Smart Start Workforce Grants and Smart Start Quality Support
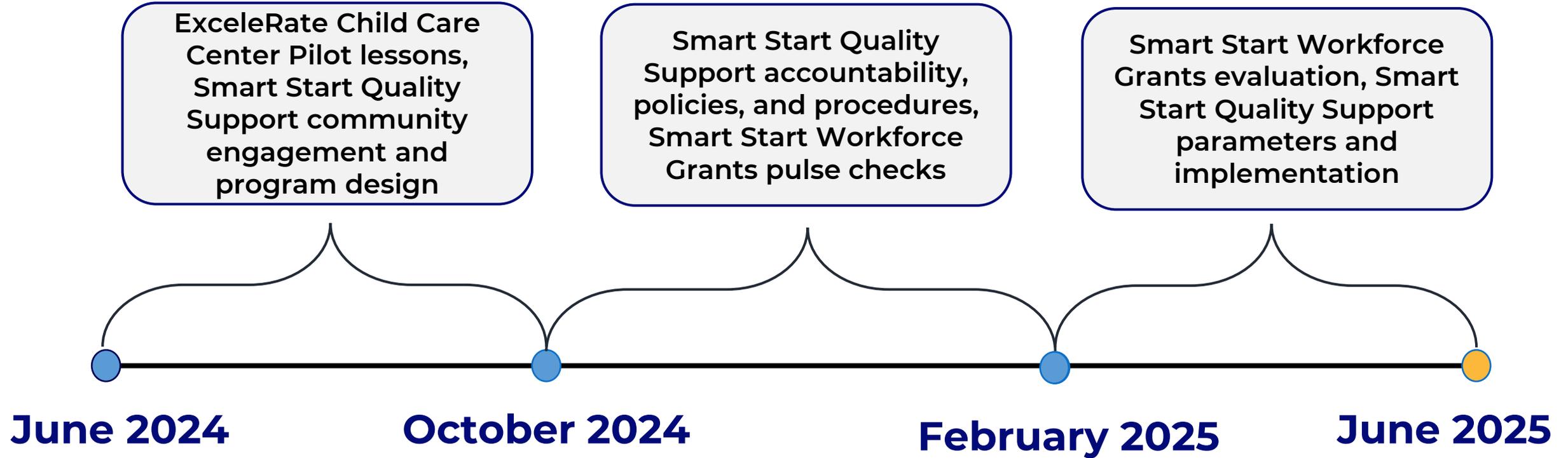
Ad Hoc Advisory Group Meeting #15

June 7, 2024

GOALS

- Share updates about Smart Start Workforce Grants

- Share about history of the Smart Start Quality Support Program

- Describe planning process and community engagement for the Quality Support Program this year

- Discuss plans to update the committee name, charge, and membership

- Hear perspectives on Smart Start Quality Support Program

AGENDA

- Introductions & reminders

- April Ad hoc reflections and follow-up

- Smart Start Workforce Grants

- Smart Start Quality Support Program
  - Background
  - Future goals and direction

- Discussion breakout groups

- Committee structure and membership update

- Next Steps

A year of planning year for Smart Start Quality Support Program expansion

ExceleRate Child Care Center Pilot lessons, Smart Start Quality Support community engagement and program design

Smart Start Quality Support accountability, policies, and procedures, Smart Start Workforce Grants pulse checks

Smart Start Workforce Grants evaluation, Smart Start Quality Support parameters and implementation

June 2024

October 2024

February 2025

June 2025

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Build **understanding and alignment** on strategic intent and goals

Provide **input and feedback** throughout the design process

Review and pressure-test relevant cost analyses, potential policy options, and administrative options

Surface any **potential risks and opportunities**

Support overall plan development and **champion it among stakeholder groups**

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Common Themes

- Providers will need support with understanding eligibility for workforce grants and the application process.

- Providers will also need clarity on allowable uses of funds, such as whether funds can pay for staff wages outside of the funded classrooms and if funding can be used for benefits.

- IDHS should monitor Smart Start Workforce Grants implementation to understand common challenges for providers and gaps for participating programs.

Questions and Concerns

- Members asked questions about the CCAP enrollment percentage and classroom enrollment minimums.

- Members raised concern about unintended consequences for programs with layered funding.

- Members were concerned about programs who are not eligible and the potential impact on the overall cost of child care.

- Members wondered how many/which programs will be left out given the change in CCAP enrollment eligibility and the classroom funding model.

