

Meeting Minutes

January 13, 2026, 12:00 p.m. - 1:00 p.m.

Agenda:

Welcome, Connector & Updates	15 minutes
Advisory Workgroup Updates	15 minutes
Discussion	25 minutes
Public Comment & Next Steps	5 minutes

Workgroup Participants:

Present	Name	Present	Name
	Africa Anderson		Samantha Jolliff
X	Meredith Barnes		Berkley Julun
	Mindy Brant		Laura Lindsey
	Johnna Darragh-Ernst	X	Janice Moenster
	Karen Heath	X	Talibah Moore
X	Kesha Harris		Kim Nelson
X	Maira Nava		Beatrice Nichols
	Maura Hirschauer		Michelle Olivarez-O'Shea
X	Lakeesha Smith	X	Yesenia Perez
X	Sanna Jesse	X	Destiny Snow
	Senator Adriane Johnson		

Welcome, Connector & Updates

- Erin Arango-Escalante (meeting facilitator) welcomed participants. Erin reminded members of the community agreements and shared the day's agenda which features a discussion around the advisory workgroup updates that will be shared.
- Erin introduced Elliot Regenstein from Foresight Law & Policy, who has served on the Illinois Early Learning Council since 2004 and is currently guiding the work of the Advisory Workgroup.
- Three new members (Meredith Barnes, Maira Nava and Destiny Snow) joined the meeting, so all members took a moment to introduce themselves.

Advisory Workgroup Updates

- Elliot shared the goal of the Advisory Workgroup: to make recommendations about how the Illinois Department of Early Childhood (IDEC) advisory work should function on an ongoing basis. The workgroup has been talking about our desired future state and put together a draft framework to share with several other workgroups to gather reactions.
- Now, the Advisory Workgroup is discussing the current state of early childhood advisory groups. Once they are able to define that, later in the spring, they will determine what needs to be done to move IDEC forward from where we are to where we need to go as a state system.
- It is a statutory requirement to have an advisory body that is representative of the community served in the state. Elliot stated that the workgroup doesn't want to limit themselves to that—they want to meet those requirements and go beyond.
- Nothing in the framework is finalized—if you have any concerns, please raise them! We will bring those concerns back to the Advisory Workgroup.
- If you think of things at a later time, please contact Elliot, Erin, Andrea Cammilleri, or Paige Greenwood. Today's meeting is not your only chance to provide feedback.
- Our draft plan consists of:
 - Measuring Impact
 - Engaging the entire advisory ecosystem
 - Direct engagement
 - Advisory groups: What and who
 - Advisory groups: How (including family and community engagement)
- With regard to measuring impact, the workgroup felt it was important to think about what success looks like. They suggest the advisory function will be successful if:
 - IDEC regularly seeks feedback on critical questions related to policy and operations. The early childhood community believes that when there are major directional questions being considered, the Department will engage with its partners before answering them. Advisory workgroups can also raise issues on their own that they believe could be important to IDEC.
 - The Department is regularly acting on feedback it receives to produce policies that are equitable and inclusive.
 - The Department is communicating to its partners about how it used the feedback it received. When IDEC receives feedback that it cannot or will not act on, it communicates clearly the reasons why.
 - These actions create a cycle where IDEC partners believe that their input will be valued and continue to provide it.
 - We also want to make sure that it's not just a small group of people giving input. We want to build awareness across a wide range of people—diverse across geography, roles, demographic, linguistic, and other factors—and communities are aware of engagement opportunities.
 - A wide range of people actually participate in advisory function through multiple entry points.
 - The advisory function provides transparency to the early childhood community.

