

**Transition Advisory Committee
Meeting 27**

February 24, 2026, 5:30 – 7pm CT

Public attendee link: https://aftonpartners.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_JhnAO7BeSP-v2CjW700fpA

In attendance:

Transition Advisory Committee (TAC) members: Katie Cobb (Peoria Public School District 150), Dara Cohen (Family Focus), Johnna Darragh-Ernst (Heartland Community College), Shontae Fennoy (East St. Louis SD 189), Rochelle Golliday (Cuddle Care, Inc.), LaKeesha James-Smith (Parent), Kesha Harris (Parent), Marcy Mendenhall (SAL Family & Community Services), Janice Moenster (Brightpoint), Bela Moté (Chair, Carole Robertson Center), Edgar Ramirez (Chicago Commons), Angel Powell-Muldrow (Early Childhood Center Principal), Sara Ziemba (EI Provider)

State Agency Members and Consultants: Trish Rooney (IDEC, Chief Family and Community Systems Officer, Christina Krasov (Chief Data Officer), Paige Greenwood (Director of Family Engagement), Rachel Oppenheimer (Director of Strategic Planning), Maya Portillo (Project Director Funding Design), Mackenze Eisen (Project Director), Gerson Ramirez (Director of Legislative Affairs), Shontee Blankenship (Chief Quality and Safety Officer); Beza Bulega (Afton Partners), Aressa Coley (Afton Partners), Kristen Garcia (Afton Partners), Kaitlyn McGovern (Afton Partners)

Members of the public: 48

Minutes

1. Welcome & Introductions – Bela Moté

Bela welcomed everyone into the meeting and started by sharing the meeting goals and agenda.

Today's Goals

- Build community amongst TAC members
- Provide IDEC updates (legislative budget, federal and workstreams)
- Learn about and provider feedback on Data Analytics and Insights Workgroup Progress
- Reflect on next steps for Year 3 recommendations

Agenda

- Welcome and introductions – 10 min
- IDEC updates – 20 min
 - New IDEC team members
 - Legislative Bills
 - FY27 Budget Updates
 - Federal Updates
 - Draft Family Engagement Framework Preview
- Data Analytics and Insights Workgroup Update– 45 min
- Looking Ahead & Next Steps– 15 min
 - TAC Survey Recap
 - Review Year 3 Timeline

Bela shared virtual housekeeping notes for TAC members and members of the public, followed by a recap of the December TAC meeting. To view any meeting materials from the December and January TAC, please visit the [IDEC website](#).

Bela shared a family spotlight quote: *“When I wrote letter [for my child] to get into the preschool he got into last year. I advocated to get him an IEP. I wanted him to be placed at a certain preschool. I wrote a letter and signed it. “NAME REDACTED’s Mommy Advocate” so that was my most successful effort because he was able to get in. It could’ve been from any other thing, but I think it was from the letter I wrote.”*– Parent, Cook County

2. Illinois Department of Early Childhood (IDEC) Updates – Trish Rooney

New IDEC team members

Trish presented a list of new staff joining IDEC:

- Christina Baker, Chief Internal Auditor
- Tyson Corley, Property and Records Manager
- Jacob Dilberto, Facilities and Fleet Manager
- James Fox, Director of Business Services
- Rachel Oppenheimer, Project Director – Strategic Plan

IDEC now has over 30 staff. IDEC has hired 5 new employees since our last TAC Meeting in January. Trish reminded everyone at Ann Whalen was appointed as the Assistant Secretary of Education & Care Services and KC Stralka was appointed at the Assistant Secretary of Project Management & Operational. IDEC is continuing to grow as we prepare for the new agency's first day on July 1, 2026.