The budget for Smart Start Child Care passed the Illinois General Assembly and was signed into law as a part of the SFY 25 budget!
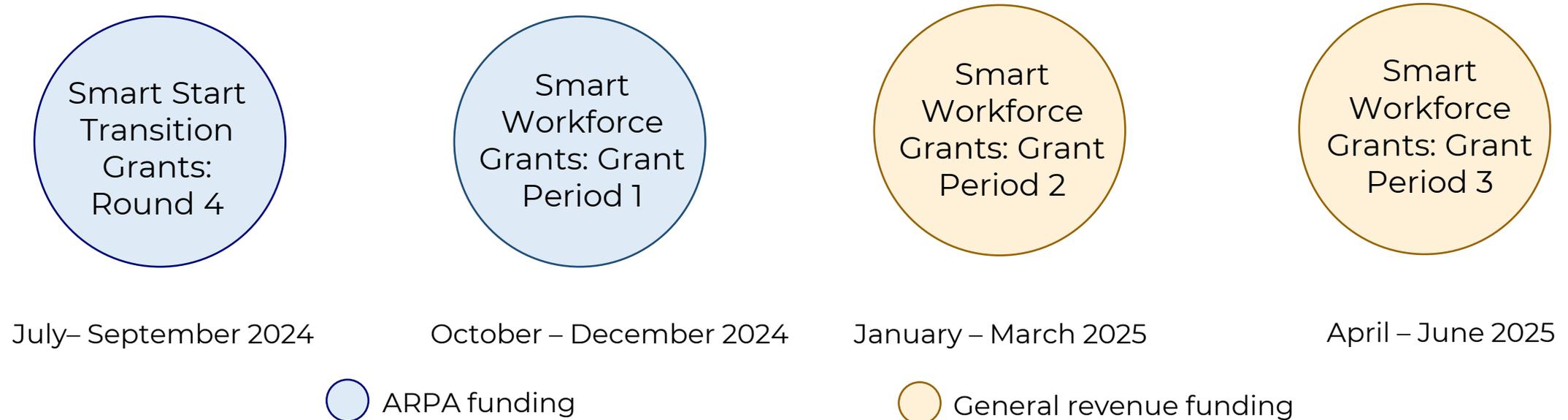

Smart Start Child Care received bipartisan support in the General Assembly and passed the Governor's proposed budget for Smart Start Workforce Grants, Smart Start Quality Support Program, and the Smart Start Apprenticeship Program.

- **$110 M** GRF for Smart Start Workforce Grants
- **$10 M** GRF for Smart Start Quality Support Program
- **$2 M** GRF for Smart Start Apprentice Program

The FY25 budget funds Smart Start Workforce Grants with ARPA funding and state general revenue funding (GRF) appropriations

- **$200M** is the annualized cost of the Smart Start Workforce Grant program in State Fiscal Year 2024 and State Fiscal Year 2025

- **ARPA funding** will cover Smart Start Transition Grants for July – September 2024 and Smart Start Workforce Grants for Grant Period 1 (October – December 2024)

- GRF funding for Smart Start Workforce Grants begins in January, so Governor Pritzker's budget proposal **represents half of the annualized cost**

Smart Start Transition Grants: Round 4	Smart Workforce Grants: Grant Period 1	Smart Workforce Grants: Grant Period 2	Smart Workforce Grants: Grant Period 3
July– September 2024	October – December 2024	January – March 2025	April – June 2025

⬤ ARPA funding   ⬤ General revenue funding

Questions and discussion from Ad Hoc members informed updates, clarifications, and training for Smart Start Workforce Grants

Policy updates: waivers	Developed resources: Detailed FAQs	Training and technical assistance
• Programs that do not meet classroom enrollment minimums may apply for a **limited** or **annual waiver.**	• INCCRRA released two detailed FAQ resources – one specifically for centers and one specifically for family child care and family group child care • FAQ resources will be updated as needed	• Local experts embedded at CCR&Rs are trained to support providers with the application process • Additional training opportunities and resources will be available via Gateways

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Programs may be awarded Smart Start Workforce Grant funds for classrooms that meet minimum enrollment criteria

	Age group	Enrollment minimum
Center-based programs	Infants/toddler classrooms	4 children
	Two-year-old classrooms (and transitional 2-3 year-old classrooms)	8 children
	3-5 year-old classrooms	12 children
	Family child care/Family group child care	4 children

Programs may request a waiver if they do not currently meet the classroom enrollment minimum requirement

Limited waiver

- Provides programs an opportunity to **raise their enrollment to meet the minimum requirements over the course of one quarter.**
  - Center-based programs may be granted 1 waiver per classroom, with a maximum of 3 waivers in the first grant year. Family child care/family group child care programs may be granted 1 waiver in a grant year.
- TA provider will visit to learn more about the need for the waiver and help programs work toward meeting the requirement.

