

Meeting Agenda

March 10, 2026, 12:00 - 1:30 p.m.

Agenda:

Welcome, Introductions & Updates	15 minutes
Introduce the Draft Family Engagement Framework	10 minutes
Discuss the Draft Family Engagement Framework	55 minutes
Public Comment	5 minutes
Wrap-Up	5 minutes

Workgroup Participants:

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

Welcome, Introductions & 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 Draft Family Engagement Framework.

Family Engagement Framework

- Erin shared a quote from a parent in Cook County to inspire the group:
 - “I hope that parents are not just involved in the decision-making tables but that we continue to be active members of the conversations that lead us to the decision-making tables. I hope that by understanding the Early Childhood systems even more, that we are also provided with the clarity, tools, and information needed to fully participate in spaces. When we understand the playing field, that is when we are really able to be of best support and guidance to our children and those in our community. I hope parents’ voices are amplified, mentored, and given space to inform what is happening at the ground level in order to work in partnership and continue the co-creation process.”
- Erin prompted participants to join a Mentimeter engagement activity. They supplied words to fill in the blank at the end of the phrase “Family engagement works best when there is _____.”
- Paige Greenwood, the Director of Family Engagement at the Illinois Department of Early Childhood (IDEC), shared a map of Illinois, showing where parents and caregivers who have supported the IDEC transition live in the state. These participants have identified needs, barriers, and goals for enhancing the early childhood system.
- Paige shared the Draft Family Engagement Framework, which consists of seven principles. Each principle has two parts: policy guidance and practice guidance.
- The seven Draft Family Engagement Guiding Principles are:
 1. Center parent/caregiver voices by respecting and honoring their lived experience and expertise in early childhood.
 2. Staff and facilitators are trained in equity and cultural competency principles to engage with parent/caregivers across Illinois to build stronger relationships and establish mutual trust.
 3. Embed parents/caregivers into programmatic leadership and governance processes to ensure they are at decision making tables.
 4. Resources and communication modalities are family friendly, use strength-based language, and are accessible in multiple languages to engage families across Illinois.
 5. Implement equitable strategies for continuous quality improvement to center family voice and improve 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.
- Three discussion questions around each of the seven principles provided structure to the meeting:

- What resonates, remains unclear, or is missing from each draft Family Engagement Guiding Principle?
- Are there considerations that should be included in the Family Engagement Guiding Principles?
- If these draft principles were fully implemented, what would change for parents? What would parents experience differently?
- Paige and Erin shared each of the Guiding Principles and invited discussion on each of them, based on the question prompts above.

Discussion

Principle 1: Center parent/caregiver voices by respecting and honoring their lived experience and expertise in early childhood.

- Two things a member liked about the first principle are: engaging parents as partners and evaluating whether it's working or not. The other part they liked as a strength-based person is the development of strengths and asset-based approaches is essential. We don't know about parents' backgrounds, experiences interacting with systems, etc. so I'm glad to see those emphasized.
- Another member agreed and acknowledged the explicit mention of barriers also reflect gaps in Illinois engagement.
- A member brought up being transparent with parents/caregivers and noted that it stands out as something they love about the workgroups. They noted that they think IDEC and its partners really are sharing everything with us (parents/caregivers). Having it in the draft framework meant a lot to this member.
- Another member was drawn to the statement around "if a policy or program doesn't work for parents, it doesn't work." It implies flexibility in working with families to meet their needs. The different ideas mesh with each other. Being transparent about observations that it's not working can lead to these honest conversations and getting advice from parents on what could work better. Professionals need to be flexible to try different things until they find something that meets families, given that their backgrounds and journeys are not the same.
- A member brought up the strength-based idea and noted that the first bullet on the Policy slide doesn't feel strength-based. They expressed that it feels defensive and not solution-oriented so we need to be mindful of what is the intent behind that statement. They also expressed curiosity around policy and practice. Policy relates to statutes, best practice, federal law. When receiving this guidance as a practitioner, these are different than policy.
 - Erin responded to explain that policies are meant as the foundational expectations and practices are the methods used to accomplish them.
 - The member noted that they think these principles are great and we could think more about who the audience is and how they might interpret certain language, such as providers like me.
- Another member working in a school district has policies that are non-negotiable. Different audiences think of policies as different things. If it's more the north star or

best practice for continuous quality improvement than the hard rule that is mandated.

