



Illinois Policy, 2023 Accomplishments

Start Early’s vision for Illinois is that its early childhood system is designed, implemented and sustained to equitably provide a continuum of high-quality services to Illinois’ children before birth and through age 5. To best support all of our state’s families, services must be culturally, linguistically and ability responsive.

This report represents advancements which Start Early led or contributed to significantly, in alignment with our Illinois Policy Agenda during Fiscal Year 2023



POLICY AGENDA INITIATIVE #1

Increase investments in and strengthen the design and implementation of Illinois' core early care and learning programs

Child Care:

- FY 2024 state budget included an historic \$170 million for child care services, including for roll-out of new contracting model, caseload growth and new data system.
- Contributed to the Illinois Department of Health Services (IDHS) contracting workgroup, with priority work on utilizing contracts to increase compensation levels, and to provide increased supports for programs serving infants and toddlers and children from priority populations, particularly children with disabilities and delays.
- Gathered input from child care programs and Child Care Resource and Referrals staff regarding barriers to serving children with disabilities and submitted memo to IDHS detailing those barriers.
- Protected foundational workforce requirements for lead teachers in child care.
- Launched Raising Illinois Family Child Care Provider Committee to deepen understanding of barriers to quality improvement and inform policy recommendations regarding access to facilities and business development resources.
- Undertook research in other states to detail the role health consultants can play in Illinois' child care programs.
- Expanded eligibility for the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) through:
 - Implementation of HB4242, including the early implementation of Department of Children & Family Services (DCFS) child care rate improvements to align with CCAP and remove disincentives from providing child care to children in the child welfare system.
 - Codified into state law income eligibility floor at 225% FPL.
 - Announced disregard of certain types of income for CCAP eligibility.
 - Extension of eligibility for job searchers.

Early Childhood Block Grant:

- FY 2024 state budget included an historic increase of \$75 million for the Early Childhood Block Grant (ECBG) and a new \$5 million investment to support activities to improve the inclusion of children with disabilities.
- Testified, and organized testimony by providers and parents in support of a 20% increase to the ECBG – ECBG was the second most-testified to budget line, second only to Evidence Based Funding (EBF).
- SB2390 enacted to extend the statutory sunset to allow teachers with the Gateways Credential Level 5 continue to serve as lead teachers in ECBG-funded programs.
- As a member of the KIDS Advisory, submitted KIDS priorities and recommendations to ISBE and new superintendent Dr. Tony Sanders; met to discuss these priorities with Dr. Sanders.
- Met with new Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) board chair Dr. Steven Isoye and superintendent Dr. Sanders.
- Submitted written recommendations on behalf of Raising Illinois to ISBE informing the FY 2024 Request for Proposals (RFP) for ECBG's Prevention Initiative awards, synthesizing feedback from both home visiting programs and center-based infant/toddler child care providers across the state.

Home Visiting:

- State FY 2024 budget included an historic \$5 million increase for IDHS-funded home visiting (Healthy Families and Early Childhood Maternal Home Visiting).
- SB1794 enacted to codify existing IDHS home visiting programs and protect their budget allocations by requiring future funds to supplement, rather than supplant, current dollars.
- Led Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) reauthorization efforts in Illinois, including:
 - Undertook outreach to Illinois congressional delegation regarding MIECHV reauthorization prior to and throughout the legislative process to ensure Illinois delegation knew about the presence and value of MIEHCV in Illinois, as well as Illinois reauthorization priorities.
 - Mobilized Illinois audiences in support of reauthorization.
 - Analyzed MIECHV bill (HR8766) for impact on Illinois children and families.

- Continued to inform implementation of Medicaid reimbursement and Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA), including advocating for greater transparency and engagement of doulas, home visitors and home visiting agency financial leads in the Medicaid work
- Supported state MIECHV team for successful Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) site visit
- Submitted home visiting recommendations to ISBE to inform the upcoming ISBE RFP with a goal of strengthening cohesion across home visiting funders.
- Developed a brief describing the community-based doula model as implemented in conjunction with home visiting.
- Advocated for workforce compensation in any state and/or federal funding increases.
 - Implementation in FY 2023 of salary floor resulted in a 15% salary increase (\$5,736) on average for home visitors and a 17% salary increase (\$8,499) for supervisors under IDHS home visiting compared to FY22 average salaries.
 - Implementation of the FY 2023 of salary floor resulted in an 18% salary increase (\$6,715) on average for home visitors and a 11% salary increase (\$5,669) for supervisors under MIECHV home visiting compared to FY 2022 average salaries.
- Partnered with Illinois Network of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies (INCCRRA)/Gateways on home visiting staffing and salary survey and improvements on workforce data.
- Contributed Illinois learnings to federal HRSA survey regarding the impact of the pandemic on home visiting programs and services.
- Developed caregiver/provider survey and conducted focus groups on home visiting services with findings to be released in FY 2024.

