

Program Standards Alignment Workgroup

Meeting #2

Thursday, January 29, 2026

4:30 pm – 6:00 pm



Interpretation instructions// Instrucciones de interpretación

How to access interpretation:

- Click on the globe icon labeled "Interpretation" at the bottom of your Zoom window.
- Select your preferred language from the list.
- If you only want to hear the interpreter, you can also click "Mute Original Audio."

Cómo acceder a la interpretación:

- Haga clic en el ícono del globo etiquetado como "Interpretación" en la parte inferior de su ventana de Zoom.
- Seleccione su idioma preferido de la lista.
- Si solo desea escuchar al intérprete, también puede hacer clic en "Silenciar audio original."

Meeting Expectations & Notes

For Workgroup Members:

- **Please be on video** as much as possible
- **Mute self** when not speaking
- Use **chat feature** or **“raise hand” button** for questions or comments
- Technical issues can happen to anyone – **chat Crystal Roman privately for any needs**
- If you are experiencing an unstable connection - **switch to phone call or close other applications**

For Public Participants:

- Attendees can provide input through Padlet, public comment (last five minutes of meeting), and will have the opportunity to engage in small group discussion

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**
 - Connection question
 - Recap goals, activities and timeline
- **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**

Welcome

Share in the chat...

What is your favorite winter activity?



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

Alberto Roman – Parent/caregiver	Jon Kormacher – Chapin Hall
Ariel Chaidez – Sr. Program Manager, Parents As Teachers State Leader (Start Early)	Rep. Joyce Mason – Illinois House of Representatives
Bridgett Vance – ECE provider – family child care	Julian Lomax -- ECE teacher (Christopher House)
Brynn Seibert – SEIU	Madison Wekony – Parent/caregiver
Cerathel Burgess Burnett – City of Chicago/DFSS	Marilyn Rodriguez – Home Visiting provider (Glenbard Parents As Teachers /CASE Du Page)
Cindy Agredo – Parent/caregiver	Marla Willard – CCR&R (West Central Child Care Connections)
Dara Cohen – ECE Provider (Family Focus)	Miranda Lin – Higher ed faculty (Illinois State University)
Donna Emmons – IL Head Start Association	Pat Chamberlain - Consultant
Erica Larkin – Parent/caregiver	Theresa Atchley – IL Association of Infant Mental Health and Birth to Five
Erin Soto – ECE Provider – center (Gov State University)	Tom Layman – CELFE
Jill Wardlow – ECE Provider – school district (ROE 13)	<i>Some additional invites still in process, including an Early Intervention provider</i>

Workgroup Norms

- **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

Is there anything else we should add to these norms?

Program Standards Alignment Workgroup

Review of Goals, Activities, and Timeline



Program Standard Alignment Workstream | Proposed goal and activities

Goal: To develop **recommendations for aligning birth-to-five program standards and expectations** for programs transitioning to the Illinois Department of Early Childhood (IDEC), with a vision of a *continuum of quality* that supports all children's development and *successful transition to kindergarten*.

Activities include:

- 1) **Informing a vision for standards based on what children and families want and need** from high-quality early childhood services, **and what providers need** to deliver on those wants and needs.
- 2) **Reviewing current program standards and requirements** for programs transitioning to IDEC, and the extent to which there is alignment, discrepancies, and/or gaps in standards and requirements across similar services (i.e., within early care and education, within home visiting, within early intervention).
- 3) Identifying opportunities to **articulate a common set of developmentally appropriate best practices** that are research-based, culturally inclusive, and support seamless experiences for children and families across services.
- 4) Identifying opportunities to **remove undue administrative burden, redundancies, or barriers** for families to access high-quality programs, and for providers to engage in high-quality standards.

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

DISCOVERY AND FACT FINDING (OCT – NOV 2025)

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

MAP CURRENT STANDARDS (NOV – JAN 2026)

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

**We are
here!**

ENGAGE WORKGROUP (DEC – JUNE 2026)

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

Role of the Program Standards Alignment Workgroup



Provide context and background on the current state to inform **program standards crosswalk**