IDEC Legislative Bills Update

Gerson Ramirez, Director of Legislative Affairs discussed three legislative bills under review by the Illinois General Assembly. The first bill discussed was SB2984 (Sponsored by Senator Lakesia Collins)/HB 5204 (Sponsored by Rep Joyce Mason) on the Early Learning Council (ELC). These changes amend the Illinois Early Learning Council Act and purpose of the Illinois Early Learning Council. These changes included making the IDEC Secretary or a Secretary appointed designee the co-chairperson and agency responsible for staffing the ELC. It also explicitly adds parents/caregiver of children 5 and under to the ELC and sets provision concerning conflicts of interest. Lastly, it provides that IDEC shall appoint specified members to the advisory committee to the Early Childhood Access Consortium.

The second bill discussed was SB3641 (Sponsored by Sen Julie A. Morrison)/HB5099 (Sponsored by Rep Joyce Mason). This is administrative clean up language, which changes amend the Department of Early Childhood Act by transferring the authority and responsibility from DCFS to IDEC to conduct fingerprint based criminal history check on providers of day care centers, part day child care facilities, day care homes, and group day care homes.

Lastly, the third bill discussed SB3907 (Sponsored by Sen. Julia A. Morrison)/HB5373 (Sponsored by Rep Joyce Mason). The changes in these bills support licensing redesign and are in three major areas: child care background checks, exemptions, and general clean up

Gerson shared that IDEC created Bill Fact sheets as a to provide more information on each bill.

TAC member comments:

- TAC Members thanked Gerson for sharing the information regarding the bills.

FY27 Budget Updates

Trish shared update on the Governor's proposed FY27 budget which includes nearly \$4.5B in Early Childhood Investments. FY27 is a maintenance budget. This is IDEC's first budget for fully running IDEC programs and services for early childhood. It does not propose major programmatic changes. It provides operational infrastructure to merge people, process, and technology to provider more efficient and equitable services over time. The specific appropriation lines are generally the same as the current year, at the transferring agencies. Grants are largely budgeted at similar levels to last year; two main increases are:

- CCAP is increased by \$55 million, to cover increased program costs
- EI is increased by \$15 million, for program and operational costs

There is a \$2 billion of appropriation authority for the CCAP program. Funds will continue to come from three main sources, CCDF, TANF, and GRF. The FY27 budget maintains Early Childhood Block Grant (ECBG) funding level compared to FY26. This will continue to support three programs: PFA, PFAE, and PI. For Early Intervention (EI), there is a \$15 million increase for operational improvements and modest rate increases to support timely services for families. Other grants are similar to FY 26. This includes the SMART Start Workforce Grants that are at held steady at \$212 million. Home visiting increases (GRF and State CURE Fund) partially offset reduced federal funds available. Dolly Parton's Imagination Library is remaining at ISBE.

The FY27 recommendation for operations is sufficient to cover:

- Agency start up and transition expenses to merge staff, process, and technology into one agency
- Additional costs necessary to start up a new agency in FY27 (central office costs, etc.)

Federal Updates

Trish gave an update on relevant federal news. On January 6th, the Trump Administration announced their decision to freeze \$10 billion in federal funds for five Democratic-led states – one of those state's being Illinois. This temporarily halted IL's ability to draw down more than \$1 billion in social service funding for Illinois, including funds that support IL's CCAP program. On January 8th, a message was sent to all of IDHS current providers from the IDHS Division of Early Childhood Director, Lesley Schwartz with additional information. Trish encouraged those on this call to refer back to that letter which is on the right of this slide. As of January 9th, the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York issued a temporary restraining order preventing the Trump administration from freezing \$10 billion for child care and other family services program. We have linked that TRO here. On Friday, Jan. 23, 2026, a federal district court **extended the TRO** stopping the federal freeze for an additional 14 days while it considers whether to order a longer injunction that would prevent the funding freeze until a final order is issued.

On February 6th the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York granted a preliminary injunction ordering that the Trump administration cannot withhold funds and directing to remove any restrictions from CCDF, TANF, and Social Services Block Grants programs. Lastly, States are not required to submit the documents that were demanded by the Trump administration in letters that accused the five states of fraud.

