

**Transition Advisory Committee  
Meeting 12  
November 12, 2024, 5:30-7:00pm CT  
Public attendee link:**

[https://aftonpartners.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_FWWdTE28T7aEz65kyZGcyg](https://aftonpartners.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_FWWdTE28T7aEz65kyZGcyg)

**In attendance:**

**Transition Advisory Committee (TAC) members:** Makisha Binns (Kiddos Care), Katie Cobb (Peoria Public SD 150), Johnna Darragh-Ernst (Heartland Community College), Shontae Fennoy (East St. Louis SD 189), Tonya Frehner (Birth to Five Illinois), Rochelle Golliday (Cuddle Care, Inc.), Kesha Harris (Parent), LaKeesha James-Smith (Parent), Marcy Mendenhall (SAL Family and Community Services), Bela Moté – Chair (Carole Robertson Center), Dara Munson (Family Focus), Angel Powell-Muldrow (Early Childhood Center Principal), Edgar Ramirez (Chicago Commons), Robin Steans (Advance Illinois), Rebecca Vonderlack-Navarro (Latino Policy Forum), Sarah Ziemba (Shine Therapy Service).

**State Agency Members and Consultants:** Aressa Coley (Afton Partners), Beza Bulega (Afton Partners), Tommie Collins (ChiByDesign), Kristen Garcia (Afton Partners), Liz Garza (Afton Partners), Kendall Miller-Roberts (ChiByDesign), Marissa Ortiz (Afton Partners), Christopher Rudd (ChiByDesign), Siri Smillie (Afton Partners), Ann Whalen (Early Childhood Transition Director), Justin Walker (ChiByDesign), Bethany Patten (IDHS), Shontee Blankenship (DCFS).

**Members of the public: 32**

**Minutes**

**1. Welcome, & Introductions – Bela Moté (15 minutes)**

The interpreter oriented the audience and gave instructions on how to select the appropriate language channel. Bela Moté (TAC member, Chair) started the meeting by reminding the audience that TAC meetings are open to the public with public participants in “listen-only mode.” She highlighted that Spanish interpretation was available and encouraged speakers to talk slowly and avoid acronyms for the interpreter. Bela also reminded attendees that meeting minutes and materials are available on the new Transition website in both English and Spanish, and encouraged feedback via two feedback forms in [English](#) and [Spanish](#).

Bela shared enthusiasm for the 12<sup>th</sup> TAC meeting and read through the goals and the agenda. She expressed gratitude for the TAC, state leadership, and public participants for their engagement and dedication to this work.

The TAC check-in question was “what are you most looking forward to during the December in-person meeting?”, participants responded in chat.

To ground the meeting in family experiences, Bela shared a family spotlight featuring parent voices from a Regional Listening Session survey. Bela concluded with reminders about the TAC’s charge, the community engagement agreements, and the equity framework.

**2. Illinois Department of Early Childhood (IDEC) updates – Ann Whalen (10 min)**

Ann Whalen (Early Childhood Transition Director) provided IDEC updates for the group, including the introduction of Sydney Ellison as the new COO of IDEC. Sydney brings experience from the Governor's Office and previously managed operations at the United Center during the DNC. Ann noted that IDEC workgroups have relaunched this month, with meeting agendas and notes available on the IDEC website for those interested in learning more. She highlighted the launch of a new workgroup, Funding Design, scheduled for November 13, 2024. Additionally, the Data, Analytics, and Insights, Supporting Multilingual Learners, and Supporting Children with Special Needs workgroups have relaunched.

### **3. ChiByDesign Final Report Presentation – ChiByDesign Team (45 minutes)**

Christopher Rudd began the presentation. The purpose of the presentation was to share out the learnings from the three parent co-design workshops that were conducted earlier in the year. The findings of the workshops are framed as barriers, desired outcomes, drivers, and principles.

#### **Goals**

Tommie Collins shared that the goals of the parent engagement workshops were to convene a diverse group of stakeholders to understand the practices, policies, and conditions that shape their experiences in early childhood education, co-design antiracist innovations with lived experts that can shape early childhood education services and practices, and build relationships between families, early childhood providers, and adjacent systems actors in Illinois. The deliverables included developing and prototyping concepts that address systemic barriers that impact children, families, and providers, as well as identify barriers to accessing and delivering high-quality early childhood experiences.

#### **Barriers**

Justin Walker shared the barriers that were found throughout the three workshops. The barriers identified in the workshops included 20 key challenges that hindered families' access to quality early childhood education, care, and learning delivery. Justin shared that the challenges must be addressed to ensure the early childhood ecosystem fully meets existing needs, anticipates and provides interventions for future demands, and fosters trust and confidence amongst all stakeholders.

#### **Desired Outcomes**

Four key outcomes were informed by the insights provided by the participants and represent their collective vision of a future in which children, their families, and the providers that offer services and care are connected to support.

