

Illinois Department of Early Childhood (IDEC): One Year In – Reflections and the Road Ahead

July 15, 2025



Fighting for the
well-being of Illinois'
youngest children.





Spanish Translation Access / Acceso a la traducción al español

- Thank you to our fantastic Spanish interpreter!
- Please click on the interpretation icon at the bottom of your Zoom screen if you would like to listen to the meeting in Spanish.
- ¡Gracias a nuestro fantástico intérprete de español!
- Por favor hagan clic en el icono de globo en la parte inferior de su pantalla de Zoom si desean escuchar la reunión en español.



Today's Agenda

1. Introduction
2. Reflections on IDEC's First Year
3. IDEC's Future Vision
4. Panel: Voices from the Field
5. Audience Q&A
6. Closing Remarks and Call to Action

Note: This event will be recorded. / Este evento será grabado.





Meet Our Moderator and Panelists

MODERATOR



Neoma Nagahawatte

Assistant Advocacy Director, Illinois Action for Children
We, the Village Coalition Coordinator

PANELISTS



Dr. Teresa Ramos
IDEC Secretary



Ann Whalen
IDEC Chief Transition
Design Officer



Ruth Van Duzer
Scott Child & Family Center,
Assistant Site Manager



DeCarla Burton
Jump Smart Learning
Academy Director



Marianne Bernardonni
Goddard Schools,
North Aurora Dir. of Operations



Mykela Collins
Parent Leader and
Advocate





IDEC Updates

Dr. Teresa Ramos, Secretary

Ann Whalen, Chief Transition Design Officer

- ✔ Easier for Parents
- ✔ Simplicity for Providers
- ✔ More cohesive informed state

Context and Background

In June 2025, the Department of Early Childhood Act was signed into law establishing the Illinois Department of Early Childhood (IDEC) to unite the majority of early childhood services into one place. This will make it easier for families to access critical services and for stronger coordination between the various early childhood programs and services provided by the state.

IDEC will officially launch as a fully functioning state agency starting July 1, 2026, continuing Governor Pritzker's commitment to make Illinois the best state to raise a family.

To do this, we must make early childhood education and care services **simpler**, **better**, and **fairer** for families with young children.



Early Education and Care Services will Move, and Broader Family and School Support Will Remain at Home Agencies.

IL Dept. of Human Services

- Child Care
- Migrant & Seasonal Head Start
- Head Start Collaboration Office
- Early Intervention
- Home Visiting
 - State Home Visiting
 - MIECHV
 - Maternal Child Home Visiting

- Better Birth Outcomes
- Family Case Mgmt.
- High Risk Infant Follow Up
- Refugee & Immigrant Services
- SNAP
- WIC
- TANF
- Etc.

IL State Board of Education

- Early Childhood Block Grant
 - Preschool for All (PFA)
 - Preschool for All Expansion
 - Prevention Initiative (PI)

- K-12 Evidence Based Funding
- Special Ed.
- Student Assessments
- Nutrition
- Title I CACFP / School Lunch
- KIDS Assessment

- Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE)*

IL Dept. of Child & Family Services

- Child Care Licensing

- Child Protective Services
- Adoption & Guardianship
- Institution and Group Home Services
- Investigative Services

GOECD

- Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH)

Programs Moving

Programs Staying

*Program not included in the initial legislative package. Additional discussions with USDOE and state stakeholders are needed to identify the best approach to support children and families moving forward.

Currently the system is *too complex and burdensome*.



Children, Families, Providers This Means:

- ✗ **In-putting the same information repeatedly**
- ✗ **Requirement of faxing paperwork and sending paper copies**
- ✗ **Difficulty applying and sustaining multiple state funding streams**
- ✗ Long waitlists
- ✗ Confusion on where to access resources
- ✗ Deciphering unclear eligibility requirements
- ✗ Struggle to find educators and culturally responsive care
- ✗ Too much time spent on administration and not on children



For The State, This Means:

- ✗ Inability to track how much funding is going to providers across multiple funding streams
- ✗ Inability to deliver services equitably and efficiently in ways that make it simpler
- ✗ Duplicated counts in data systems (no clear picture of what services a single child is accessing/unable to access)
- ✗ Pressure to loosen safety standards to ease stressors for providers
- ✗ Inefficiencies in processing request (when pen and paper or faxed!)