IDEC, IDHS, and the Governor's Office are in constant communication, and Trish encouraged those on the call to continuously check our pages and social media channels for the latest updates. She assured although there are many unanswered questions about this alarming federal action IDEC will provide more updates as soon as they are available. To be clear - as of today, providers and families should continue to operate as usual.

Additional information on this issue and other federal updates will be shared at the Early Learning Council Federal Ad Hoc meeting held Thursday, February 26th from 11am-12pm. The link to register was put in the chat. Registration link: [2.26.26 ELC Ad Hoc Committee on Federal Resources and Programs](#)

Draft Family Engagement Framework Preview

Paige shared an update on the Draft Family Engagement Framework. She emphasized that IDEC is committed to building an equitable early childhood system that is shaped by the lived experiences, expertise, and leadership of families across Illinois. In IDEC's family engagement efforts, parents have identified barriers accessing early childhood programs and services, persistent system navigation and coordination issues, as well as a need for more culturally competent and diverse staff to advance equity across the early childhood system. The Draft Family Engagement Framework establishes a shared vision, principles, and commitments to ensure that parents and caregivers are meaningfully engaged as partners in policy, program design, and systems improvement.

Paige shared that the Framework would be presented at the Advisory Workgroup on March 2nd from 4:00-5:30 pm. The registration link was shared in the chat: <https://illinois.webex.com/weblink/register/r0ae69573474abe54e567ba2f7b344ded>

TAC Members Comments:

- TAC Member – Does parents also comprise caregivers/non-traditional family roles?
- TAC Member – Do the guiding principles also include the role of fathers/caregivers?

3. Data Analytics and Insights (DAI) Workgroup Updates – Christina Krasov, Aressa Coley, Beza Bulega, Kaitlyn McGovern, Kristen Garcia

Trish introduced Christina Krasov and Aressa Coley (Afton Partners) to give an update on the DAI workgroup. Christina thanked the Afton team and workgroup members for their contributions to the priority metrics recommendations memo.

Aressa Coley gave an update that the DAI Workgroup provided recommendations on key data metrics and outcomes IDEC must prioritize for Day 1 Readiness. Specifically, she discussed that the priority metrics will enable IDEC to understand:

- Families and providers' experience with Illinois' early childhood system

- Current gaps and inequities to accessing high-quality ECE programs
- Opportunities to enhance data systems and application processes

To review the full presentation, please visit [the IDEC website](#).

Aressa provide a high-level view of how the STEP (State, Tailor, Evaluate and Plan) Framework is organized including 1) 6 steps to assess equitable access and quality of ECEC for families and workforce, 2) essential questions to understand access to quality in ECEC, and 3) recommended metrics to quantify and track trends over time (e.g. percentage of access, etc.). She emphasized success would look like a shared vision of priority metrics, that stakeholder perspectives are integrated and that equity is embedded throughout.

Thus far, the Phase I Deliverables on Priority Metrics included input from the Family Service Workgroups and Transition Advisory Committee (TAC) to help with the development of priority metrics with essential questions.

The DAI Workgroup recommends that IDEC prioritize the following six essential questions by July 2026, to better understand how children and families experience access and quality within Illinois' early childhood system:

- EQ1. Supply: Does the existing supply meet the needs of families from priority populations?
- EQ9. Learning experience: Do workforce members receive training in supporting the needs of children from priority populations and families?
- EQ11. Learning experiences: Do children from priority populations have access to the developmental supports they need?
- EQ16. Transitions: Are children from priority populations reaching developmental milestones when transitioning to kindergarten?
- EQ18. Administration: Are there funding mechanisms to support equitable experiences for children and families?
- EQ19. Administration: Is there system-level guidance for how to support equitable experiences for children, families, and workforce members?

