigate incompatible data systems and compliance and monitoring processes that are inconsistent across funding streams.
- Some providers indicated interest in meeting higher standards, and believe higher standard programs support kindergarten readiness.

Home Visiting

- IDHS-funded home visiting and ISBE-funded Prevention Initiative (PI) home visiting programs share a similar mission, but they differ in requirements and approach (e.g. model selection).
- Differences across the ISBE and IDHS eligibility and tracking systems impact access to home visiting services for families.
- There are opportunities to streamline the monitoring, compliance, and data reporting expectations under the new agency.

Early Intervention

- The foundation for Early Intervention standards is federal civil rights law, which sets non-negotiable standards, including federally required child outcomes.
- Early Intervention practices are family-centered, functional, and embedded in everyday environments.

- Referral, intake, and data processes are complex and not aligned across all early childhood programs, causing confusion, burden, and inconsistency for families.
- Transitions from Early Intervention (EI) to Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) are complex, relationship-driven, and highly variable across districts.

Discovery interviews indicated that implementation of Illinois Early Learning Guidelines for Children Birth to Age Three (IELG 0-3) and Illinois Early Learning Development Standards (IELDS) is not consistent across early childhood programs and services, there are varying degrees of awareness and varying degrees of alignment of programs to IELG and IELDS. Beza offered some considerations for future use based on the discovery interviews.

After the overview of findings, workgroup members were asked:

- What resonates?
- What is missing?
- What stands out as key alignment considerations?

Workgroup members

- A workgroup member commented that Head Start and Home Visiting services are also family-centered, functional, and embedded in everyday environments, not only Early Intervention.
- Another workgroup member agreed with this comment. Head Start and Home Visiting are two generational approaches to supporting families and children. The workgroup member is also thinking about the value and importance of family choice, voice, and where there are opportunities to give some program choice, as well.
 - Beza shared that the PSAW team will be sure to include these points in future iterations and written documents.
- A workgroup member shared that when we talk about screening, it doesn't specify screening for language background. That needs to be broken out explicitly. Language screening impacts how you do developmental screening.
- A workgroup member said that they couldn't tell from the description of the conversations if workers in classrooms in centers and family child care providers were part of the interviews. They wanted to uplift the importance of workforce experience, including classrooms and family child care, are centered in this. They also added that one thing to dig into is what are the barriers and challenges programs are experiencing in reaching standards, and what can be done to address those. They wonder if with family child care participation and Head Start/Early Head Start there are particular things to be done to help providers access those programs. It would be interesting to dig deeper into why those barriers are there and what can be done to address those.
 - Beza affirmed that when this work goes into deeper conversations on alignment, it would help to get into the experience of program standards by provider type. She

shared that through future workgroup engagement, there will be opportunities to bring in those nuanced understandings of provider experience and unique challenges/barriers to deepen this discussion.

- A workgroup member shared one thing that stood out in the early childhood education and care arena was the different compliance areas and multiple systems. They appreciate the size of early childhood education and care. The quote shared during this section in particular about the different systems stood out.

Members of the public

- A question in the chat asked for more context about the quote related to the criminal justice system: "I am mindful that EI serves all types of families. From different languages, different needs, such as those in the criminal justice system, etc. There is not one-size-fits-all approach to these programs. But it is important to dream big and get us to a place that is easier to use for families."
 - Beza shared that this quote is meant to portray the different lived experiences families have. Program standards, particularly for Early Intervention, should not include a one-size-fits-all approach given these unique experiences.

Members of the public were also offered the opportunity to respond to the discussion questions via Padlet. *Padlet comments can be found in Appendix A*

English - <https://padlet.com/croman65/1-29-public-padlet-reflections-gwpjaw6sdmrbciw5>

Spanish - <https://padlet.com/croman65/1-29-padlet-p-blico-reflexiones-upf7ys65247y14fk>

3. Draft Vision and Guiding Principles – Siri Smillie (Afton Partners)

Siri presented a set of draft vision and guiding principles to the group. A vision is an aspirational statement describing the desired future state. Guiding principles represent a shared set of commitments and values that will guide discussions and recommendations. She shared that these drafts are based on the workgroup's first meeting, 1-1 discovery conversations, the Transition Advisory Committee, and prior engagement feedback. They will remain in draft form as the workgroup continues to provide feedback as well as input from Family Service Workgroups and the Transition Advisory Committee. They will also continue to be adapted and iterated as the workgroup continues to learn.

