

**Professional Development Advisory Council**

**September 4, 2024**

**Meeting Minutes**

Anna Perry	Johnna Darragh Ernst	Pam Womack
Barb Christmas	Julia Auch	Paula Schnicker Johnson
Barbara Tucker	Julie Lindstrom	Rebecca Livengood
Barbara Volpe	Kate Connor	Rebecca Pruitt
Beth Knight	Kimberlee Hendricks	Rosario Wortman
Carole Franke	Leslie Layman	Ruth Kimble
Cerathel Burgess Burnett	Lisa Downey	Sara Seitz
Christi Chadwick	Lori Harrison	Sharyl Robin
Connie Shugart	Lynn Burgett	Stephanie Hellmer
Danen Busch	Marcus Brown	Steven Sharp
Debbie Rogers Jaye	Marcy Mendenhall	Stormy Udell
Elva DeLuna	Marie Donovan	Susan Murphy
Emily Dorsey	Marilyn Toliver	Tamara Notter
Erika Mendez	Marsha Hawley	Tammy King
Gabriel Holmes	Medina Bailey	Tina Wiegel
Gwyn Moss	Mellissa Ferguson	Toni Porter
Hollie Hoole	Mercedes Mondragon	Trinita Winston
Jackie Melendez	Mikki Sherwood	Wendy Connell
Joan Longtin	Nichole Miller	Wendy Williams

**Welcome and Review of Minutes**

- **Attendees were welcomed to the zoom meeting by Johnna Darragh Ernst.**
- Carissa Hurley Davis has stepped down as the PDAC Tri-Chair. She has taken a new position outside of ISBE. She will continue as an At- Large member of PDAC.

**Review and Approval of the Minute**

- Minutes June 5, 2024
  - Minutes were approved in the chat or by show of hands.

**Orientation Materials**

- PDAC materials are located on the Gateways website under Professional Development toolbar, PDAC drop down on orientation materials page. Draft minutes are now placed on the website. This link takes you to the page directly: [PDAC Orientation Materials - Gateways to Opportunity \(ilgateways.com\)](https://ilgateways.com)
- Qualifications and Credential Committee Tri-Chair
  - Gwyn Moss was welcomed as a Qualifications and Credentials Committee Tri-Chairs.
- Recruitment FY25
  - Looking to expand PDAC diversification, including geographic representation, expertise and workforce.

## **Strategic Plan Phase X**

- Over the next few months committees will review their goals and objectives, giving priority to the goals they would like to address first, and gather information in order to make recommendations.
- PDAC-At-Large will be reviewing the strengths of the plan and overall implementation.
  - Will identify any barriers to the plan in order make sure as a whole the plan can continue to move forward in the most seamless way possible.
  - Will continue to make sure that connections are maintained to the new Department of Early Childhood.

## **Listening Session for the new Illinois Department of Early Childhood**

- This session is intended to provide a brief summary about the early childhood education and care system in Illinois.
  - Describe the need for a new Department of Early Childhood.
  - Provide updates on the transition process to the new department.
  - Offer updates on the process to the new department and build awareness.
  - Hear your perspectives on what is working well in the current system and what could be improved.
- Need for services:
  - Need for children to grow social-emotionally academically and physically during a critical time for brain development.
  - Support parents and other caregivers to participate in the workforce.
  - Provide businesses with the ability to have a consistent workforce today and a well-educated workforce in the future.
- Illinois' early childhood education and care services provide essential support to families, but access is limited:
  - Less than half of children under five can access licensed child care.
  - 9.6% of children eligible for Early Intervention services experience service delays.
  - 52% of children eligible for home visiting receive services.
- Illinois' early childhood system is complex, and a better structure is needed.
  - There is confusion about where to go for information and services.
  - Multiple agencies with duplicative processes
  - Funding challenges
- Efforts to engage parents and prioritize equity in the process of creating a new agency are already underway.
  - Engage parents early and often hear their perspectives.
  - Ensure racial diversity in work groups.
  - Developing an equity framework that provides guidance on how the Transition Advisory Committee can prioritize equity.
- Currently in phase 2 (July 2024– July 2026) with start-up, redesign, and preparing to be operational with fully operational starting in July 2026.
- During the next two years will continue with engagement to support alignment and redesign, build the capacity of the new agency while the programs and services will continue to be administered by the current agencies.