Services for Children with Disabilities and Developmental Delays:

Early Intervention

- FY 2024 state budget included an historic \$40 million increase to support service coordinator recruitment, provide a 10% rate increase for therapists and support caseload growth.

- Analyzed and disseminated data regarding service coordinator capacity gap and resulting service waitlists resulting in a larger than anticipated increase in the governor's proposed budget.
- Implemented strategies addressing existing disparities identified by the General Assembly in the Education and Workforce Equity Act (PA 101-654):
 - Developed and gained approval of modified service delivery recommendations.
 - Supported Project INITIATE with a focus on identifying policy implications. The project targets children discharged from Neonatal Intensive Care Units in Chicago in order to provide prompt and equitable therapy service that improves infant and family outcomes.
- Submitted public comment to ISBE regarding the continuation of Early Intervention after the third birthday .
- Supported implementation of HB2424 provisions regarding automatic eligibility for children with substantiated cases of abuse and neglect.
- Informed implementation of 30-day timeline legislation, including messaging and materials for parents.
- Deepened partnership and advocacy with Early Intervention (EI) providers and families, including:
 - Engaged with EI provider coalition to highlight workforce crisis.
 - Partnered with Equip for Equality to create and disseminate family-friendly flyers about families' rights.
 - Co-hosted EI families' rights and advocacy sessions for families (in English and Spanish) with Equip for Equality, EI Clearinghouse, COFI and Raising Illinois.
 - Participated in Raising Illinois postcard campaign to gather stories of families in the Early Intervention program; shared postcards with lawmakers at Advocacy Day.

Inclusion

- In partnership with Chicago Head Start partners and Chicago Public Schools (CPS), developed agreed community-based service delivery model for children with disabilities who are dually enrolled in Head Start and CPS.

- With internal and external partners in Chicago, began plans for training of staff involved in the pilot for community-based services for children with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs).
- Supported parents to advocate for individual and systemic solutions to the issues they have experienced gaining access to IEP services for their children, secured commitment from CPS to follow up on each complaint and received confirmation that they had addressed issues between families and CPS teachers and related service providers.
- Informed the Illinois inclusion report, including obtaining practitioner input.
- With Early Choices and the McCormick Foundation, convened a public launch event for the state's federally-funded Inclusion project.
- Supported lawmakers to secure a new \$5 million appropriation to ISBE for inclusion activities.

POLICY AGENDA INITIATIVE #2

Strengthen the infrastructure of Illinois' early care and learning system

- In advance of the fall 2022 gubernatorial elections, prepared brief for gubernatorial candidates with partners and undertook first public polling on early childhood in decades. Shared information with both campaigns and the Pritzker administration post-election. Governor Pritzker's FY 2024 proposed budget request for *Smart Start Illinois* for \$250 million very closely aligned with advocate request.
- In advance of the spring 2023 Chicago mayoral elections, finalized a mayoral and aldermanic candidate early childhood brief; 23 early childhood organizations signed on to the brief. Met with eight aldermanic candidates to provide information and education about early childhood programs and services.
- With key partners, developed FY 2024 budget requests and legislative agenda; engaged grassroots partners around the state including ISBE budget testimony and advocacy actions throughout the legislative session. For example, ISBE received 41 requests in support of a 20% increase to the Early Childhood Block Grant, second only to requests for an increase in evidence-based funding.
 - Called on to provide ongoing advocacy updates at a range of meetings, including a presentation at the Illinois Association for the Education of Young Children (IL AEYC) statewide conference.

- Aligned with key partners on City budget priorities and advocacy with the City of Chicago regarding those priorities, including continued funding for city scholarships for the early childhood workforce. Generated city council sign-on letter with advocacy partners and aligned talking points for testimony at public events.
- Undertook lawmaker education and hearing testimony on *Smart Start* investments and other early childhood-related legislation. Start Early and Raising Illinois provided support for a series of lawmaker-led subject matter hearings to build support for *Smart Start*, including securing parents and providers to provide testimony and providing interpretation services for the hearings.
- Undertook Early Childhood Advocacy Day as an in-person event for the first time since 2019, in partnership with Illinois Action for Children and SEIU and our coalitions (Raising Illinois; We, The Village; Child Care for All). The event included 300+ attendees and was capped off by an address from Gov. Pritzker in the Capitol rotunda.
- Through Raising Illinois, continued amplification of the recommendations in the Infant & Toddler Child Care Roadmap and the Prenatal to Three (PN3) Policy Agenda by holding two live, hybrid, bilingual statewide gatherings, reaching 300+ individuals, as well as convening seven in-person community conversations around the state, reaching an additional 150+ stakeholders from diverse geographic regions.
- Conducted Hill visits with eight offices to strengthen relationships between Start Early and the Illinois congressional delegation with a focus on new and key members.
- Submitted nine ideas to the state's Preschool Development Grant (PDG) application, including projects regarding inclusion, parent voice/engagement, home visiting, universal newborn support systems.
- Ongoing efforts on cross-agency implementation of Illinois' early childhood expulsion law, including:
 - Input and advocacy with ISBE on provider expulsion forms templates.
 - Supported provider-developed resources.
 - Led successful application for technical assistance from BUILD.
- Finalized a package of universal newborn support system (UNSS) messaging materials, including parent/provider videos to build awareness and gain public/political support for expansion of UNSS.
- Monitored next steps in implementation of Medicaid coverage of a postpartum UNSS visit, including advocacy for input from UNSS communities.