Over 5,200 Touchpoints

Bi-monthly
Listening
Sessions

CHIBYDESIGN
Design Sessions

Transition Advisory
Committee

Full Early
Learning Council

Early Learning
Council Committees

Child Care
Advisory Council

Illinois Interagency
Council on Early
Intervention

ECACE Consortium
Advisory Council

Workgroups

Other Regional or
Program Specific
Advisories

Listening Survey on
IL ECE Governance
Transition

Regional Listening
Sessions

= Regional
Listening Session
Report

More to
come!

**THERE ARE MULTIPLE OPPORTUNITIES TO ENGAGE
AND GATHER INPUT FROM DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES**

Early Priorities Build Toward Future Equity and Efficiency



Starting in FY27, IDEC will administer ~\$3 Billion dollars in program funding

PHASE 2: BUILDING ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY AND REDESIGNING PROGRAM SERVICE DELIVERY IS UNDERWAY.

Phase 1:
Pre-Launch

Phase 2:
**Start-Up, Redesign,
and Build Capacity**

Phase 3:
Fully Operational

December '23-July '24

July '24 – July '26

July '26+

Phase 2: FY 2025

Build internal operational capacity

- Hiring and Staff
- Facilities
- Budget and Fiscal
- Technology and Data
- Change Management
- Project Management

Continue policy-program alignment and redesign processes

- Focus engagement and feedback loops
- Develop recommendations
- Support from Transition Workgroups

Phase 2: FY 2026

Build internal operational capacity

- Soft launch systems needed for Day 1
- Continue change managements support for impacted teams

Policy-program alignment and redesign processes

- Advance necessary legislation to enact recs
- Shift and focus engagement and feedback loops

PHASE 3: FULLY OPERATIONAL AND REDESIGNING PROGRAM SERVICE DELIVERY IS UNDERWAY.

Phase 1:
Pre-Launch

Phase 2:
**Start-Up, Redesign,
and Build Capacity**

Phase 3:
**Fully Operational
& Service Redesign**

December '23-July '24

July '24 – July '26

July '26-July 27-July-28

Phase 3: FY 2027

Troubleshooting transitions & new ways of working

- Phased roll out of technology and data systems
- Robust implementation of new trainings & change Management
- Continued Project Management

Continue policy-program alignment and redesign processes

- Prepare for new funding system
- Advance additional legislation/rule making to enact recs
- Continue focus engagement and feedback loops

Phase 3: FY 2028

Build external operational capacity

- Continue systems launch and integration .
- Ongoing implementation of new trainings & change Management
- Continued Project Management

Policy-program alignment and redesign processes

- Advance new necessary legislation to enact recs
- Shift and focus engagement and feedback loops

4 Buckets for Phase 2 Years 1 & 2

Bucket	Description
Agency Operations	Ensuring agency operations are running for a seamless transition.
Transition Legacy Staff	From impact bargaining to reorganizing leadership in a newly established org chart.
Data & Technology	Aligning data architecture, acquiring new technology, testing technology, and ensuring interconnectedness.
Redesign Service Delivery	Redesigning programs to maximize efficiency and equity, with improvements day one and over several years.

DEVELOPING THE FUTURE OF SERVICE DELIVERY

Macro Steps in the Transition Innovation Lifecycle



Initial Outcomes for New Agency



**Information
navigation and
accessibility**



**Cross-
collaboration and
communication**



**Holistic
well-being**



**Professional
development and
support**



**Dynamic learning
environments and
diverse learning
needs**

Committees and Initiatives

- Transition Advisory Council
- Executive Committee
- Community Equity & Access Committee
- Family Advisory Committee
- Health and Home Visiting Committee
- Integration & Alignment Committee
- Quality & Workforce Committee
- Research, Evaluation & Data Committee
- Service Blueprint

Transparent & Timely Communication

- External Newsletter Launch
- Social Channels Rollout
- Website Updates
- Listening Session Reports

Upcoming Meetings

- 7/15 - Transition Advisory Council
- 7/17 - Data, Analytics, and Insights (DAI) Workgroup
- 7/22 - Supporting Children with Disabilities and Developmental Delays Workgroup Meeting
- 7/23 - Funding Design Workgroup
- 7/25 - Supporting Multilingual Learners Workgroup

Immediate Redesign Priorities for IDEC

Child Care Licensing Process

Create and communicate a package of licensing changes that simultaneously simplify and strengthen regulations for child care settings that seamlessly connect to a continuum of quality and support.

Early Intervention Services

Design ways to increase access to and participation in essential 0-3 services for families with young children with special needs, differentiated by region and community assets and needs.