Draft vision statement

The Illinois Department of Early Childhood (IDEC) envisions an early childhood system that offers children and families a continuum of equitable, high-quality support, education, and care from prenatal to age five. This continuum ensures seamless, coordinated, and comprehensive services that support developmentally appropriate outcomes, lead to successful transitions across all early childhood programs, and fosters Kindergarten readiness.

The program standards and associated expectations, measures, and milestones that guide programs and services under IDEC are:

- Equitable and culturally inclusive, reflecting the strengths and needs of diverse communities.
- Informed by input from families, providers, workforce members, and community partners, who share responsibility for continuous quality improvement and outcomes for children.
- Grounded in research-based best practices as a foundation, alongside families' aspirations for their child's growth, learning, and well-being.
- Supportive of the workforce, enabling early childhood professionals to effectively deliver high-quality education and care programs and services.

Draft guiding principles

1. Center the child and family's experience and perspective. Program standards and expectations must support the whole child—their education, care, and relationships with families, caregivers and other service providers.
2. Recognize the interconnected systems shaping early development. Children and families navigate multiple programs and supports in their first five years. A cohesive, aligned continuum of services ensures equitable access to the opportunities children need for positive and developmentally appropriate outcomes and successful transitions across all early childhood programs, including towards Kindergarten readiness.
3. Prioritize outcomes and impact over inputs. Ground expectations for program standards in the desired outcomes and impact for children and families, with flexibility to address the unique strengths and needs of each child, family, and community.
4. Facilitate providers' ability to meet the needs of all children and families, particularly those farthest from opportunity, including multilingual learners, children with disabilities and developmental delays, families who are unhoused, and children who are or have been involved in the child welfare system.
5. Where possible, streamline and align reporting to minimize administrative burden while maintaining clear expectations for accountability. Demonstrating compliance with standards should not be a barrier to providing high quality programs and services.
6. Pair quality expectations with support for providers. Providers must be supported by responsive and intentional mechanisms that enable early childhood professionals to deliver high-quality early childhood services in partnership with families.
7. Advance equitable outcomes through equitable design and process centered on those farthest from opportunities. All children, families and early childhood professionals — regardless of geography, race or ethnicity, ability, socioeconomic status, language, or documentation status—deserve the same opportunities for success. Any process to inform

system design must engage those most affected by inequities and share decision-making power with families, providers, and communities.

Workgroup members then went into small groups to discuss the following:

- Vision: *What resonates or is missing when you look at the proposed vision? What needs to change for you to feel good about the draft vision?*
- Guiding principles: *What resonates or is missing when you look at the proposed guiding principles? What needs to change for you to feel good about the draft guiding principles?*

Large group share-out

Workgroup Members

- Group 1: This group discussed what it would look like to emphasize the wellness component for both families and providers and adding language that speaks to the social-emotional development components of programs, particularly Early Intervention. They debated the language around kindergarten readiness – they want to ensure that outcomes language does not mean a one-size-fits-all approach and discussed how “kindergarten readiness” is defined. They uplifted the importance of individualized supports for students who may not be kindergarten ready and how to use that support to teach parents the importance of developmental benchmarks. They also recommended adding “workforce compensation” to the 6th guiding principle and add an 8th guiding principle that speaks to workforce considerations and mindful implementation of program standards.
- Group 2 also spent time talking about kindergarten readiness language and how that interacts with developmental outcomes. There were suggestions to add language about striving for “optimal developmental outcomes” and a note about the importance of early nurturing relationships and its connections to successful outcomes and optimal developmental progress. Workgroup members suggested that “developmentally appropriate outcomes” should account for progression over time, rather than a “snapshot” suggesting that adding language that speaks to developmental progression and outcomes could address this. The group suggested adding “immigration status” to the 4th guiding principle, along with “supporting disabilities and developmental delays.
- Group 3 appreciated the point about workforce in the vision and guiding principles as home visitors are often isolated. For the guiding principles, they flagged that the order of guiding principles may signal level of importance. They appreciated that the first guiding principle focused on centering children and families. They also had a question about how to frame kindergarten readiness for the 2nd guiding principle. One workgroup member who is familiar with other workgroups noted some similarities in guiding principles across workstreams.

