



Supporting Children with Disabilities & Developmental Delays

April 14, 2026





How to access interpretation:

1. Click on the globe icon labeled "Interpretation" at the bottom of your Webex window.
2. Select your preferred language from the list.
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Cómo acceder a la interpretación :

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Community Agreements



Stay engaged



Speak your truth in a safe



Take space, make space



Allow time for interpretation



Experience discomfort- and name it



Show empathy



Expect and accept lack of closure



Come prepared to actively participate in meetings



Avoid the use of acronyms



Be flexible

Goals and Agenda

Today's Goals

- ✓ Learn about the work of the Program Standards Alignment Workgroup
- ✓ Give feedback on the Program Standards draft values and guiding principles
- ✓ Share about the experiences and needs of children with disabilities and developmental delays

Agenda

Welcome	5 min
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Updates on the Draft Family Engagement Framework Policy and Practice Guidance	15 min
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Overview & Discussion of Program Standards	55 min
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Public Comment	10 min
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Next Steps & Close	5 min
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Workgroup Engagement

Workgroup Members

<https://bit.ly/4epcNp6>



Members of the Public

<https://bit.ly/4htrqdH>





Family Engagement Framework Update

A *draft* framework outlining the vision, principles, and structures for engaging parents and caregivers as partners in Illinois' early childhood system.



Guiding Principle



Policy
Guidance



Practice
Guidance



Family
Engagement
Framework
Structure

Draft Family Engagement Guiding Principles



1

Center parent/caregiver voice by **respecting and honoring their lived experience and expertise** in early childhood.

2

Staff and facilitators are trained in equity and cultural humility principles to engage with parents/caregivers across Illinois to build stronger relationships and establish mutual trust.

3

Embed parent/caregivers into programmatic **leadership and governance** processes to ensure they are at decision making tables.

4

When engaging families across Illinois, resources and communications are family friendly, use positive and understandable language, and are accessible in multiple languages.

5

Implement equitable strategies to continuously improve by **centering family voice and strengthening feedback loops**.

6

Design programs and cultivate community partnerships that are informed by the needs of children and families.

7

Provide **compensation for parent/caregivers'** participation, feedback, and contribution to IDEC workstreams and beyond as available.

Revisions to Family Engagement Framework

From

- Participation
- One-time training
- Translation and interpretation
- Outreach
- Input
- Including parents
- Compensation
- Undefined
- Isolated family engagement
- Use of jargon and acronyms



To

- Leadership
- Cultural humility
- Different ways to communicate
- Trust and relationship-driven engagement
- Transparency
- Shared decision-making
- Flexible and family-friendly compensation
- Shared definition of family engagement
- Connected ecosystem
- Family-friendly language
- Overall accountability

Program Standards Alignment Overview

Tuesday, April 14, 2026



Program Standards Alignment Overview



Today we will cover:

- ✓ **What** are program standards?
- ✓ **How** are program standards used?
- ✓ **Which** program standards do Illinois early childhood programs and services use?
- ✓ **What is the role** of the Program Standards Alignment Workgroup?

We will ask for your input on:

- ✓ A **draft vision and guiding principles** for program standards
- ✓ Sharing how program standards have impacted you and your family

How are we defining Program Standards?

Program Standards serve as the foundation for program quality, safety, and accountability and focus on what programs must do to support children's development.

Providers must meet various standards and requirements in order to...

1. **Operate Legally** (e.g., child care licensing standards)
2. **Receive Public Funding** (e.g., State Pre-K, Child Care Assistance Program, Home Visiting, Head Start)
3. **Participate in Quality Systems** (e.g., ExceleRate Illinois, National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and National Association of Family Child Care (NAFCC) accreditation)

State developmental standards provide research -based guidance on how children grow and develop, and how adults can support that development. These include:

- **Illinois Early Learning Guidelines (IELGs)** – for children birth to age 3
- **Illinois Early Learning and Development Standards (IELDS)** – for children ages 3 to 5
- **WIDA Early Years Standards** – which focus on language development for children who are multilingual learners

Examples of program standards: Early care and education

Example 1

Program : Early Head Start / Head Start

Category : Supporting Children with Disabilities and Developmental Delays

Standard:

Head Start programs must ensure that children with disabilities, including those with developmental delays, are identified, referred for evaluation, and provided services in collaboration with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). With the key expectations outlined around

1. Identification and screening
2. Referral and evaluation
3. Collaboration with IDEA
4. Services
5. Family engagement
6. Ongoing monitoring and coordination

Example 2

Program : Preschool For All/ Expansion (PFA/PFAE)

Category : Program requirements - curriculum

Standard:

PFA and PFAE programs are required to use an evidence -based curriculum aligned with the Illinois Early Learning and Development Standards (IELDS), which guide planning, instruction, and assessment.