- Engagement with families is foundational in the work. Families, providers, community members, workforce, businesses, K12/Higher Ed., state and local agencies are integrated into the process as well.
- The <https://oecd.illinois.gov> website gives access to resources, materials and reports about the early childhood system, meeting minutes and materials and listening sessions.

### **Breakout Rooms**

Each room will review and give input to the following questions:

- In your experience with early childhood services, what has worked well? What have you valued about your experience and would like to remain the same?
- In your experience with 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 and plan for a family-centered system?
- What else is on your mind with the transition to a new agency?
  - Feedback from the breakout groups is included in the attached document (Attachment 1)
  - Overarching themes included:
    - Creation of the credentials by the state was foundational and done well and can be used by higher education to create consistency for students.
    - Data systems used across early childhood (DCFS/IDHS) are not consistent.
    - The new department gives the opportunity to start new, need to take advantage of this opportunity to build a system that works better for Illinois.
      - Must ensure that no one area gets lost in the reorganization and must have transparency.
    - K-12 is unaware of the transition and new agency formation; more outreach to them about the change.
    - Need to be weary of being too reactive.
    - Positive about Preschool for All/Preschool for All Expansion.
    - Hope that blended funding can be improved and streamlined for implementation.
    - Hope that technology can be more user friendly and efficient as possible for families.
    - Need for multi-lingual pre-k workforce.
    - Need for clarity and communication on the process for stakeholders – messaging needs to be simple and assessable.
    - Families need to be the center of work.

### **Committee Updates**

- Financial Supports
  - Developing a recommendation for dual language teachers to be compensated in the SMART START Quality Supports wage scale at a higher rate.
- Workforce Development & Pathways
  - The committee reviewed goals and objectives and prioritized Goal 3 (Develop systems for identifying and sharing high quality, innovative practices that strengthen recruitment and retention for the prenatal to age 5 workforce) and Goal 2 (Develop targeted communication and messaging tools) as first priorities for the committee.

- **Qualifications and Credentials**
  - Goals, objectives, and timelines were reviewed in order to prioritize the work of the committee. One priority is how to expand the competency infrastructure which would include working with the higher education committee. A new QC Tri-Chair will soon be announced.
- **Higher Education**
  - Work is centering on elevating and identifying the innovations that have been occurring over the past few years thanks to the work of the Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity (ECACE) in higher education.

### **State Agency Report**

- **Illinois Department of Human Services – Gabriel Holmes**
  - Currently working on responses to the Federal Officers regarding the State Plan.
  - The first round of applications ended July 31, 2024. More than 4,000 applications were received, and at this time more than 2,000 have been processed. More than \$13 million dollars has been awarded.
  - Quality Unit has been working with INCCRRA and the Division of Early Childhood to support the redesign of the external facing ExceleRate website.

### **Adjourn**



## Attachment 1 Breakouts

### # 1

#### **Q1: In your experience....what has worked well? What have you valued about your experience and would want to stay the same?**

--For the workforce (Tammy Notter): The recent scholarship funding for students in the incumbent workforce made a very big difference. AND: Good resources now available for how to handle various funding streams, and helpful to CBO programs' accessing resources quickly and effectively.

--Medina Bailey: DCFS' online background portal for clearances has been a boon. Being able to check the portal and get immediate confirmations has been vital.

--Tammy Notter: More transparency among the three agencies is necessary and must happen when they're one.

#### **Q2: In your experience with EC services, what would you like to see improved with the new agency?**

--Lisa Downey: Given this unique opportunity to offer feedback, let's tell them to blow up what we've been doing and start from scratch. (a) We know the scholarship worked. Let's build that again. We need to put money wherever we can to make it work the best that it can.

--Marie—Make the 'new reality' what all children **really** need, rather than second-guessing and think, "Oh, but we won't have money to do that...." Dream big!

--Kimberlee—The wait time for EI children to receive services is abysmally long. Hope this will improve with the new agency's launch. This must be a priority.

