

Meeting Minutes

May 27, 2025 12:00-1:00 p.m.

Link: <https://illinois.webex.com/illinois/j.php?MTID=mf34625de9a5e83515ba42dadeb896a62>

Meeting ID: 2866 191 5080

Password: rMkYHyi8T23

Phone: 312-535-8110 (IL) or 415-655-0002 (US)

Agenda:

- Welcome & Introductions
- Process Overview
- Previewing the Next 6 Months
- Workgroup Name
- Public Comment
- Next Steps

Workgroup Participants:

Johnna Darragh-Ernst

Kesha Harris

Yesenia Perez

Benny Delgado

Theenshina Mayfield

LaKeesha Smith

Kristy Doan

Talibah Moore

Welcome & Introductions

Erin Arango-Escalante (meeting facilitator) welcomed everyone to the meeting and provided the agenda for the day, which included a process overview, previewing the next 6 months, the workgroup name, and time for public comment. Erin also reminded everyone of the community agreements developed by the workgroup members. Participants shared some personal/family activities they have been involved in recently with one another.

Process Overview

Ann Whalen shared about "a historic moment and opportunity" of the transition to the new IL Department of Early Childhood (IDEC). She previewed that we will be talking more about the next 6 months to get to a blueprint and strategic plan, but first, she wanted to share more about the entire vision and connected groups. She acknowledged that efforts to improve the system in the past have been siloed and fragmented, jumped to the "how" before understanding the "what," and/or had limited engagement, leaving out those who were least served by the system. This created vulnerabilities and risks, and led to unaligned or misaligned policies and services, continuing structural inequities in service or supports (e.g., geographic inequities, barriers for new providers), missed opportunities for innovation, solutions designed for those who were already receiving access, or using the same approaches to address any and all challenges. Ann welcomed ongoing feedback on whether or not we are doing a good job avoiding these traps.

Ann shared that IDEC is planning to mitigate these risks. Some have been engaged to look across all the different workgroups to ensure we connect dots and align the direction of all. As we bring programs and policies together into one agency, we don't have to think only by program or funding stream and we might be able to pull multiple levers at once. We are making sure we are inclusive in our process and iterate across multiple different interested parties, including those who have not been served well by the system.

IDEC is developing a strategic plan to redesign its service delivery, starting with families' wants and needs. Through this process, it will leverage multiple ways of gathering feedback to define the current state, including identifying the pain points in family services. We have the family service work groups, focused discussions, surveys and interviews, co-designed workshops, and listening sessions.

At the same time, Ann talked about focusing on where we want to go in the future state, asking What do families want and need? What do providers need to deliver to families? IDEC will continue to do this through all those same types of engagements.

Once the current and future states are filled, it will be important to define how do we get from the current state to the vision, asking what infrastructure is needed to make the vision

possible? The support work groups are/will be deeply engaged in this. Across all of this we have the TAC.

Finally, a multi-step process will lead to a strategic plan. In other words, the strategic plan will offer a scaffolded and prioritized road map or approach to moving from the current state to the future state. It will encompass agency operations, data infrastructures, technology modernizations, licensing reform, funding alignment, and more. Ann would appreciate feedback on how to represent this effort visually.

Ann emphasized that there will be sharing and iteration across workgroups, as we first communicated last fall.

A workgroup member asked for clarification of how many workgroups are involved. Ann showed a slide and discussed their purposes.

Another member brought up "enablers" to clarify the meaning of the term--defining them as factors that facilitate being able to come up with and implement new ways to meet the needs of families. Ann agreed with this definition and added that often we focus on one enabler at a time, like the budget or a legislative rule. We need to think about all, including implications for communications, technology, our staff's responsiveness, etc. Again, there are multiple "hows" to help us to achieve the "what," so we want to broadly examine before jumping too quickly to solutions.

Ann asked this workgroup to keep asking questions about the process and holding all of us accountable to our shared goals and the commitments that have been made. Members were encouraged to speak up if at any time they feel that the process is not living up to the plan. For example, Ann shared that IDEC is continuing to improve communications so they are now developing with a new external newsletter. Ann reiterated her appreciation for when people ask questions and push to make sure we aren't missing anything.

