

**Meeting Minutes****February 27, 2025 3:00-4:00 p.m.****WebEx Link**

Meeting number (access code): 2864 204 6874

Meeting password: Mp7Jq2x9mpF

**Meeting Objectives:**

- Provide updates on Transition Advisory Committee and workgroup conversations
- Share Early Intervention (EI) cost model highlights from Feb. 13
- Discuss initial family perspective feedback
- Discuss birth – age 3 proposal and make recommendations

**Agenda:**

Welcome, agenda and connector	10 minutes
Transition Advisory Committee update	5 minutes
Cost model and family perspective feedback	15 minutes
Birth-3 proposal	20 minutes
Public comment	5 minutes
Next steps	5 minutes

**Participants:**

- Abigail Bautista-Office of State Senator Villa
- Edgar Ramirez
- Kate Estrada
- Rebecca Vonderlack-Navarro
- Luis Narvaez
- Marilyn Rodriguez
- Michelle Ramirez
- Joanne Clyde

**Welcome, agenda and connector**

Erin Arango-Escalante (meeting facilitator) welcomed everyone to the meeting and proceeded to discuss the agenda for the day, which included the Early Intervention Cost Model, Family Insights, Birth-3 Co-Design Proposal, Public Comment, and Next Steps. Erin also reminded everyone of the community agreements developed by the workgroup members.

### **Transition Advisory Committee update**

Ann Whalen shared that Governor JB Pritzker introduced his FY26 budget last week and early childhood continued to be a priority for the Governor as it has been for the past few years, in spite of it being a tight budget year. Ann shared a link to information about the budget. This is the start of the process with a final budget expected by the end of May, then it will go into effect in July 2025. The workgroup will receive updates as the budget progresses.

### **Cost model and family perspective feedback**

Erin shared that on Feb. 13, members of this workgroup joined with members of the workgroup on supporting children with special needs to talk about the cost model. Erin invited anyone who attended that meeting to share their thoughts about it.

One member reported that participating in the Feb. 13 meeting was very interesting, informational, and easy to digest. They found it validating to see that many of the challenges discussed “on the ground” are seen at higher levels and were identified potential areas for improvement. The participant also added comments about the urgency of correcting issues that affect people’s livelihood, even though we know the work takes time.

Another member expressed a desire to learn more about the intersectionality between early childhood, English language learners, and all the identities that come across within early childhood. They want to know more about research and best practices around this.

Erin acknowledged that within the early care and education system, there are a lot of different programs and services and they all need to address those intersectional needs. The workgroup’s goal is focused very specifically on birth to 3-year-olds within the broad system. This report says within the Early Intervention system for children who have been identified as having a disability or a delay needs to also connect to other system components like child care, Early Head Start, home visiting, along with all the other adults in those children’s lives. It also needs to include serving multilingual children. Erin reported that on Feb. 13, the group discussed broad early childhood system barriers for multilingual families and providers. The participants from this workgroup sought to make others aware of the need for helping multilingual parents understand and navigate birth to 3 services through transportation, increasing bilingualism, addressing the shortage of multilingual teachers and therapists and avoiding potential misinformation about children’s language(s) and development. This workgroup also passed along the importance of a consistent/common communication channels and offering communications online in the families’ preferred languages. As a reminder of our past work, Erin called out that parents/families had a high level of trust with local organizations as a single point of entry into the broad system, which is also relevant to the birth to 3 system. Other ideas discussed were providing car seats, funding for bilingual doulas, additional funding for child care programs to accept multilingual children and pay increases for bilingual staff. Erin spent time sharing these ideas back to the workgroup to encourage all to keep referencing them as work continues and future feedback opportunities arise.

This segment of the agenda concluded with an exchange about the importance of acknowledging and compensating for the extra work that bilingual professionals, such as early intervention system coordinators, sometimes take on to guide families.