Each recommended priority metric was evaluated using an Equity Reflection Tool to understanding disparities, community perspectives, potential for action burden & harm, disaggregation and visibility. Aressa emphasized that the Phase 1 recommendations included 70-equity centered priority metrics across six essential question questions. Feedback from the DAI workgroup informed revisions to 36 priority metrics and an additional 24 priority metrics to ensure a comprehensive and equity-centered set of data points across six essential questions. Lastly, the DAI workgroup is applying an equity lens to data collection, data interpretation, and data use and feedback loops.

After the DAI presentation, TAC members went into small groups to discuss the following questions:

- What safeguards or guardrails are most important to ensure data is interpreted fairly and without bias?
- What would support families and providers to feel comfortable and trust how their data is being collected and used? What might undermine that trust?

- What additional equity considerations should IDEC keep in mind when it comes to data collection, interpretation, and use?

Members of the public were given opportunities to share their thoughts on the discussion questions via Padlet:

- Advocates: <https://padlet.com/kristengarcia4/DAI Presentation Advocates>
- Providers: <https://padlet.com/kristengarcia4/DAI Presentation Providers Proveedores>
- Families: <https://padlet.com/kristengarcia4/DAI Presentation Families Familias>
- Service Organizations: <https://padlet.com/kristengarcia4/DAI Presentation ServiceOrgs>
- State Local Agencies: <https://padlet.com/kristengarcia4/DAI Presentation StateLocalAgencies>
- All other roles: <https://padlet.com/kristengarcia4/DAI Presentation AllRoles>

4. Looking Ahead – Bela Moté

Bela shared that in January TAC members completed a survey before finalizing an approach for Year 3. This survey asked about TAC members preferences on meeting cadence, timing and processes. 100% of TAC members are flexible with 2 hours extended meeting times. 80% of respondents were flexible with morning meetings as needed. TAC members shared they would like the following topics covered in 2026:

- Process mapping and milestone deliverables
- Funding
- Licensing/exemptions
- IL Governance Structure
- ChiByDesign IL findings
- New IDEC guidelines
- Intermediary alignment

TAC Members expressed appreciation for sharing meeting content ahead of time and that they've noticed positive changes to TAC meeting structure. Bela thanked TAC members for completing the survey. She shared during the March TAC Meeting TAC Members will complete a deeper dive into the survey and the next steps for recommendation.

5. Looking Ahead and Next Steps

Bela also shared dates for upcoming meetings and workgroups which can be found on the IDEC website.

Workgroup Meetings:

- **Funding Design Workgroup**
 - Wednesday, February 25, 4:30-6:00 pm
- **Data, Analytics, and Insight Workgroup**
 - Thursday, February 26, 1:00-2:30 pm
- **Program Standards and Alignment Workgroup**
 - Thursday, February 26, 4:30-6:00 pm

- **Advisory Workgroup**
 - Monday, March 2, 4:00-5:30 pm
- **Supporting Multilingual Learners**
 - Tuesday March 3, 1:00-2:30 pm
- **Supporting Children with Disabilities and Developmental Delays**
 - Tuesday, March 10, 1:00-2:30 pm
- **Data, Analytics and Insights Workgroup**
 - Thursday, March 26, 1:00-2:30 pm
- **Program Standards and Alignment Workgroup**
 - Thursday, March 26, 4:30-6:00 pm
- **Advisory Workgroup, Monday**
 - March 30, 4:00-5:30 pm

Early Learning Council

- **ELC Ad Hoc Committee on Federal Resources and Programs**
 - Thursday, February 26th, 11-12pm
- **ELC Health and Home Visiting**
 - Monday, March 16, 1:30-3:00 pm

She also shared information about the next TAC meeting and Transition Listening Session:

- Follow up email to be sent next week with meeting summary.
- TAC members should reach out to Trish Rooney or Bela Moté with any feedback
 - Next TAC Meeting: March 18th, 5:30-7:00 PM
- Next Listening Session:
 - TBD

A [feedback survey link](#) was shared in the chat before the meeting was concluded.