Previewing the Next 6 Months

Ann introduced the 0 to 3 Design Sprint, which we have discussed before. Its purpose is to be sure we are clear on the current state of pain points in family services. She acknowledged that we have gathered previous reports, resources, and feedback of those challenges with the system and connections to early childhood special education and asked for continual support in determining whose voices are missing, that haven't yet been captured. Additional data will be gathered, including doing a deep dive into two regional communities furthest from access to understand their inequities and challenges. The Deep Dive community cohorts will look at communities with high percentages of persistent service delays, families waiting for services who are black and brown, families involved with DCFS, enrolled in Medicaid, under poverty, receiving a greater share of services virtually, etc.

Ann clarified that the Deep Dive Community Cohorts will be part of the 0 to 3 Design Sprint. Other engagements will also happen. Ann agreed and emphasized that information gathered will go deep in these communities and broad across the state as a whole.

IDEC is also doing a data discovery to determine what information is collected, and for what purpose. IDEC will then look at the current state of our technology to determine what it's doing/not doing and find opportunities to improve.

Through all of this, the future state will be defined and refined, and integrated with our future business requirements for technology and data collection that is meaningful and actionable. Then the Strategic Plan will bring everything together to map the path to look across the levers and enablers like legislation, funding design, communication, process and system efficiencies, and technology. Ann emphasized that this will all move quickly this year to have recommendations by the fall.

A member asked about the sources of data used to select the deep dive community cohorts. Ann described the process of looking across multiple sources and investigating gaps.

A member asked about the 0 to 3 sprint, regarding children with special needs. The member wondered if the special needs analysis would come from the same service areas. Ann pointed out that we want to make sure a service area analysis isn't focused on one funding stream (e.g., Early Intervention). It will be important to hear about all services families receive from the state, because they're all interconnected. So yes, Ann anticipated that the work will overlap a lot with this workgroup for this reason.

Another member restated that the workgroup is being asked to look at work from the family perspective, from the lens of children with disabilities, to provide insight from parents and users of the system on the current way that children and families are receiving services, not just in Early Intervention, but through all early childhood programs. They continued to restate that the workgroup will provide input on the way that currently happens, and then, to think about in the future, what might it look like in an ideal state, to dream and innovate, not be limited by boundaries and restrictions? In addition, the workgroup will look at access and participation in these different regions where it might be a little more challenging, to really uncover those inequities. All of that information is going to feed back to the other workgroups that will identify how to address it. In our programs we also have partners and intermediaries, so the other workgroups will identify the how based on our definition of 'the what.'

Ann agreed with that restatement but also asked for the workgroup's support in identifying whose voice is still missing from this process (e.g., superintendents), and once 'the hows' are being developed, we will bring those to this group to ask for your feedback on whether or not those approaches will address the issues. The workgroup member responded that maybe unhoused or pediatricians might be important voices to include.

Another member asked for a timeline for when all the planned groups will be up and running. Ann shared that some are launching now or soon. Other than that, they are working through the procurement process and that IDEC is working hard to get them all going.

Public Comments

Have you spoken to all the Birth to Five Illinois Regions? They have been talking and gathering family voices for a few years, all in their own communities.

As someone who has worked in the ECEC field for over 25 years, I can tell you that families that need to be heard and have such a hard time with the current system are the families experiencing homelessness, fleeing domestic violence situations, and multilingual families that also may be fearful of being deported. Consider Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Parents who are trying to have a roof over their children's heads and food in their bellies are not able to typically join these types of workgroups, but their voices need to be heard. They are struggling with so much and getting their children the services they need should not be another struggle for them.

Padlet Comments available at links below:

From workgroup members- <https://padlet.com/erin674/ChildrenwithSpecialNeeds>

From members of the public-

<https://padlet.com/erin674/ChildrenwithSpecialNeedsPublicComment>

Workgroup Name

The workgroup was given opportunities to vote using “first to five”. Result: workgroup name changed to Supporting Children with Disabilities and Developmental Delays.

Next Steps

- Future meetings: Tuesdays, noon-1pm (6/24, 7/22, 8/19, 9/23, 10/28, 11/18, 12/16)
- Erin will send a follow-up email asking some very specific questions to give you the chance to think about these questions and respond.