Funding Alignment

Design early childhood funding approach that promotes equitable and inclusive access to quality services that meet the needs of children and families, with a particular focus on investment prioritization and system sustainability.

Technology Improvements

Ensure technology infrastructure is in place to simplify and ease the burden for families and providers while enabling the state to efficiently and equitably administer services that meet the diverse needs of families in the state.

Status of Redesign Priorities for IDEC

Child Care Licensing Process

- Scope of work created w/IDEC & DCFS
- Scope shared with external partners for input
- Brought on consulting partner support
- Initiated small projects in support of this effort (e.g., Digitization of files)

Early Intervention Services

- Scope of work created in partnership with IDHS
- Scope of work shared with external partners for input
- Launched 2 Cohorts of Co-Design Process; rolling out additional community engagement
- In the process of bringing on additional capacity

Funding Alignment

- Building from Governor's 2019-2021 Funding Commission Report and agency collaboration on Smart Start Illinois goals
- Workgroup meeting monthly to help inform recommendations
- Additional community and provider engagement being launched

Technology Improvements

- Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS)
- Parent and Provider Portal groundwork
- Digitization project underway with DoIT and DCFS
- Automation partnerships: Center for Public Sector AI

Leveraging modern technology to be more responsive to user needs



Family



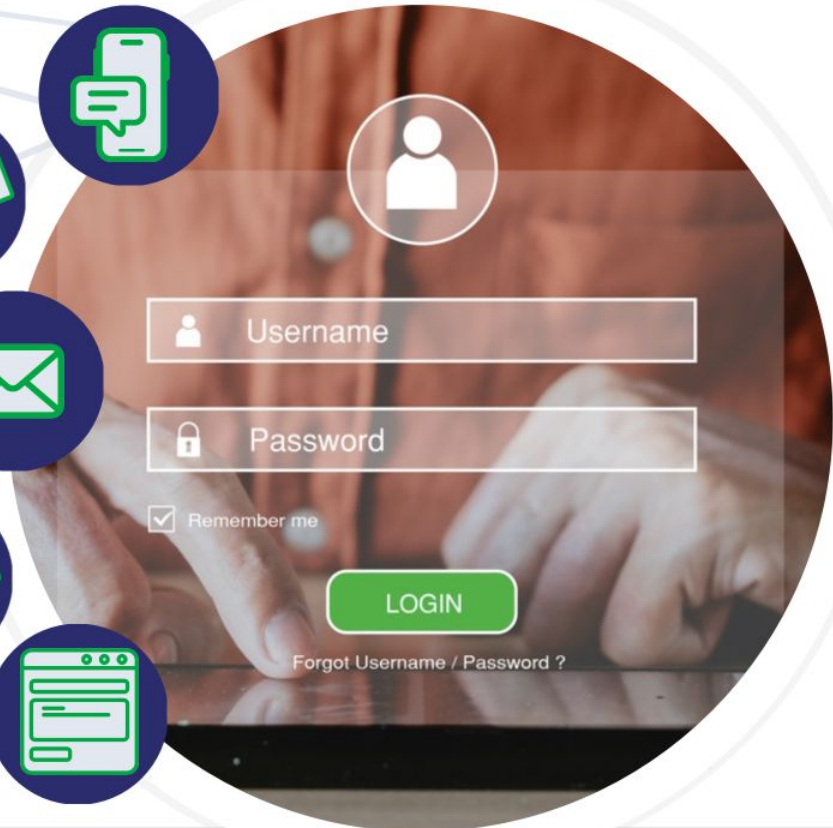
Providers



Admin



Unified User Portal



Developing a Strategic Vision & Plan to Redesign Service Delivery

A one-size fits all services delivery model will always be both inequitable and inefficient in a state as regionally, racially, linguistically, and culturally diverse as Illinois.

1

Vision: What do families want and need?
What do providers want and need to deliver to families?