Inform **vision and guiding principles**

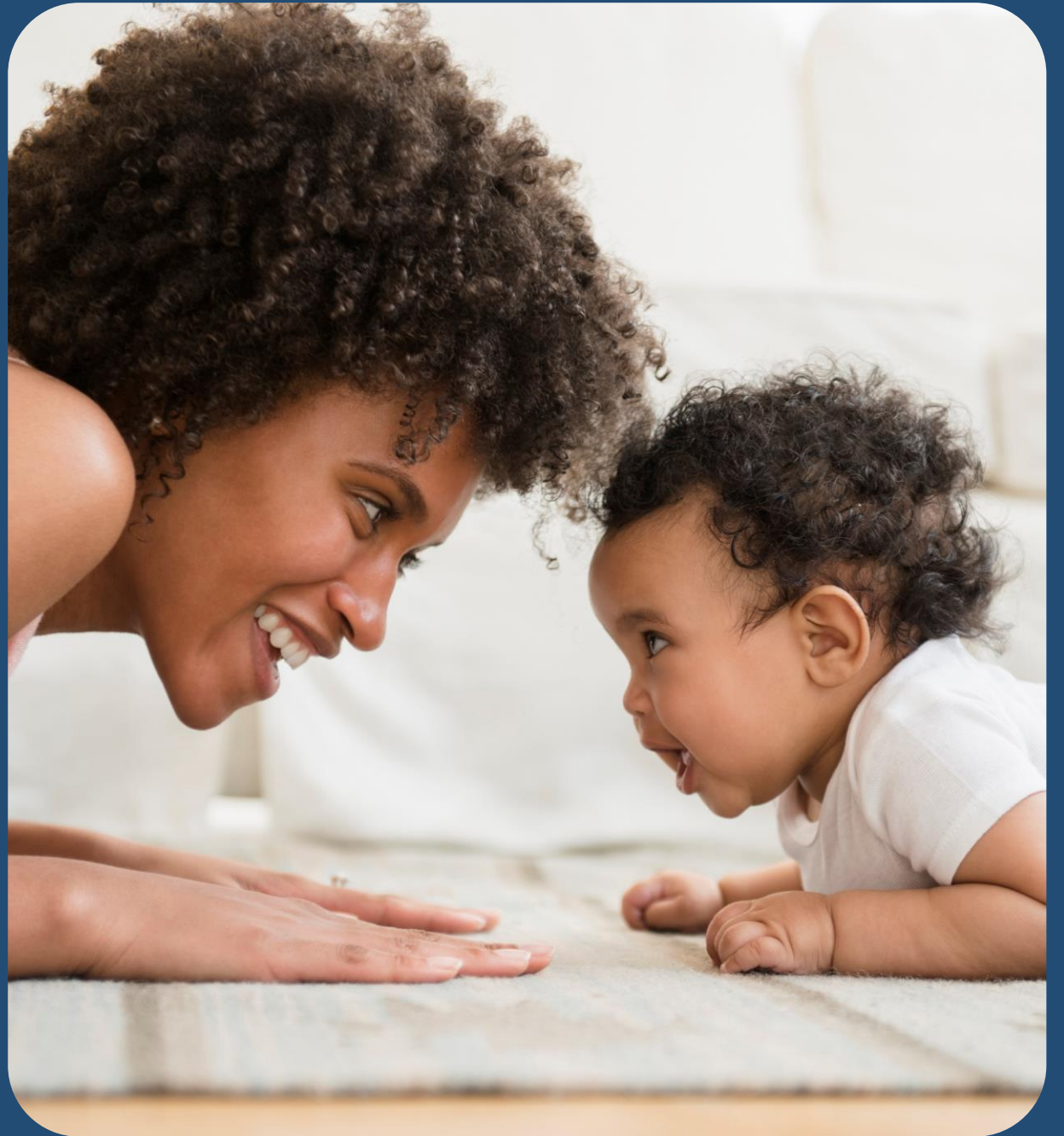


Provide feedback to develop **recommendations for standards alignment**



Identify potential **risks** and **mitigation strategies**

Program Standards Discovery Conversations: Initial Findings



Purpose of program standards discovery conversations

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



Today we will:

- Share a summary of what we learned from a series of discovery conversations, e.g., sector-specific takeaways for programs transitioning to IDEC, including:
 - Family and provider experience
 - Current structure of programs and program standards
- Get your reaction and feedback (what resonates, what's missing, what stands out to you as key alignment considerations?)

We completed 27 conversations with a wide range of stakeholders, covering representatives from all programs and services transitioning to IDEC

1-1 conversations represented all programs and services transitioning to IDEC

- **Early care and education programs** (e.g., Child Care Assistant Program (CCAP), ExceleRate, Prevention Initiative Center-Based, Preschool for All/Expansion)
- **Early Intervention**
- **Home Visiting**, including Prevention Initiative Home Visiting, Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) Home Visiting, and Maternal Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV)
- Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) Services

1-1 conversations included a wide range of stakeholders

- **State agency staff**, from IDHS and ISBE
- **Quality systems alignment, training, and technical assistance**, and advocacy (INCCRRA, CELFE, Early Childhood Professional Learning, Start Early, and Illinois Head Start Association, Higher Ed)
- **Intermediaries**: Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&Rs), and Regional Office of Education (ROEs)
- **Providers**, including center-based, district-based programs early care and education, and home visiting providers
- **Family Service workgroup facilitators** from All Children Thrive

This process will review program standards in early care and education, home visiting, and Early Intervention. These include:

Early Care and Education

- Licensing standards
- Child Care Assistance Program standards
- Early Childhood Block Grant: Administrative rule; Preschool For All/ Preschool for All Expansion and Prevention Initiative compliance checklist
- ExceleRate Standards
- Head Start Program Performance Standards
- National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) & National Association of Family Child Care (NAFCC) accreditation standard
- Federal (e.g., Child Care Development Fund plans)

Home Visiting

- Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) administrative rules & Prevention Initiative Compliance checklist
- Illinois Department of Human Services requirements (*not in rule*)
- Federal guidelines for federally funded programs (Maternal Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV))

Early Intervention

- Federal standards: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part C
- State laws, rules and guidelines

IECMH expectations are incorporated across ECE, HV and EI in various ways.