- Another member brought up the role of practitioners and the workforce and the idea of engaging parents and caregivers as partners, to co-design in partnerships. The act of co-designing requires someone to facilitate and sustain that partnership, which includes active participation of the workforce. The roles in that partnership could be more explicit.

Principle 2: Staff and facilitators are trained in equity and cultural competency principles to engage with parent/caregivers across Illinois to build stronger relationships and establish mutual trust.

- The second bullet resonates with me around staff seeking training. Will it be mandated and how will we know that they are following through?
 - Paige appreciated this point and noted the goal is requiring training on a regular basis.
 - The workgroup member talked about the relationships with her child's care provider. They talked about the differences in their culture and need for relationship building to be successful. Some of that is the workgroup member's role and responsibility to share about their culture, but some of it is them taking an interest and learning about the family's culture. The relationship is a journey of working together. An example of this is that when the member shares things, it's not a red flag or big concern, it's part of their culture to share. Sometimes things are elevated that should not be elevated, but that happens due to lack of understanding or respect for cultural differences.

Principle 3: Embed parents/caregivers into programmatic leadership and governance processes to ensure they are at decision making tables.

- When involving parents, recognizing that parents may have trauma. We need to take a trauma-informed approach in putting these councils together. There may be tears. Breaks may be needed during sessions. It's a lot to share your journey and information about your child. There needs to be support in the group and trauma-informed practices to ensure psychological safety for everyone involved.
- A member wrote: "I thought the attention to the real costs for families was very important (transportation, meals, etc)." And agreed with the prior comment on trauma-informed practices.

Principle 4: Resources and communication modalities are family friendly, use strength-based language, and are accessible in multiple languages to engage families across Illinois.

- I wonder if there's a way to highlight and embed issues of digital equity, to make that practice guidance more explicit. I think in relation to communication modalities

across the document. This includes access issues like broadband and digital literacy. This should be considered across all aspects of engagement and appear across the document.

- A member expressed that from own experience, it's critical to review documents with families before asking them to sign, so they know what they're signing. That should be added to the draft document somewhere.
 - Erin agreed and noted that there are many documents to sign for children with disabilities and it can be overwhelming to parents/caregivers, so having someone to explain all of it is important.

Principle 5: Implement equitable strategies for continuous quality improvement to center family voice and improve feedback loops.

- A member liked the part about disaggregating the data and breaking it down so we can see exactly what is working where and how: if there are areas making strides or if there are areas of concern.
- The time of day of meetings is another barrier for IFSPs or IEPs that could be added to addressing barriers to participation.

Principle 6: Design programs and cultivate community partnerships that are informed by the needs of children and families.

- A member wrote: "With the transition to preschool part of the B-5 structure, I am curious as to why ISBE is not listed as an intermediary?"
 - Paige noted that the B-5 will be transitioned to IDEC.
- A member commented that there was a lot of description around the inputs, but how the inputs produce the desired outcome to meet families' needs could be more explicit. The way it all comes together to impact the outcome could be more intentional.
- A member asked, "Are you designing programs or enhancing current programs to provide supports?"
 - Paige responded that this document exists to strengthen existing programs and could support design of future programs, but it's primarily for existing programs.
 - The member appreciated the terminology around strengthening because sometimes people panic when they see "design programs" when we could be strengthening the ones we have.

Principle 7: Provide compensation for parent/caregivers' participation, feedback, and contribution to IDEC workstreams and beyond as available.

- A member stated that the attention to banking status and immigration status as access barriers is specific and thoughtful.