3

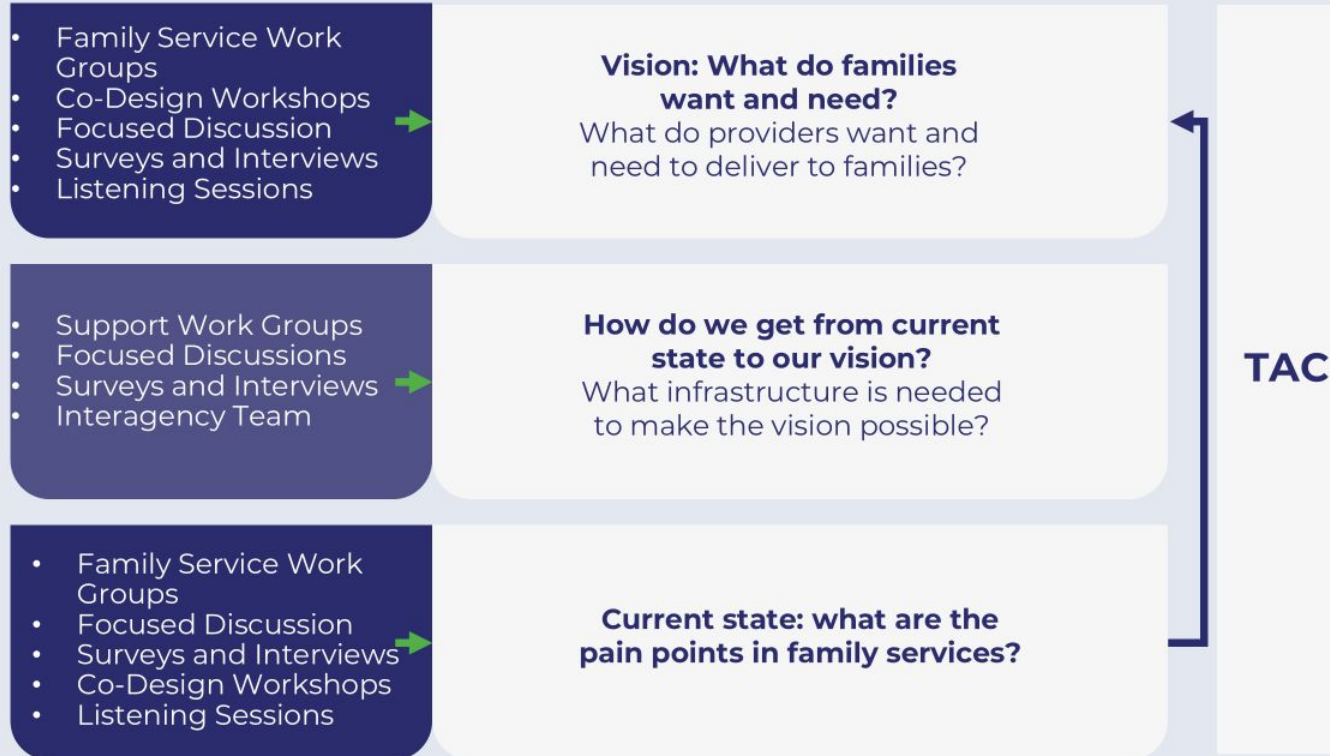
How do we get from current state to our vision?
What infrastructure is needed to make the vision possible?

2





Current state: what are the pain points in family services?



Further Informing the Redesign for Service Delivery



Multi-step process to create a strategic plan

1. Identify what families want/need and what providers can deliver and turn it into a design blueprint for services  A service blueprint
2. Catalogue the current state, from background materials, interviews, and workgroups  Assessment of the current state
3. Map out what rules, laws, operations, etc, need to change to get form the current state to the future state.  Path
4. Scaffold and prioritize those activities to create a strategic plan  A strategic plan

Evolving Federal Context

- **ELC Co-chairs have established an Ad Hoc Committee on Federal Funds & Services.**
 - *Proposed Objectives:* share information, plan, coordinate communication, and provide feedback on contingency planning ideas for the evolving federal context and its impact on early childhood and care services and programs in the State (e.g., changes to Head Start (HS)). This group will also help identify secondary impacts and less apparent dependencies (e.g., changes to Medicaid and TANF).
- Staffed by Maya Portillo, Project Director at IDEC
- If you are interested in participating, please fill out the [interest form](#) by Thursday, July 17

This is not a “Lift and Shift”– It’s a Redesign for equity and efficiency.

- ✔ Engaging parents, providers, school leaders, agency staff, from across the state in the design process for policies and functions
- ✔ Shifting the burden of the system from families and providers to state and simplify
- ✔ Re-organizing service delivery and regional footprint
- ✔ Aligning funding streams – from allocation to distribution
- ✔ Updating and leveraging technology (i.e., AI integration)
- ✔ Improving data architecture, streamlining and improving reporting and transparency



Redesign will Take Capacity and Innovate Change

- ✔ Big changes to existing statute, regulations, and operational structure are forthcoming
- ✔ Implementation of redesign will not be complete in FY27, it will be early stages



How to Stay Connected

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<https://idec.illinois.gov/>

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@IllinoisDepartmentofEarlyChildhood



@IDEC_Illinois



Voices from the Field

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Good Morning

- As a member of the Supporting Professionals Network Association (SPNA), a family child care association with over 100 members, I'll be sharing the perspectives from both my personal experience and insights shared by my family child care community.