--Others on the call agreed on this priority

--Tammy King—How to universally identify children who need multiple services, regardless of the funding source for their seat. CBOs aren't getting much support for identifying and supporting EL children needing additional services and they desperately need help in doing this.

--Tammy Notter—CBOs also need to be able to utilize the speech paths and OTs, so it's more *universal* care that's needed than ever before.

--Sharyl—It's a nightmare keeping track of the qualifications for all the different staff in various roles.

--Tammy King—We don't have enough bilingual staff members and need to find ways to get more people into the profession from the communities being served.

#### **Q3: What more can the transition team do to focus more on equity?**

--Tammy K—They're doing stuff for Spanish but not for other languages. In linguistic minority communities, we need to communicate we're there for *all* of them. We need more families from different language groups feeling comfortable enrolling, having somewhere to enroll.

--Kimberlee--Knowing how to access childcare remains so hard, there could be spaces but the antiquated systems we must use make parents visit each/every school to find out if there's a seat. Let's exploit the technology and create a dashboard that parents can use to find out where to go, all in one place.

--Tammy K—We're the first contact new families have, we in ECE, so we must know both the people we're serving but also the resources to direct them to, so having integrated systems is key.

--Medina—Transportation is a major issue for childcare centers (schools usually have transport but CBOs, etc. do not ). We can't extend our reach because we don't have transportation for families to avail themselves of our centers. It's a huge factor.

#### **Q4: Engaging geographically, other ideas how to better engage with them?**

--Medina—We're still at a point where COVID is still hurting us. Kids are being kept home. Others are watching children. In Chicago, agencies go door to door to enroll but we need other initiatives to put us on the ground to build awareness of our centers.

--Lisa—Transportation is indeed a big factor especially for the northwest and other downstate areas. So is staggered timing of the transportation. Too: Non-traditional care for shift workers is critical (e.g., night nurseries), don't have enough of it. The availability of bilingual care in rural areas is a significant need, let's not forget this. Another big issue during COVID: access to high-speed internet remains an issue for those in rural areas, so they can't get internet access to do their own research to find care and other services.

--Wendy—Working in rural areas, knows how far parents have to they can't get a school district's pk services because they can't get their children back and forth, e.g., due to inflexible work schedules.

**Q5: What else is on your mind about the new agency?**

--Medina—We need to know that whatever needs we have and communicate get channeled to where they need to learn about them. Concern that such a big agency might not have effective or efficient information sharing.

--Tammy King—The K-12 world isn't aware of the new agency. And: Given we have the full-time kindergarten mandate coming up in two years, they must get better connected to us in early care and education.

--Marie—Concerned higher ed might get lost in the shuffle, especially their role in professional development for staff.

--Lisa—Concerned family childcare also might get lost, need to think about them whenever we have conversations about compensation and quality care.

#2

**1)** In your experience with early childhood services, what has worked well? What have you valued about your experience and would like to remain the same?

As a quality specialist, I work with providers and being able to keep the individualization is important. The state is diverse, and we want to make sure we are responsive to all parts of the state, no matter what part of the state. There are still a fairly diverse options for care – community base, home base, school based – but we are glad that styles are able to offer choices for families. We want families to be able to choose. We must make sure that the places children and families go to are high quality – and make sure that the services are high quality and available in their community – and funded! All the opportunities for individual voice – like PDAC and others – so that providers can still give voice to what we're doing and what we're doing. We want it to be proactive. Individuality for each staff is respected – keep the communities together. Keep an understanding of the difference between the rural, collar, urban, areas. We know what works. These are all factors that are not assumed but represented.

**2)** In your experience with early childhood services, what has not worked well? What would you like to see improved with the creation of the new agency?

Be wary of being too reactive and not anticipating what is going to happen. Communities may have a lot of resources and sometimes that makes it more competitive, rather than collaborative – we need to think about how to work together. Leadership makes a difference about how we can all work more collaboratively. We feel like DCFS is working against us. We're trying to put policies in place, and they are looking at rules. The licensing system has a lot of accountabilities and no consistency. We need a culture shift since there is so much angst. We get busy and policies get lost that we have forgotten the children – we need to focus on the children. Over time we've gotten so busy we have lost sight of that. So rarely are we asked about how the children, families and teachers are. We need better policy changes – background changes – different regulations – little communication happens. No knowledge about what is happening. We are losing the lens of quality – there is a very narrow view of what quality looks like. The perception of quality is low. Quality is not measured by a piece of paper (degrees). Flexibility in funding is important – not every program is the same or has the same needs.