- **Continuity of Care:** The education and well-being of children are impacted by the care and services provided from prenatal through the transition into kindergarten and beyond. To create equitable outcomes for children and provide them with the support and care they need to thrive, The Department of Early Childhood must provide consistent, coordinated, and comprehensive support to children and families, ensuring their educational, developmental, and health needs are continuously met.
- **Guaranteed Access to High-Quality Early Learning:** To drive equitable outcomes, the Department of Early Childhood must address systemic inequities directly, prioritizing increased accessibility and transparency within the early education and care ecosystem. Children and families face significant barriers in accessing early childhood education and care services. Beyond the

financial burden of childcare costs and the scarcity of available services, families often struggle to navigate the system and understand how best to support their children's development. Creating new roles, such as ecosystem navigators and parent advocates, can provide insight and clarity to families and providers and assist them in remedying challenges they may encounter.

- **Economic Security:** A key initiative in this effort should be forging new pathways to advance early learning careers—supporting families interested in the field and providing opportunities for existing professionals to enhance their skills. Continuous and sustained financial support is essential to achieving economic security. Early childhood practitioners must receive family-sustaining wages and be supported in their educational and professional development through scholarships, stipends, and other resources. Ensuring caregivers earn a family-sustaining wage is essential to their overall well-being and stability, directly impacting the care and opportunities they can provide for their children.
- **Harmonious Relationships:** Caregivers should derive meaningful benefits from the time and energy they invest in supporting their child's provider, just as providers benefit from parents' active involvement and resources. Such mutually beneficial relationships should be fostered between all stakeholder groups at every level of the ecosystem. Harmonious relationships support the ecosystems and its stakeholders' sustainable growth and development. They also foster stronger connections among stakeholders, building a sense of community and belonging, enabling trust-building, and collectively supporting the well-being of children and families across Illinois.

## **Drivers**

Kendall Miller-Roberts shared the drivers that came out of the workshop findings. The ChiByDesign team proposed five drivers that will enable the Department of Early Childhood to create equitable outcomes for children and families.

- **Bridge Digital and Physical Infrastructure Divides:** Communities of color often face severe underinvestment in digital resources—like broadband Internet and technology—and physical infrastructure, leading to restricted access to critical services such as transportation, employment, healthcare, and more. This dual deficit hampers economic advancement and exacerbates social inequities. Investing in digital and physical improvements is crucial for creating vibrant, thriving communities where families, providers, and practitioners can fully participate in and benefit from broader societal advancements.
- **Advance Communication and Information Exchange:** The Department of Early Childhood must take decisive action to enhance the flow of information among all stakeholders. It must also ensure that information is easily accessible in diverse languages, culturally responsive, and available to all Illinois parents, caregivers, and families. By ensuring that parents, providers, and other key stakeholders have relevant, timely, and accurate information and the means to communicate effectively with one another, the Department of Early Childhood can empower them to make well-informed decisions, improving children's education and well-being across Illinois.
- **Strengthen Cross-Sector Collaboration:** The Department of Early Childhood must work collaboratively with state and local agencies to develop integrated strategies that holistically meet the needs of children and families. Likewise, as the Department integrates services from

various agencies, those agencies should maintain continuous collaboration to better support children and their caregivers. By fostering inter-agency cooperation and designing comprehensive social interventions, the Department can significantly expand its impact and drive the transformational change necessary to achieve positive family outcomes.

- **Prioritize Holistic Family Well-Being:** The Department of Early Childhood must strive for equitable outcomes for families and other stakeholders by addressing the social determinants of health in partnership with other state agencies. Addressing these determinants through policies and programs that ensure access to healthcare, stable housing, adequate nutrition, and social support is crucial for promoting healthy development and creating positive generational impacts for Illinois residents and those who care for them
- **Invest in Workforce Excellence:** The Department of Early Childhood must prioritize paying its workforce sustainable and equitable wages, developing pathways to and through the field, and creating structures and policies within the workforce that reinforce the value early childcare professionals provide. By prioritizing these areas, the department can improve the quality and stability of early childhood education, ultimately benefiting children, families, and communities across Illinois.

### **Principles & Early Childhood Education and Care Equity Framework**

Tommie Collins shared that 18 principles were developed from co-designer discussions should be incorporated into interventions and utilized as a metric for creating positive experiences between children, families, and providers within the early childhood ecosystem.

He also presented the Early Childhood Education and Care Equity Framework, consisting of the desired outcomes, drivers, and principles, that addresses the racial inequities and hardships experiences by Illinoisan families the Department of Early Childhood must implement strategic efforts that ensure all children, families, and providers receive the necessary resources and supports to access and deliver high-quality care and services. The Early Childhood Education and Care Equity Framework identifies the pathway to create an ecosystem that serves all Illinoisans and captures the interconnectivity of the proposed and co-created outcomes, drivers, and principles. Desired outcomes represent the goals set by co-designers for the Department of Early Childhood, while the drivers refer to the essential approaches employed to reach these goals. To bring the drivers—and ultimately the desired outcomes—to fruition, the principles serve as guideposts for developing new programs and services, modifying existing ones, and acting as evaluation metrics for both.