My Experience with the Creation and Development of IDEC (Illinois Department of Early Childhood)

My direct experience has been limited, as the department is still in its early phases of information on the rollout of the department.

There has not been any direct changes that I or my colleagues have personally witnessed.

I appreciate that community feedback is being sought during the initial phase of the process, and I look forward to meaningful engagement that includes our input in the development of policies and systems that reflect the realities of our work.

Expectations For IDEC



Services will be streamlined

Resources can be found and accessed in a centralized place to improve communication, reduce confusion, and better support family child care providers

The Family Child Care Community Expectations For IDEC

IDEC will become a trusted, responsive and transparent agency.

IDEC brings new leadership from the departure of the top-down approach and moves toward one that values partnership, support and respect for providers.

IDEC moves into the world of technology to access digital forms and policies.

Critical Challenges, Unmet Needs: Why the Current System Must Change"

- Licensing Confusion and lack of Communication. There is often tension around how DCFS licensing standards are interpreted and enforced, We need clearer, more consistent guidance and communication.

Critical Challenges,
Unmet Needs:
Why the Current
System Must
Change"

Access to Updated Resources – Providers are unsure where to find current forms, or updates.

A centralized, digital portal would greatly improve access to up-to-date information.

Delays in Background Checks – Makes it difficult to bring in new staff, placing financial strain on programs.

We are often forced to offer incentives just to retain potential hires while waiting for clearance, all while trying to remain in compliance with teacher-to-child ratio requirements.

Family Child Care Expectations For IDEC

Fix the background check system to eliminate back log for a faster and more efficient system.

Continue to create opportunities for ongoing provider voice & Feedback.

Final Thoughts

(family child care community)

As a family child care educator for 20+ years, I am deeply committed to quality care, safety and compliance but we need systems that support us in achieving those goals.

With the creation and development of IDEC (Illinois Department of early Childhood), I along with the Provider community are hopeful that this will be an opportunity for meaningful change, collaborations and improved infrastructure to support our work.



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Q&A - How To

Ask A Live Question

To ask a live question, virtually raise your hand!

- To do this, click the "Reactions" button at the bottom of your Zoom window and then select the "Raise Hand" option. This will notify us that you have a question, and we can then call on you to speak.

Submit a Question Using the Q&A Feature

You can also submit your question using the Q & A Zoom feature!

- Locate the Q&A icon at the bottom of your Zoom window. Click on it to open the Q&A window. Here, you can type your question, and optionally choose to submit it anonymously.

If we cannot get to your question in our allotted time, please send it in the Q&A and we will answer it in the follow-up email after the Town Hall.



Q&A Ground Rules (30-Minutes)

- ◆ **Please Be Respectful**

Speak and engage with courtesy.

- ◆ **Please Stay On Topic**

Keep all questions relevant to the session theme. This ensures a focused and productive conversation.

- ◆ **If Called On to Speak**

- Please unmute when prompted.
- Clearly state your name and organization (if applicable).
- Keep your question brief and direct.
- Mute yourself again when done.

- ◆ **Please Pose One Question at a Time**

- Please limit yourself to one question so more voices can be heard. Follow-up questions may be allowed if time permits.

- ◆ **Please Avoid Repetition**

- Before submitting or asking a question, check to see if it has already been addressed.



Closing Remarks: Call to Action

Stay Informed

1. Stay updated on the IDEC transition process and attend monthly IDEC Transition Advisory Council (TAC) Meetings: idec.illinois.gov
2. **TAC Workgroups:**
 - a. If you are interested in serving on a workgroup, please complete the [interest form](#).
 - b. [Please check the calendar](#) for upcoming workgroup meetings.

Join the We, the Village Coalition

3. Join the We, The Village Email List
 - a. [Sign up to stay up to date](#) on the latest information and actions from the early childhood education and care field!
4. Join Our Monthly All Coalition Meetings:
 - a. [Schedule For 2025-2026 Meetings \(July 2025 - June 2026\)](#)
5. Follow Our Social Media:
 - a. Instagram: [@wethevillageil](#)
 - b. Facebook: [@wethevillageil](#)
 - c. X: [@wethevillageil](#)

Visit www.righttocareil.com for more!





Thank you!

Questions? Contact Neoma Nagahawatte

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