

Understanding the Illinois Funding Landscape

In July 2026, most early childhood programs are scheduled to transition from their legacy agencies to the new Illinois Department of Early Childhood (IDEC). This transition is changing the ways that early childhood programs are funded, and Illinois' early childhood coalitions, Raising Illinois and We, the Village are coming together to share information about this process and ways to engage with IDEC.

During October and November of 2025, Raising Illinois & We, the Village convened two groups of providers from infant and toddler center-based and family-based programs to better understand their perspectives and priorities for the state funding redesign process currently underway by the the Illinois Department of Early Childhood (IDEC).

View a discussion on funding design featuring **Bri Stormer**, Assistant Director, Policy and Engagement at Illinois Action for Children; **Kimberly Bianchini**, Founder & Director of Advance Preschool, Inc. in Hoffman Estates; and **Simone Santiago**, Director of Raising Illinois.



Key Terms:

- Early Childhood Funding Redesign: A process that began in November 2024 as a part of the transition to the Illinois Department of Early Childhood to simplify and streamline early childhood funding. This process includes three components.
 - Funding Alignment: Combining existing state funding streams to create fewer overall funding streams
 - Funding Distribution: How money gets from the state to the provider or family
 - Funding Adequacy: How much money it costs to do all the work required to support families and children (also called “true cost of care”)

Funding Alignment Preliminary Recommendations:

- Create two new clusters of funding:
 - Early Learning and Care: Includes Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP); Early Childhood Block Grant Preschool for All and Preschool for All Expansion; Early Childhood Block Grant Prevention Initiative – Center-Based; Smart Start Workforce Grants; Smart Start Quality Support Grants
 - Home Visiting: Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV); Maternal Child Home Visiting Program (MCHV); Illinois Department of Human Services – Home Visiting, Early Childhood Block Grant Prevention Initiative – Home Visiting

Funding Distribution Preliminary Recommendations:

- Expand the use of non-competitive grants or contracts
- Maintain vouchers for providers who do not wish to utilize contracts and to maximize family choice
- Utilize competitive funding for short-term or specialized funding

Funding Adequacy Preliminary Recommendations:

- Determine true cost of comprehensive services
- Create transparent strategy for distribution of funds
- Fund programs based on need

What's Next:

At such a critical and exciting time for the state, it's crucial that the perspectives and experience of providers are heard throughout the decision-making process. Through Illinois Action for Children and Raising Illinois, we are poised to ensure that providers across the state have the opportunity to shape the new design of our state's systems. Join us and make your voice heard!

Get Involved with IDEC

In the lead up to the full transition on July 1, 2026, IDEC is holding Listening Sessions as well as Transition Advisory Council Meetings, [Visit the IDEC website to get involved with the transition work.](#)

Raising Illinois is a collective effort to close the opportunity gap for our state's expecting families, infants and toddlers. They are a public-private partnership of diverse individuals and organizations across Illinois committed to supporting our youngest generation by ensuring families can access high-quality health care, engage in quality learning experiences and establish economic security. Learn more at www.raisingillinois.org!



Launched in 2019 and powered by Illinois Action for Children, the We, the Village (WTV) coalition is a diverse, statewide coalition of families, child caregivers, early childhood educators, child care providers, school districts, non-profit organizations, and community members who work together for transformational change in Illinois' early childhood care and education system. [Click here](#) to visit the WTV website and learn more.