Summary of 1-1 outtakes for early care and education services (Part 1)



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.

"There is only one child care program in my area that has PFA. Inevitably, you are going to have children with special needs in that program. But the support level is minimal. The child attends the ½ day PFA program, but their special needs support services are in the school district. It's tricky for families when you live in another district and don't have the transportation to get them to their services, and they need full day child care. There are no wraparound supports – nothing."
- ROE

Summary of 1-1 outtakes for early care and education services (Part 2)



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.**

“I have to report to a DCFS rep for licensing, ISBE for PFA, NAEYC for my accreditation status, ExceleRate Gold status, and qualifications for teachers that is under CQIPs. *Plus* Smart Start is monthly – and even though that is run by and reported through INCCRRA, none of that data transfers into their ExceleRate information. Smart Start Quality Supports and Great Start staff reporting is all separate... It's not the standards themselves that are the issues, it is the way you have to prove them – this is different for every system.”
-- Provider

Summary of 1-1 outtakes for home visiting services



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.

"What is home visiting's role in a more robust prenatal-3 system? This is an opportunity to think about the outcomes of home visiting and how it functions in the entire system with its unique touchpoints."
- Advocacy

Summary of 1-1 outtakes for Early Intervention services



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**

"I am mindful that EI serves all types of families. From different languages, different needs, 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."
- State agency

Illinois Early Learning Guidelines for Children Birth to Age Three (IELG 0-3) and the Illinois Early Learning Development Standards for Three to Five (IELDS 3-5) - Current Use

Implementation of IELG and IELDS is not consistent across EC programs and services, there are varying degrees of awareness and varying degrees of alignment of programs to IELG/IELDS.

- **Widely used** in ECBG-funded programs for both PFA/E and PI for **lesson planning and aligning curriculum.**
- Providers and intermediaries who use the IELG/IELDS noted the **importance of having a document that articulates appropriate developmental milestones and best practices.**
- **Organizations that provide PD** and quality supports (e.g., STARTNET, CCR&Rs, ROEs) **use the IELG/IELDS and reference them regularly to train staff in ECBG programs.**
- **Some child care providers receive training** on the use of IELG and IELDS through the Illinois Trainers Network, **available as part of ExceleRate.**

Illinois Early Learning Guidelines for Children Birth to Age Three (IELG 0-3) and the Illinois Early Learning Development Standards for Three to Five (IELDS 3-5)- Considerations for future use

- **Most interviewees regard these documents as essential**, and stated the importance of having an official state early learning standards that articulate research-based developmentally appropriate practices all programs can anchor to.
- Consensus that these **documents were developed with a thorough process**, including provider and field experts, but not inclusive of all stakeholders (e.g., families).
- **Strong consensus that they should be reviewed** and revised to incorporate current research, provide more examples that fit our current understanding of what families need, seamless articulation of child development from 0-5, and be applicable to all EC program and services.

"By their nature, learning standards should be applicable regardless of setting. It's about the child and the family. If done appropriately, they should be applicable across settings."
– Higher Ed



Discussion questions

- What resonates?
- What are we missing?
- What stands out to you as key alignment considerations?

Draft Vision and Guiding Principles



Vision and guiding principles' purpose and context

The following DRAFT vision and guiding principles:

- Are based on the **Workgroup's** first meeting, **1-1 discovery conversations**, the **Transition Advisory Committee**, and **prior engagement feedback**.
- Will **remain in "DRAFT" form** as we continue to gather and incorporate your feedback as well as input from Family Service Workgroups and the Transition Advisory Council.
- **Will never be written in stone.** We can continue to adapt and strengthen these as we learn more.

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.

Draft Vision Statement for Program Standards Alignment

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 for Program Standards Alignment

- 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.

Draft Guiding Principles for Program Standards Alignment Cont.

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.

Note: These guiding principles are intended to evolve over time.

Small group discussion



1. **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?
2. **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?

Public Comment, Closing and Next Steps



Public Comment

To join the line to provide public comment, please raise your hand via Zoom.





Next Steps

- **Share your feedback:**
<https://forms.gle/jHV1jSTmXe7DGMFh8>
- **Next meeting**
 - Thursday, February 26, 4:30 – 6:00 PM



 @idec_illinois

 @IllinoisDepartmentofEarlyChildhood

 @Illinois Department of Early Childhood