- The advisory function continues to evolve as needed to meet the needs of the agency and communities.
- The advisory function takes into account the lived experience of the state's families and providers, including families who have not been served by the system.
- To measure impact, the Department should conduct outreach asking stakeholders about the advisory function using surveys, focused conversations, and span multiple populations, including providers, families, and those least well served by the system.
- The process of measuring impact should be ongoing.
- The process of collecting input should be of minimal burden, and where possible should be combined with other engagement opportunities.
- IDEC should use technology where possible to make it easier to provide input and consider a dashboard or other method of transparently tracking input.
- Impact should be measured regularly, perhaps quarterly.
- A member asked for clarification on the meaning of "measuring impact," whether it referred to the impact of IDEC overall or just of the advisory activities it's engaged in.
 - Elliot indicated that he meant the impact of the advisory process. This means that the process of collecting feedback is progressing and is the feedback being acted on. If not, why not? Etc. There is a need to also measure the broad impact of IDEC, but the Advisory Workgroup is narrowly focused on measuring the impact of feedback gathering and how well that advisory process worked.
- Elliot continued to talk about engaging the entire advisory ecosystem. One of the things his workgroup is very interested in is determining how state-level work affects local-level work.
 - The group will consider what kinds of activities IDEC might support at the local level.
 - The group will consider how the agency should work with and/or build on existing resources, including the 39 Birth to Five Councils and Head Start Policy Councils.
 - The workgroup will consider what channels need to be established to work with community-level leaders.
- The Advisory Workgroup has also been thinking about direct engagement. Advisory groups serve an important function but that is not the only way to gather feedback. Other ways could include focus groups, interviews, social media or texting opportunities. This should all be available in multiple languages.
 - These channels of engagement will be distinct from IDEC's customer service or constituent services.
- IDEC will ultimately need to have a single lead advisory group, which will be designated as the state's advisory council under the Head Start Act (one of several federal requirements).

- Federal law defines some minimal requirements for membership in the advisory group and the topics it should address, but the workgroup can add to those recommendations.
- The current designated state advisory council (Early Learning Council) has been an important council, but it is far from the only one. Elliot remarked that he has yet to come across another state that has as many advisory groups as Illinois does. Some groups in Illinois have similar or overlapping responsibilities, but they are generally more specialized than the Early Learning Council.
- IDEC should run “air traffic control” to ensure coordination among groups.
- IDEC should also ensure coordination with other agencies to ensure it is not in conflict with the work of other agencies.
- Historically, there have been various other advisory groups. This workgroup can make recommendations for how these other advisory bodies should be organized and populated, including whether they should be connected to the state advisory council (e.g., as a subcommittee).
- There are benefits to short-term task-oriented groups, but having too many can be burdensome.
- Advisory bodies should engage in practices that support provider and family engagement, including...
 - Conduct onboarding to ensure that all members understand their role and the group’s expectations
 - Schedule advisory groups when providers and families can participate
 - Establish norms of participation that are welcoming and inclusive like sharing materials in advance, avoiding jargon, and supporting participation in providers’ and families’ home languages.
 - Offering multiple ways to engage in the meeting
 - Strong facilitation to encourage participation
- In general, workgroup members believe families should be paid for their participation.
- Families participating in any advisory workgroup should also be given space to connect with each other with support to help them succeed in their roles.

Discussion

- A member expressed appreciation for wanting to gain the parent perspective. It’s important to train the providers on parent perspectives as they prepare to interact on the same committees.
- Another member noted that they loved how the Advisory Workgroup included family engagement and training opportunities as well as many different languages. Having families representing different voices and cultures is very important. Establishing a sense of community is helpful for everyone because it allows us to have pride in our work and feel that we are helpful. Having term limits is great as well so it doesn’t get stagnant.

- A workgroup member raised a common theme that gets discussed in this workgroup around providing services in least restrictive environment - which is the day care - rather than having to walk the children to the local school.
- A member noted that when a child is newly diagnosed, they often see Early Intervention and other staffers just aren't getting in touch. They see this more in non-English speakers because the program doesn't have a staff person with the language who can reach out and offer guidance. The member had a family recently tell them that the state told the family to find an interpreter themselves, then come back for help.
- Another member highlighted one of the perspectives that comes up a lot is thinking about children who are multilingual and have disabilities (also known as dual identified).
 - Elliot responded that we need multiple people who experience those issues, who have diverse experiences and expertise, so they can all come together to talk about the specific issues that affect those populations. One person can't represent everyone with those experiences.
- Another member noted that representation by families with child welfare is also needed.
- A member asked: Will parents be included in the main advisory group?
 - Elliot responded: Yes, our goal is that they would be included at all the tables.
- A member asked about the Advisory Workgroup meeting last night and didn't think any of the participants were parent representatives.
 - Elliot explained that David Quiroz attended as a parent member and two other parents in the workgroup unfortunately were not able to attend last night's meeting.
- A member echoed that this workgroup just wants to be sure that parents are on the Early Learning Council. Some of the members of that group have been there for 20+ years and their experience is valued. That said, we might need to make some room for fresh perspectives and voices, especially from parents.
 - Elliot agreed that this is the goal.
- One member suggested that IDEC should think about other ways to engage as well, whether it's a Padlet or a survey, or other similar tools. We need to get more savvy with using those tools and synthesizing that data to discuss.
- A member asked: How do you recruit people for the Early Learning Council? They noted that their son's teacher is an expert on supporting children with disabilities. There are so many experts like her who understand and do this work, including so many professionals who should be recruited to these tables and be mindful of the time that they can engage. They felt that it seems like we always go to the same individuals who are connected to the state, not the ones who are most dedicated to directly serving parents and families.