The youth are not supported after school. We forget about the children who grow up. Want to get rid of after school programs because of limited funding. What happens to the workforce. School-age children are forgotten children. Where are they if they don't have a place to go?

**3)** What more could the transition team do to focus on equity (including racial equity) and plan for a family-centered system?

In addition to racial equity, in the quad cities we have so many different communities there are no services in some area – there are no opportunities. There is no before and after care available. Districts can't cross county lines.

Focus on equity of available services – like no internet service, no care available. In rural areas there is no licensed child care. I don't even have high speed internet available where I live. We don't have a Target in 12 counties.

When we talk about equity we need to think about income inequity. It is different for each community. We must be aware of what is lacking.

Accessibility for families who speak different languages and others who are like them. There are systemic barriers that prevent representation – a system that forces college courses. The system is not supportive of what different teachers need.

**4) What else is on your mind with the transition to a new agency?**

We want more options. We need to acknowledge what quality care for children is – we want to offer options for what that means (philosophies, theories, approaches).

We need to focus on children with disabilities. Right now, there's not enough.

#3

1) In your experience with early childhood services, what has worked well? What have you valued about your experience and would like to remain the same?

- Creation of credentials - credentials brought consistency to classes offered throughout higher education. It created a pathway and a correlation that provided consistency for providers across the state. And to see the alignment across universities. We have a solid structure that shows us how they are aligned.

2) In your experience with early childhood services, what has not worked well? What would you like to see improved with the creation of the new agency?

- Career Lattice that outlines job opportunities as they get credentials and degrees. Aligning job requirements with credential levels.
- Data collection across systems – especially DCFS collection of data, if it has not been put into a system that could be used.
- Creation of new agency allow for a robust entry system for parents to use. Needs to be user friendly.
- Better education on the federal program of Head Start and what it really is and what it means for our state.
- Two distinct pathways - Teachers that will be licensed and teachers that are not licensed. Does it make sense to have two separate pathways and programs.
- How do we offer students the licensure route without making them quit jobs. Or being able to not have to test, if you are not a good test taker.
- Required child development knowledge for individuals in charge of licensing.
- Ways to review proposals for state systems (not from a financial standpoint) but from the early childhood development standpoint.

3) What more could the transition team do to focus on equity (including racial equity) and plan for a family-centered system?

- Challenges with passing the licensure exam, maybe not the best test option, and not an equitable option. People who create the test for early childhood licensure should have background in early childhood development (Pearson)

- Language challenges and variations of languages. Look at state demographics for languages spoken, they are changing rapidly.
- Recruiting qualified staff, even 10x more difficult to find staff that are bilingual and a special push may need to be made for other languages outside of Spanish ) French, Arabic, middle east, etc.).
- Having teachers that look and speak the language of the children. Access to scholarships that provide priority to recruit ethnically diverse and language diverse teachers.
- Possible alternative paths for teachers who speak a second language. Or highlight the paths that exist.
- Opening a center in Beardstown with 23 languages spoken by families. They are including parents on the path and getting them involved.
- Equitable access comes down to finances. Higher ed has created the program and supports for equitable access, and that funding was eliminated, and it is a challenge to recruit without these funds.
- Relating to language, we need to be careful to give credit to students who come into EC classrooms for the language they DO know, even if it is not English - Spanish, Arabic, Black English, whatever it is, they should not be thought of as deficient because they do not speak as much English as their native English-speaking peers.

#4

1) In your experience with early childhood services, what has worked well? What have you valued about your experience and would like to remain the same?

