

POLICY PRIORITY: STRONG INFRASTRUCTURE

Cross-system Preparation, Professional Development & Support



Budget

- **Increase state funding by \$12M in FY 2026 for the Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC) to expand the Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity (ECACE),** restoring a portion of the scholarships available to incumbent educators after significant reductions in FY 2025
- **Sustain or increase state funding in FY 2026 for ISAC to continue operating the Human Services Professional Loan Repayment Program,** incentivizing recruitment and retention of qualified staff at community-based human services agencies, including those that serve expecting families, infants and toddlers



Administration and Implementation

- Identify and establish a statewide administrative home for **Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health (I/ECMH) Consultation** to implement equity analysis recommendations, improve accessibility and increase workforce utilization
- Advance opportunities to leverage the ECACE program to expand **degree pathways for infant-toddler educators from underrepresented backgrounds**
- Continue convening communities of practice to train more practitioners to use **DC:0-5, an age-appropriate mental health diagnostic tool**, in their clinical work with infants and toddlers
- Develop **cross-training offerings** that meet professional development requirements across early childhood provider types



Public Awareness & Engagement

- Continue elevating and disseminating **I/ECMH Consultation public awareness campaign materials** to early childhood educators, families and other stakeholders statewide



POLICY PRIORITY: STRONG INFRASTRUCTURE

Strong State & Community Structure



Budget

- **Sustain or increase state funding in FY 2026 to continue transitioning to the Illinois Department of Early Childhood and building the capacity of regional intermediaries**, without reappropriating existing dollars from programs that serve expecting families, infants and toddlers



Legislation

- Amend the **Department of Early Childhood Act** (SB 1; Pub. Act 103-594) to improve how the new agency transition process prioritizes the needs of expecting families, infants and toddlers



Administration and Implementation

- Improve prenatal-to-age-three service delivery through **ongoing state and regional alignment** between the Office of the Governor, state agency leaders, the Early Learning Council, Birth to Five Illinois and the Early Childhood Education and Care Transition Advisory Committee
- Build capacity for the **new Illinois Department of Early Childhood** to:
 - **Effectively integrate data** to simplify family applications, intake and referrals
 - **Support cross-system governance** for Universal Newborn Support Services, Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation and inclusion
 - **Collaborate across agencies** to facilitate Medicaid financing and enable greater family participation in maternal and child health initiatives and nutrition and cash assistance programs



Public Awareness and Engagement

- Continue increasing awareness of the **Illinois Cares for Kids web portal** as a tool for collaborative referrals across family-serving systems