Program standards vary across Early Care and Education, Home Visiting, and Early Intervention.

Early Care and Education

Child Care Licensing	Child Care Assistance Program (State and Federal requirements)	ExceleRate Illinois	Preschool for All/Expansion and Prevention Initiative Center Based	Head Start, Early Head Start, and Migrant Seasonal	License Exempt (FFN, Non-traditional programs)
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Home Visiting

Early Childhood Block Grant – Prevention Initiative Home Visiting (ECBG – PI HV)	Illinois Department of Human Services – Home Visiting (IDHS-HV)	Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV)	Maternal Child Home Visiting (MCHV)	Head Start/Early Head Start Home Visiting
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Early Intervention

Federal Requirements: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part C	Illinois Approach (state law, guidance, and administrative rule)
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This table includes examples of program standards that apply to each early childhood sector.

How do **families** experience the impact of inconsistent standards and expectations?

Current Challenges and Inequities

- Some families have a hard time finding services that are inclusive, supporting, welcoming, safe and culturally responsive

Family Voice from Transition Engagement

“We talk about equity, but the process itself creates inequity, especially for families who don’t speak English or who are navigating disability services for the first time.” - Supporting Multilingual Learners Workgroup

- Providers are not always able to fully meet children’s and families’ needs

*“The system shouldn’t work only for those who can afford to leave the workforce and give care full time.”
– Supporting Children with Disabilities and Developmental Delays Workgroup*

- Multilingual families and families with children with disabilities face the most barriers

“We had a physical therapist, but she moved to another state so we no longer have her, but she was Colombian. And I did notice that she clicked more with my son and achieved more, because she was speaking in his language... I feel like it made him much more cooperative with therapy.” - Transition stakeholder engagement

What are providers experiencing with current programs and program standards ?

Current Challenges and Inequities

- Multiple sets of administrative rules with different staff qualification requirement

Provider Voice from Transition Engagement

Providers noted the difficulties of keeping up with multiple standards across various federal and state guidelines and stressed the importance of aligning these at the state level, as well as providing adequate resources for providers to meet the program requirements

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- Many different monitoring visits throughout the year

Providers noted that monitoring experiences feel punitive. This is especially challenging for providers who have multiple monitoring visits in a year with different assessors who may each have different expectations .

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- Current standards can be interpreted many different ways

Providers expressed the desire for a simpler, easier -to-understand language for rules and requirements

Program Standard Alignment Workgroup Overview

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* .

Workgroup role:



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

Alignment is the intentional coordination of program standards to ensure expectations across programs are clear, without requiring programs to be identical.

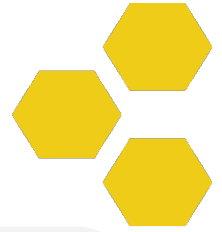
What Alignment *Is*

- Supporting **smooth transitions** for children and families
- Making it **easier for providers to operate** across funding streams

What Alignment Is *Not*

- Eliminating **program -specific strengths**
- Forcing all programs to **operate the same way**

This work is informed by deep stakeholder engagement, research, landscape analysis and workgroup engagement



Stakeholder Input

- Transition engagement data, including input from Family Service Workgroups
- 1-1 engagement with stakeholders
- Cross -agency engagement

Research and Examples

- Current child development research
- Current research on developmentally appropriate practices
- National frameworks (e.g., Head Start, NAEYC, NAFCC)
- Other state examples

Workgroup

A representative group that will:

- provide context and background on the current state,
- inform guiding principles,
- identify potential risks and
- provide directional feedback and recommendation inputs

Ongoing engagement with other workgroups and Transition Advisory Committee (TAC)