- appreciate the PFA/PFAE model – high quality instructors, strong curriculum, benefits for students/families, model to remain with more of it/increase availability
- communication between EI and EC services is important to maintain for transitions for children and families – continue to maintain for that
- ExceleRate – maintain, given benefits for children and families
- Workforce specifically, PD supports; continue to work on alignment of qualifications and offering PD
- Working with children ELL and providing programming that is respectful of that; need more growth in that area (e.g. consistency in language, speech supports)
- Work with Community Inclusion Teams (CIT) – work with school districts and willingness to be involved and inclusive; need to be able to expand

2) In your experience with early childhood services, what has not worked well? What would you like to see improved with the creation of the new agency?

- Optimistic conversation about blended funding – but often clunky – therefore leads to staff turnover or departures for more unified settings/systems; hoping new system has less complicated structure/less hoops, streamlined administrative model
- Minimize delay in access to services potentially caused by administrative complications
- Maximize technology to make process for child care as user friendly and efficient as possible
- Make sure workforce prep (higher ed) is as comprehensive and reflective of current family needs as possible – e.g. inclusion, trauma-informed, etc.
- Structure (incentives/disincentives) for infant/toddler workforce

3) What more could the transition team do to focus on equity (including racial equity) and plan for a family-centered system?

- Lack of teachers who have a multilingual cert at pre-k level with special ed; not a timely program to complete

4) What else is on your mind with the transition to a new agency?

- Posed as research with resulting action items, build on why people stay in the field; while continuing to work on compensation

#5

1.) In your experiences with ECE services, what has worked?

- Communication- we are all on the same page. There are written documents, videos, listening groups- this information is so helpful. The communication has been collaborative and transparent (IDHS Smart Start grants)
- DCFS Licensing Reps- I know they are not consistent throughout the state however, in our area, they are a trusted source of information
- Illinois ECE innovations: Smart Start grants, Quality Support grants, Apprenticeship pilot programs, and wage increases. All so important for moving the system forward
- Innovation by listening to the workforce. (IDHS) By bringing providers in, listening to the workforce to find solutions, the field feels heard.

2.) In your experiences with ECE services, what has not worked well?

- Birth to Five systems are disjointed from the school districts, they are two completely different systems. I know this is going to be a heavy lift to integrate, yet it is necessary to achieve our goals.
- Teacher prep system, there is not a clear pathway in the higher ed system.
- Depending on the funding source, there are significant pay differences for teachers/staff
- Transparency in accessing services- we don't have one hub of information
- We are not treating the whole child with a continuum of services.
- School age children are not in this system, yet they are part of a family
- Gateways website has technology glitches and errors make it difficult for providers to get what need
- Providers who are licensed and getting trained, some DCFS reps have different processes of printing training certificates and others are not. This is a time suck for ECE directors

3.) What more could the transition team do to focus on equity (including racial equity) and plan for a family-centered system?

- Gap in family child care to care for black and brown children. We need to meet small business needs so people can care for children
- 50% data slide- what is the plan to find the other 50% and engage the parents and children into the ECE system.
- Language and cultural barriers for families. We need more parent advocates as liaisons to support families.
- There used to be a universal 'phone bank' for translation services in Illinois. This is no longer available, and it was helpful in engaging with our multi-language families.
- Trying to engage our rural communities and those in child care deserts. We need to promote family child care homes to open their ECE small business.
- Written documents, videos, and other media so multi-language learners and their families can build their skills, language, and confidence in the ECE system. We need to see real life examples so families can feel more comfortable and welcome in our system.
- Equity means increasing compensation for our ECE staff
- Family advocates who can support multi-language families by taking them to the grocery store, obtain immunizations, and learn about Illinois. Right now, that only happens when you are specific programming
- Continuity of care- once a child leaves the ECE system there is lack of support in the k-12 system and families are left to fend for themselves

4.) What else is on your mind with the transition to a new agency?

- I am afraid I am going to miss a meeting, and it is hard to keep track of all the changes that are occurring. We need a streamlined process for communications
- Process- who *actually gets to decide* on what is changing, moving, and retaining in the new Department
- We are taking three free standing agencies: what is the process on how to meld cultures and build a positive climate when forming the new agency. How do we build shared values?
- Communication – what does 'Day 1' look like but what does year 5 look like as well
- Relationships matter- don't lose the people in the process