Annual Waiver

- **Allows programs who are licensed for below the classroom minimum requirement to participate** in Smart Start Workforce Grants
  - Classrooms with annual waivers will receive a reduced award amount ($3,250 quarterly for preschool classrooms in SFY 25).
  - Family child care/family group child care programs with annual waivers are not eligible for assistant funding.
- DCFS licensing letter or statement from DCFS confirming capacity required for verification and waivers will be reviewed each fiscal year.

Additional detail on the timeline for grant applications was also released

Application Round	Application /Opt-In Period	Deadline for Documentation	Funding Released	Funding Use Period	Quarterly Reporting Deadline
Round 1	July 1 - July 31 2024	August 14, 2024	September 2024	October - December 2024	January 15, 2025
Round 2	October 1 - October 31 2024	November 14, 2024	December 2024	January - March 2025	April 15, 2025
Round 3	January 2 - January 31, 2025	February 14, 2025	March 2025	April - June 2025	July 15, 2025

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Efforts to clarify concerns related to layered funders are underway

- Connected with Head Start Collaboration Office and Head Start Association and reviewed data to understand system implications of Smart Start Workforce Grants

- Reviewed Early Childhood Block Grant cost survey data to understand implications for Preschool for All/Prevention Initiative programs

- Invited layered funding programs to share potential impact of Smart Start Workforce Grants on their program

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Smart Start Quality Support Program

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Smart Start Quality Support Program began as the ExceleRate Child Care Center Pilot Program in 2020

Initiated by the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development as part of Illinois' **Preschool Development Grant Birth to Five.**
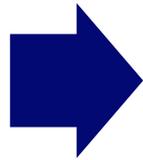
Designed to test:

- Contract funding method
- Additional supports for Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI)
- Execution of new standards
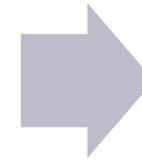
Includes:

- **34** Licensed child care centers
- CCAP Region 2
- At least **40% of enrolled children participating in CCAP**

In FY 24, the ExceleRate Child Care Center Pilot became the Smart Start Quality Support Program

The Smart Start Quality Support Program intended to:

Pay staff members wages that honor their credentials	Funds support programs to implement a wage ladder where staff earn increased compensation for credentials.
Improve staffing patterns	Participating centers may use funds to hire additional staff above minimum licensing standards
Offer activities to support continuous quality improvement	Activities include 1-1 coaching and a community of practice for directors, using tools like Environmental Rating Scales and Plan-Do-Review processes

For Smart Start Quality Support Pilot, "teaching staff" is defined as directors, teachers and assistant teachers

Several evaluations have found that the pilot resulted in positive outputs for staff and providers.

The number of staff at participating sites grew.

Teaching staff at participating sites earned additional credentials.

Turnover at participating sites decreased, particularly for those individuals who earned a new credential.

Qualitative feedback identified overall positive impacts of the program, as well as opportunities for improvement.

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Our goal in SFY25 is to propose a recommendation to expand Smart Start Quality Support program in SFY26.

Build on lessons learned from Quality Support Pilot Program

Expand to reach more programs

Provide resources to support quality in child care programs across Illinois

The Smart Start Quality Support Program can build on Smart Start Workforce Grants to progress toward quality
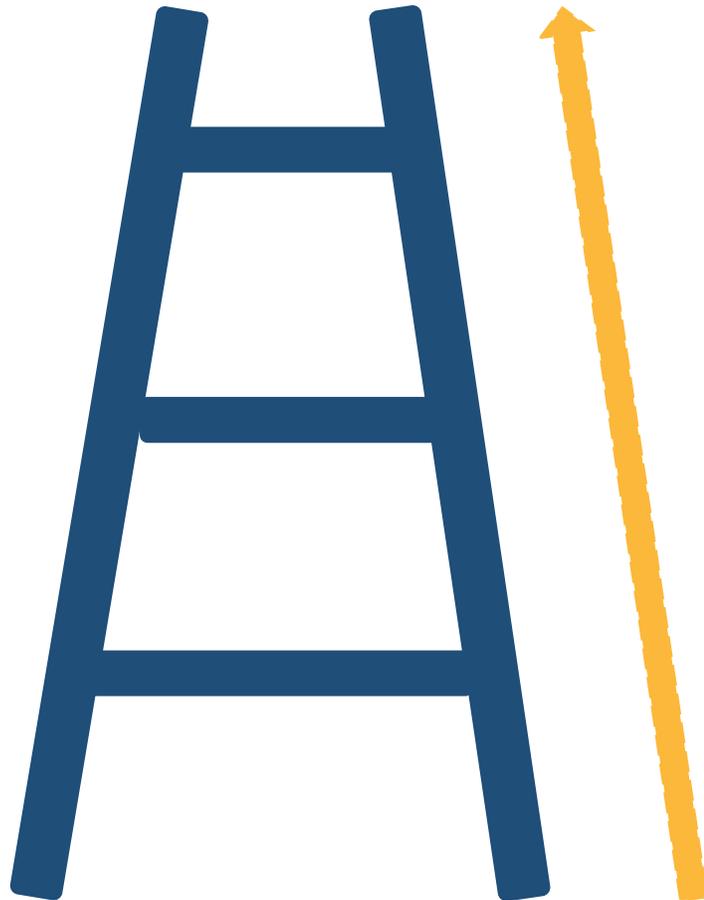
Smart Start Quality Support Program
Support child care programs committed to enhancing their quality