On the entire framework:

- A member raised that a strength of the framework is that family voice is at the forefront of each principle.
- Another member named another strength that it is focused on removing barriers for families to engage and co design.
- A member mentioned the fear of the unknown was hard at the beginning of being involved. They said, *“As time has gone by, I’ve had an approach of acknowledging my child’s diagnosis and some limitations but to be hopeful that we don’t know exactly what their capacities or limitations are and that we shouldn’t restrict our children based on a diagnosis. If providers have that empathy and acknowledge that children may be capable of a lot, we don’t know. Hearing that from providers at the beginning would have brought me some peace. I personally exposed my children to many activities with the mindset of trying it, even if I didn’t know if they would be successful or not, because you won’t know their capacity if you don’t expose them to opportunities.”*
- A member felt that once this is fully implemented, families will experience less challenges negotiating system, there will be an increase in diversity of voices at the table, and family input will be truly going somewhere.
- Erin asked participants to give a fist to 5 to vote on the framework’s readiness to be implemented. Many members ranked it a 4.
- Erin asked members to state which principle means most to them. Their responses included:
 - 3 and 7
 - 2 and 3
 - 2 and 3
 - 1, 2, 4
- A member expressed that the Autism Place connected to IL State University has done an amazing job creating a space like this for parents.

Public Comment

- A member of the public suggested that the 7 principles of Early Intervention could also be incorporated into this document:
<https://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=149002>
 - Another member of the public liked that idea.
- A member of the public mentioned Principle 1 of Early Intervention (EI): The primary goal of EI is to build caregiver capacity by supporting their ability to promote their child's optimal development and to facilitate their child's participation in family and community activities.

- A member of the public suggested a rephrasing to “If the policy or program lever doesn’t work for parents/caregivers, work in collaboration with parents/caregivers to reevaluate the policy or program and determine policies that best meet the needs of children and families.”
- A public participant commented that given the large number of stakeholders in early childhood, they would urge IDEC to be very clear about what staff/ facilitators/ providers the document is referencing.
- Another public participant asked that we highlight the parent liaison roles in EI.
- A member of the public stated that understanding how isolating EI can be with providers visiting families makes community support essential. We should be making it best practice for providers to provide families with support networks. Some examples of this include creating easier ways for families to access community support with local nonprofits, providing them with information about medical reimbursement, costs, insurance, etc.
- A member of the public pointed there's more of a strain on resources and just anxiety/stress because of environmental factors.
- A member of the public shared they would hope families would feel valued, their opinions welcome and their suggestions used, plus would stay engaged because they feel listened to.
- A member of the public emphasized, if we are able to connect parents of children with disabilities with other parents and a supportive community, it would be extremely empowering to understand they are not alone.
- A member of the public most appreciated principle #6.
- Another public participant thought it would be helpful to inform the draft framework by connecting with the Data, Analytics, and Insights Workgroup, particularly around those pieces around data collection and ensuring families/providers are not overburdened.
 - Erin shared that the DAI workgroup is coming to our workgroup in the spring to discuss this.
- A member of the public (a speech therapist in EI) thinks it is an amazing document that reminds them a lot of the EI document (see above). *“I do see a gap in this, which has been brought up by the attorney general around parental mental health. I have worked in a lot of different settings and none of them have been as isolating as EI for the families I’m working with. I go into families’ homes and they don’t necessarily know anyone else who is receiving those therapies. The nonprofit we started is around creating a community of individuals supporting each other in navigating. Whoever makes the referral for a child to be evaluated, they should be providing some support for the parents/caregivers to make sure they are aware of the process so they don’t just rely on Google but can connect with others who have been through it. That would be my wish.”*

- Paige acknowledged that this is missing from the framework, so we can think about navigation supports for families and how to incorporate that idea.
- A member of the public said AARTS with RUSH is strong at implementing these practices as well, along with CITY of Support (Children in Therapy and You).
- A member of the public commented on the fact that this framework could be burdensome for providers. They love having mandated cultural competence training and noted a potential compromise that has worked for speech therapy is that they have to take 2 out of their 30 hours of continuing education each year in cultural competence, but adding cultural competence training did not increase the overall hours requirement.
 - Paige agreed that it's a great idea to make new requirements complementary to existing requirements, rather than new add-ons.

Padlet (for use during meeting):

For workgroup members- <https://padlet.com/erin674/supporting-children-with-disabilities-developmental-delays-3p26qae2e5de0qnp>

For members of the public- <https://padlet.com/erin674/supporting-children-with-disabilities-developmental-delays-p-u2ot2xuzjdg4ydv0>