Members of the Public

- Members of the public liked the language in the vision about an “equitable, seamless, coordinated system.” For the 2nd guiding principle, they liked the mention of the interconnectedness of the early childhood system. There were also a lot of conversations about acknowledging the lift for the workforce to implement standards. They stressed the importance of meeting providers where they are to support continuous quality improvement across sectors.

Members of the public were also given the opportunity to join a breakout room for discussion or respond to the discussion questions via Padlet. *Padlet comments can be found in Appendix A.*

English – <https://padlet.com/croman65/1-29-public-padlet-vision-guiding-principles-68muctxkue0dp0k>

Spanish - <https://padlet.com/croman65/1-29-visi-n-y-principios-rectores-6jq3yx6ld7tgudlo>

4. Public Comment, Next Steps & Adjournment

Siri opened the meeting for any public comment:

- None

Siri encouraged workgroup members and public attendees to share any feedback or additional insights on the meeting survey. The next meeting is scheduled for February 26th from 4:30-6 pm.

Appendix A: Padlet Comments

Program Standards Discovery Findings Overview

What resonates?

- I’m surprised by how few center-based providers are represented on this workgroup. If the goal is to elevate provider voices, there should be greater representation from providers and parents, rather than primarily advocates.
- Simplified, streamlined access points across home visiting and early intervention with a transition to school (Preschool or Kindergarten) based on parent voice and need.
- As a provider who moved to a CCR&R role 4 years ago, but who still works 2-3 Saturdays/month at the ELEC worksite, trying to balance the many standards was challenging. For example, the physical environment was designed around DCFS space standards, but I was trying to include the materials to meet the highest accreditation and ExceleRate standards. Often, classrooms end up being overwhelming (for providers and children) due to the sheer number of toys and materials in the space. There are also different documentation expectations and not adequate time to complete them without feeling overwhelmed and burnt out.

- Regarding the Head Start program, it depends on the daycare centers providing that service.

What is missing?

- Consider safety, protections, and family voice when considering language.
- There is not enough education/training for ECEC providers to understand how to connect IELG/IELDS to children's experiences; especially for FCC who are working with multi-age groups. There needs to be introductory and higher-level trainings that guide providers through creating DAP lesson plans, especially ones that incorporate the IELG/IELDS
- In the meeting, an ECEC program was highlighted because they decreased classroom enrollment to meet the needs of children (15 instead of 20) and noted the loss of income incurred. Another loss of income could be correlated to the requirements related to funding stream. If the program applies for SSWG, the % of CCAP is tied to the number of children the classroom/setting is licensed for, not necessarily what is in the best interest of children (or providers)

What stands out as key alignment considerations?

- Alignment of target population, eligibility and reporting systems
 - There is no one-size-fits-all solution. Every family wants and needs different things.
- Holistic intake systems that reduce repetitive processes and documentation. This goes for provider, program, and agency systems as well... Often, the required data is the same or similar, but the processes and documentation are siloed. As a provider I experienced this with INCCRRA when I would send documentation for Great Start Wage Supplement, Credential, and Gateways to Opportunity Scholarship. The foundational documentation was the same, and I would send everything in one envelope... I would pay for certified mail to guarantee receipt, as individual departments would state that documentation wasn't received, but it was because they didn't collaborate with the other INCCRRA programs (+2)

Draft Vision and Guiding Principles

- None