### **Birth to 3 proposal**

Erin walked through the parts of the proposal and invited workgroup members and the public to use the Padlet links to share reactions to the draft proposal. She explained that over the next 12 months, there will be a partnership between the Dept of Human Services and the Dept of Early Childhood to co-design a strategic plan for young children and families. More specifically, there's a goal to center the parent voice, including from this workgroup. This process will include mapping the current state of services for children ages birth to three, knowing there's a focus on Early Intervention, but these children also experience other components of the system as well. The Supporting Multilingual Learners workgroup will be working alongside the other workgroups and Transition Advisory Council to define what success of this project will look like. The workgroup will interact with the new agency to create a package of changes to address the disparities that exist, particularly for Black, rural, and multilingual families. Erin explained the new agency's desire to ensure there's a strong, stable network of providers and that we can communicate to families and system members about what services are available, how to navigate them, how to transition children, bill Medicaid and private insurance, and more. This will include engaging with the Data and Funding workgroups.

Erin called attention to the report's overview of the timeline and phases of the process. These include: design; meeting with various community members, workgroups, and providers; and focusing on funding, data, technology, and the workforce. The engagement will culminate in a blueprint of knowing what parents want and iterating with this workgroup to create a plan for the future state of programs and services for multilingual children. Members can access the draft document in the shared folder.

### **Questions or comments:**

One member asked if there is a grid of the timeline and what we hope to accomplish and Erin responded positively to the idea.

A member asked whether there is anything in the document about how to identify children as multilingual learners during the Early Intervention process.

Another member highlighted a previous point on the priority of recruiting and staffing up to increase bilingual services, emphasizing the need to prioritize detailed plans for recruitment, training, and development. He offered to share a resource around higher pay scales for multilingual teachers and support staff that was previously developed.

Erin asked for the group's thoughts on the proposed strategy in the draft to identify specific communities to more deeply explore the complexity, assets, and needs of communities. One member responded positively to the idea, and relayed concerns that there may not be

adequate training and support for working with multilingual families. She expressed that when programs engage with families who come from various home language and cultures, there can be a lot of misunderstandings and errors. The workgroup is aware of disconnects in understanding the importance of home language development and culturally-responsive practice, which occur across the system.

A member then shared enthusiasm to get to work on the community engagement, as well as further defining the milestones or benchmarks on what we are trying to meet and report out on.

Finally, a member made comments about the urgency of correcting problems and removing barriers for children, as they are not in the birth to three age range for very long but their early experiences have a tremendous impact on their education and lives.

### **Public comment**

A series of videos that were developed through PDG was shared. These videos include a very intriguing 4-minute video on young children and the bilingual brain with a very compelling message for bilingual parents about how valuable their role is in providing their native language as a gift to their children. It was noted that it's a very positive, asset-oriented message and it's in English, Spanish, and Arabic. She felt this could be a resource in the proposal as a PR piece.

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLJbL3nqQWaSwFAaDL8cZCipUuQMC7vNNM>

A member referred to the list of multilingual learner barriers shared earlier in the meeting and commented that those same barriers exist for Early Intervention, so the workgroup needs to think strategically and specifically about what actions and procedures can be put into place to reduce those barriers. She told about a family whose child needed early intervention services, and the parents spoke English but had no idea what the program was. If they did not speak English and did not know about the program, the barriers to accessing EI would be even higher. The member felt that we need to consider every step for a person with no knowledge of EI to go through to access the services and be purposeful about identifying barriers. They concluded that looking closely from the parent and child perspectives will help us get the services to the children who need it.

Another member expressed appreciation for this description of "a double barrier" for multilingual families. They emphasized the role that communications will need to play and that we will have to be very sensitive because fear is another major barrier.

A member underscored that multilingualism will help children break barriers. It will help the child soar higher academically. Reaching the child early with programs and services they need gives them more advantages to reach their potential goals in life.

A reminder was shared that the FY26 (July 2025-June 2026) budget from the Governor is the beginning of the process, and it will go to the General Assembly for committees and hearings. Only for one more year, early childhood budgets are still in other agencies' budgets. Advocacy

will happen in different places for committee hearings. It also noted that IDEC is thinking about multilingual families in the front end of the process to ask what we are missing and that the state appreciates the workgroup's willingness to dive into areas like Early Intervention and services for young children that may not feel as familiar.

Erin concluded the meeting with enthusiasm that this workgroup is not an afterthought, and that the IL Department of Early Childhood is thinking about multilingual families from the beginning!

### **Padlet: Comments**

From workgroup members-

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

From members of the public-

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

### **Next steps**

- Workgroup meeting dates: March 18, April 23, May 29 all from 3-4pm; calendar invites will be sent
- The team will continue to refine the birth-age 3 co-design proposal