- Elliot agreed and added a reminder that by law, individuals on the Early Learning Council are appointed by the Governor. People in his office invite participants. I think we need to make a point to work on recruiting this greater variety of people through that process.
- A member expressed that it would be nice to have parents be able to connect across the different councils so that our voices can combine and lift each other.
- Another member noted that they use all the tools as a parent and have used all the tools for years now. They feel savvy and are speaking from experience that is valuable to share.
- A member noted that from their experience that parent engagement needs to be accessible - not only are they parents but also full-time workers, community advocates and human.

Public Comment & Next Steps

- A member of the public wrote: For the Illinois Interagency Council on Early Intervention (IICEI) there are requirements for a certain % of the seats to be for parents and a certain number of them have to have children who are below a certain age. Not sure if you are thinking along these lines for the larger state advisory. For the main advisory as it's relevant for this subcommittee - you may want to set parameters for there to be parents of young children with disabilities/delays AND consider representation from adults with disabilities which are often missing from any of our tables. It might be helpful to map where there are federal/state appointed/required bodies focused on this population that can be connected to the larger body.
 - A workgroup member responded: As a neurodivergent parent – absolutely.
- The same member of the public wrote: The Latino Policy Forum and the Illinois Workforce and Education Research Collaborative (IWERC) have been doing identification, training, and parent engagement research through a continuous improvement model and have provided early recommendations to IDEC but it's absolutely essential that we identify and serve children Birth to 5 as Dual identified children and we must make sure they are evaluated for Individualized Family Service Plans (IFSPs) in their home language. We have developed tools and would be the first state to do that meaningfully. For Community Inclusion Work, it makes sense to walk that through a Birth to 5 Model that centers both multilingual learners and children with disabilities from the moment of "GO" when the advisory group launches. The Dual Identified Child can get so easily lost. Understanding language goals that a family has for their child, including becoming Bilingual and Biliterate, are also an essential part of child solution meetings as soon as they begin.
- Later, the same member of the public wrote: Community Inclusion Teams have made great impact and hopefully that work can continue to be uplifted through the cross-work with ISBE. It's important that we make intentional steps to elevate the talent we have in qualified Early Care and Education staff that have their Special Education

Approval Levels instead of only relying on school districts to support through itinerant models. While that is one model that can work in some communities, it won't be scalable for every child and family statewide. So, I think it's important to continue to think about that.

- Another member of the public noted that IDEC is considering developing a network for all parents who are appointed to the main advisory and the other advisory groups that fall underneath that or are connected to it. They think that's a good idea.
- A member of the public mentioned that STAR NET IL has parent networking and education components built into the STAR NET grant, and it would be feasible to recruit parents from the group of parents that participate in those options. Often times STAR NET is also a part of their regional Birth to 5, but they aren't sure if everyone realizes there is a Family Specialist part of that and they definitely may not know that people hired as family specialists must have a child with a disability to qualify for their role.
- A member of the public added that we must consider how to elevate the voice of families that speak indigenous languages because they often miss out on opportunities to provide feedback.

Padlet:

For workgroup members- [Supporting Children with Disabilities & Developmental Delays: Workgroup Members](#)

For members of the public- [Supporting Children with Disabilities & Developmental Delays: Public Comment](#)