Smart Start Workforce Grants
Raise wages to promote program stability and staff recruitment and retention

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Quality support program will support pathway to quality

GOAL

Support and adequately fund the pathway to higher quality **with a focus on equity**

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First shared December 2022

CURRENT STATE

Quality improvement is needed statewide, but not all providers have what they need to jump into rigorous PFA/HS standards	There are not enough PFA/HS funds for all providers that would like to implement higher quality standards

INTENDED PROGRAM OUTCOMES

Child care workers with higher credentials will receive higher compensation tied to those credentials	Programs will be better positioned to successfully apply for PFA/PI funding with improved structural quality

CURRENT PROGRAM APPROACH

Provide funding for more robust staffing patterns and participation in PD/coaching	Provide funding to increase compensation for providers with higher credentials

The Smart Start Quality Support Program can help programs fund "structural quality"

Fund quality improvement through pay increases for credentials and degrees

Fund improved ratios and group sizes above licensing standards

Fund support staff (admin assistants, specialists, etc.)

Fund staff supervision and training

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First shared December 2022

Key questions for us to consider during the design process

- What aspects of quality do we want to focus on in this grant?

- Who will be eligible for this program and what is needed to participate?

- How can participating programs use funding?

- How will this program interact with other funding opportunities?

- What would enable Smart Start Quality Support Program to become a pathway to other funded programs with high quality expectations (PFA/Head Start)?

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Ad hoc and community engagement will help design a recommendation to expand the Smart Start Quality Support Program

July – August 2024   Focus groups for targeted audiences
- Potential key audiences: current quality support grantees, programs that participate in CCAP, programs in different regions of the state, programs that have not engaged in QRIS, programs in different QRIS circles of quality

September 2024   Share key findings from community engagement

Fall 2024   Determine Quality Support design with ad hoc committee

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Small Group Discussion

We will split into **four** groups to hear from you and respond to these questions:

- What stands out to you about the plan to update the Smart Start Quality Support Program?

- What is most important to prioritize in developing a recommendation to expand Smart Start Quality Support?

- When it comes to community engagement, what groups should we engage? Who might be able to help with outreach?

- Whose voice is missing from the Quality Support conversations who should be engaged as ad hoc members/participants?

Committee Structure and Membership Update

Smart Start Child Care Ad hoc Committee will update our name, charge, and membership in July

Current: Child Care Contracts Ad Hoc Committee

- Informs design of Smart Start Workforce Grants

New: Smart Start Child Care Ad Hoc Committee

- Informs of design of the Smart Start Quality Support Program
- Informs implementation of Smart Start Workforce Grants

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Membership will transition during Summer 2024, as initial planning and community engagement for Smart Start Quality Support begins.

Membership transition
(June 2024 – August 2024):

Current members will be given the opportunity to continue or retire their membership.

New members will diversify perspectives including family child care and family group child care.

New member orientation held in July

Ad Hoc Committee meetings
(September 2024 – June 2025)

Meetings will likely occur every other month. Time of meeting will be determined based on members' preferences.

Meetings will be hosted virtually and continue to welcome engagement from non-members.

Next Steps

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What's next for the Ad hoc?

- FY 25 Membership and Purpose Update
  - Recruitment and recommitments – *June – August*
  - Fill out the interest form if you are interested in FY25 membership:
    - [Smart Start Child Care Advisory Committee Interest Form English](#)
    - [Comité Asesor de Cuidado Infantil Smart Start](#)

- Next Meeting: August 2 *(time TBD)*
  - Meeting topic: Quality Support Program Design

- Open Survey for Feedback:
  - https://forms.gle/3DPPyPUcPQiTgbwX9

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