Timeline of workgroup activities through June 2026

Dec. 2025 – March 2026	April – June 2026
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Launched the workgroup✓ Developed a working draft of a vision and guiding principles for program standards alignment✓ Reviewed the current state of program standards across early childhood programs and family and provider experience✓ Identified topics to prioritize for Spring 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Begin to discuss priority topics, with a deep dive into one topic each month✓ Discuss:<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Current program standard misalignments✓ Impact of misalignment on providers, children, and families✓ Opportunities for aligning program standards✓ Reflect on emerging program standard alignment considerations for priority topics✓ Gather input to inform next steps for this work

After June 2026

- IDEC will identify any additional need for deep-dive discussion and will explore opportunities for turning alignment consideration into proposed program standard changes
- Continue analysis and discussion of program standards topics that were not prioritized in this round

**Program
Standards
Alignment Vision
and Guiding
Principles**



Vision and guiding principles' purpose and context

The following DRAFT vision and guiding principles:

- **Reflects workgroup input** , 1-1 discovery conversations, the Transition Advisory Committee, and prior engagement feedback .
- **Will remain in “DRAFT” form** as we continue to gather and incorporate 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.

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 provides 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 cultivate **learning** and foster **Kindergarten readiness**.

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

- **Equitable, culturally, linguistically, and developmentally inclusive**, reflecting the strengths and needs of diverse communities.
- **Informed by families, providers, workforce members, and community partners**, who share responsibility for continuous quality improvement and individualized 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

Illinois' program standards for early childhood programs and services will:

- 1. Center the child and family's experience and perspective.** Program standards and expectations must support the whole child —their education, care, health and well-being – and foster nurturing relationships with families, caregivers and service providers.
- 2. Strengthen coordination across interconnected early childhood systems.** Children and families navigate multiple programs and services from prenatal through age five. A cohesive continuum ensures equitable access, nurturing relationships, developmental progression, and smooth transitions across programs and into Kindergarten.
- 3. Prioritize developmentally appropriate progression and outcomes.** Ground expectations for program standards in the desired outcomes and impact for children and families, with flexibility to address the unique strengths and individualized needs of each child, family, and community.
- 4. Ensure inclusion and increase access of all children and families, particularly those who are least well served by our system.** Program standards must support providers in meeting the needs of all children and families to achieve individual outcomes that cannot be predicted or determined by race, ethnicity, culture, language, gender, religion, orientation, geography, ability, immigration status, housing status, socioeconomic status, or any other protected class or circumstance*.

Draft Guiding Principles for Program Standards Alignment, cont.

5. **Streamline reporting and reduce administrative burden for families and providers.** Where possible, program standards should streamline reporting to reduce administrative burden while maintaining clear expectations for accountability. Compliance processes should not create barriers to providing or accessing 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 a continuum of high -quality early childhood services in partnership with families.
7. **Advance equity through design and process centered on those who are least well served by our system.** All children, families, and early childhood professionals —regardless of race, ethnicity, culture, language, gender, religion, orientation, geography, ability, immigration status, housing status, socioeconomic status, or any other protected class or circumstance —deserve access to opportunities for success. Any process to inform system design must meaningfully engage those most affected by inequities and share decision -making power with families, providers, and communities.

Process Note: IDEC understands that future phases of this work will need to include discussions on operational considerations and connections with other workstreams

Discussion



1. Vision:

- a) What **resonates** or is **missing** when you look at the proposed **vision** ?
- b) What **needs to change** for you to feel good about the draft vision?

2. Guiding principles:

- a) What **resonates** or is **missing** when you look at the proposed **guiding principles** ?
- b) What **needs to change** for you to feel good about the draft guiding principles?

Public Comment



Next Steps



- Continue incorporating your feedback on the Family Engagement Framework and Program Standards drafts
- Next Family Service Workgroup Meetings:
 - Supporting Multilingual Learners – Tuesday, May 5 from 12-1:30 PM
 - Supporting Children with Disabilities and Developmental Delays – Tuesday, May 12 from 12-1:30 PM



Closing

- **Next Program Standards Alignment Workgroup meeting**
 - Thursday, April 30, 4:30 – 6:00 PM



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