### **Creating Equitable and Compassionate Digital Experiences**

Tommie Collins shared the co-designer driven recommendations

1. Create equitable and compassionate digital experiences (Tommie Collins)
2. Early childhood center evaluation reimaged (Justin Walker)
3. Anti-racist early childhood center (Kendall Miller-Roberts)

At the end of the presentation, Marcy Mendenhall (TAC member) asked how many people were involved in the findings, to which Ann responded that approximately 60 parents, providers, intermediaries, and state team members attended all the sessions.

The group broke out into small group discussions to discuss the following questions:

1. How do these findings align or differ from your current understanding of community priorities for an equitable, family-centered system?
2. What are the opportunities to incorporate workshop principles to guide our process moving forward?
3. Based on workshop findings, what are adjustments we should make to our current process?
4. How can we incorporate these findings into our ongoing work to comprehensively understand families' needs for an equitable early childhood system?

Members of the public were also given the opportunity to respond to the questions via Padlets based on their stakeholder role:

- Advocates: <https://padlet.com/ssmillie2/tac-meeting-12-chibydesign-advocates-uzttzg7203vssgsi>
- Families (English and Spanish): <https://padlet.com/ssmillie2/tac-meeting-12-chibydesign-findings-families-124kuiekczjo418d>
- Providers (English and Spanish): <https://padlet.com/ssmillie2/tac-meeting-12-chibydesign-providers-xqc7ladsom3s9by3>
- Service organizations: <https://padlet.com/ssmillie2/tac-meeting-12-chibydesign-service-organizations-8q256mnvaiwa2hib>
- State and local agencies: <https://padlet.com/ssmillie2/tac-meeting-12-chibydesign-state-and-local-agencies-njgz3i7mizd0thfj>
- Spanish (all other roles): <https://padlet.com/ssmillie2/reuni-n-12-del-tac-chibydesign-todos-los-dem-s-roles-x6ah6sdq8w7j74nr>

#### **4. Community Engagement Overview (Regional Listening Session Findings) – Afton Partners (15 minutes)**

Beza Bulega (Afton Partners) gave an overview of the engagement findings and preliminary themes from Regional Listening Sessions held from June – October 2024. To date, Regional Listening Sessions consisted of 72 individual meetings, 40 organizations who hosted the meetings, and 1,689 participants. Residents in every county of the state had the opportunity to participate in Regional Listening Sessions.

##### **Participant Demographics**

- Parents were the single largest group that participated: 23% parents
- Participants were racially diverse, especially parent participants.
  - Overall: 45% BIPOC
  - Parents: 62% BIPOC
- 98% of participants in regional listening sessions were a part of or serve priority populations.
- Residents in every county of the state had the opportunity to participate in Regional Listening Sessions.
  - 100% of counties have been represented

##### **Key Questions**

Regional Listening Sessions sought to learn from communities related to four questions:

- In your experience accessing or providing early childhood services, what has worked well? What have you valued about your experience and would like to remain the same?
- In your experience accessing or providing early childhood services, what has not worked well? What would you like to see improved with the creation of the new agency?
- What more could the transition team do to focus on equity (including racial equity) and plan for a family-centered system?
- What else is on your mind with the transition to a new agency?

Three family-focused themes emerged from the data, and included accessible and affordable services, communication and coordination for cohesive support, and consistent and culturally responsive relationships.

1. Access and affordability: Families appreciate the mixed delivery system and experience barriers accessing services. Families in rural areas, multilingual families, and families with children who have special needs described difficulties with accessing services. Specific challenges include:
  - a. Finding information
  - b. Services not available in their community and long waitlists
  - c. Lack of full day care
  - d. Lack of transportation
2. Communication and coordination: Families value continuity of services and want providers to work together. Parents and caregivers expect providers to work with one another to support their child and emphasized the value of parent or family support services or parent groups as important resources to support their children's healthy development. Specifically, parents appreciate:
  - a. Smooth transitions between programs or collaboration with multiple providers to ensure continuity of services and prevent interruptions to their child's developmental progress.
  - b. Parent support groups that help families learn about and connect to resources to support their children's development.
3. Relationships: Parent support groups that help families learn about and connect to resources to support their children's development. When families shared about positive experiences, they often mentioned supportive and culturally responsive staff and robust communication. Specifically parents value:
  - a. Caring and responsive teachers in ECE settings
  - b. Home visiting services and the resources their home visitor shares with them
  - c. Consistency with providers/caregivers that enables trusting relationships to form
  - d. Robust and consistent communication
  - e. Services delivered in their preferred language

Next steps for Afton Partners include:

- Analyze data collected through the end of October
- Develop a Regional Listening Session final report
- Share findings with session hosts and community members

Bela celebrated the diversity among families and parents, particularly the uptake in Black and Latino communities. She acknowledged that there is more work to do but is proud of the increase in engagement.

#### **5. Closing and Next steps - Bela Moté (5 minutes)**

Participants were given time to complete the TAC feedback survey and equity reflection.

- Next Meeting (In-Person TAC Meeting\_ : Thursday, December 5, 10am-3pm, location Bloomington/Normal area- specifics to come.
- Next Listening Session: Friday, November 15, 2024 from 12-1pm