- Supported IDHS in the execution of the Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS) grant to create the government infrastructure and prenatal-to-three systems alignment needed to support scaling of UNSS including:
 - Recruiting and orienting parents to the ECCS advisory body.
 - Conducting assessments to support continuous quality improvements within the ECCS advisory body.
 - Overseeing the gathering, tracking, and reporting of relevant data both to the ECCS advisory body and to IDHS and HRSA.

POLICY AGENDA INITIATIVE #3

Recruit and retain a representative, well-compensated and qualified early care and learning workforce, with a particular focus on those who work with infants and toddlers

- Centered need for improved early childhood workforce compensation in the FY 2024 advocate budget requests.
- Advocated for improvements to the child care salary “floors” being discussed as a part of the child care contracting work and in the governor’s *Smart Start Illinois* initiative.
- Promoted workforce policy changes made over the past several years with a blog post and a presentation to Early Head Start and Head Start program partners.
- Submitted comments to US Department of Education on considerations for providing loan forgiveness for early educators in specific settings.

POLICY AGENDA INITIATIVE #4

Improve the health, mental health and well-being of young children and their families in Illinois

- Submitted to the Illinois Department of Public Health early childhood-focused comments on the state’s maternal and child health Title V program.
- Contributed expertise to the recently-released *Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health (I/ECMH) Cross-Systems Guide to Accessing Services*.

- Coordinated and submitted advocate letter to Deputy Governors on sustainability and continuation of Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (I/ECMHC and engaged with IDHS to better understand their I/ECMH work at IDHS and the need for coordination of I/ECMHC efforts across agencies.
- Supported continued work on database, infrastructure, and orientations for I/ECMHCs as well as DC0-5 implementation through ISBE grants.
- Led efforts with Office of Early Childhood Development (OECD), IDHS and the Erikson Institute to ensure collaboration of multiple scanning projects of the I/ECMHC workforce.
- Continued funding for Pyramid model included in the state's 2023 PDG application.
- Submitted recommendations to the Children's Behavioral Health Transformation effort to influence their recommendations to increase the likelihood that the final plan included more references to mental health/well-being for young children.
- Distributed I/ECMHC cross-systems guide to multiple family and child health/mental health tables (Illinois Children's Mental Health Partnership [ICMHP], Healthy Minds Healthy Lives coalition, Children's Behavioral Health Transformation Initiative, I-PROMOTE, and the BRIDGES policy workgroup) in order to increase knowledge of and influence efforts impacting young children's mental health and Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation.
- Met with Rep. Lindsey LaPointe to onboard her to I/ECMH issues and our Start Early priorities around I/ECMHC.
- Submitted feedback to the Kennedy Forum on the National Governor's Association's Youth Mental Health Initiative recommendations to include specific I/ECMH references and strategies.
- Supported the training of nearly 500 clinicians in the use of DC:0-5 age- and developmentally appropriate diagnostic tool.
- Undertook outreach to Illinois congressional delegation regarding Dear Colleague letters to support I/ECMH proposals in the president's budget.
- EI procedure manuals were updated to include DC:0-5 diagnoses to ensure better awareness of program eligibility due to social/emotional risk factors.
- Submitted comments to Healthcare & Family Services (HFS) on Illinois' 1115 Behavioral Health Waiver Extension application.

OTHER KEY FY23 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Raising Illinois Coalition | In addition to Raising Illinois' policy wins, Start Early's coalition backbone role also supported the following accomplishments:

Coalition Growth & Engagement:

- Grew Coalition membership by 50% since FY22, to 1,250+ members organizations and individuals today.
- Launched the Steering Committee for Raising Illinois to guide and support high-level strategy in future, including heads of all PN3-related public agencies, philanthropic partners, legislators, Family Leaders, providers and other key contributors.
- Convened various Coalition-wide public events and discussions, reaching nearly 500 unique participants from across the state.

Communications:

- Deepened equity and inclusion practices by offering Spanish language translation and interpretation to all Raising Illinois Policy Work Groups and Coalition-wide events.
- Launched Coalition social media channels on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram in order to provide another avenue of communication and engagement for Coalition members and the public, with tens of thousands of unique impressions per month.
- Delivered compelling, substantive PN3 e-messaging to Coalition members monthly, demystifying policy and advocacy updates and highlighting stories of families, providers, and partners across the state.
- Refreshed the standalone Raising Illinois website with regular Coalition statements, news and other resources, including the launch of the Action Center as a clearinghouse for advocacy actions from members and other partners in the field.

Data:

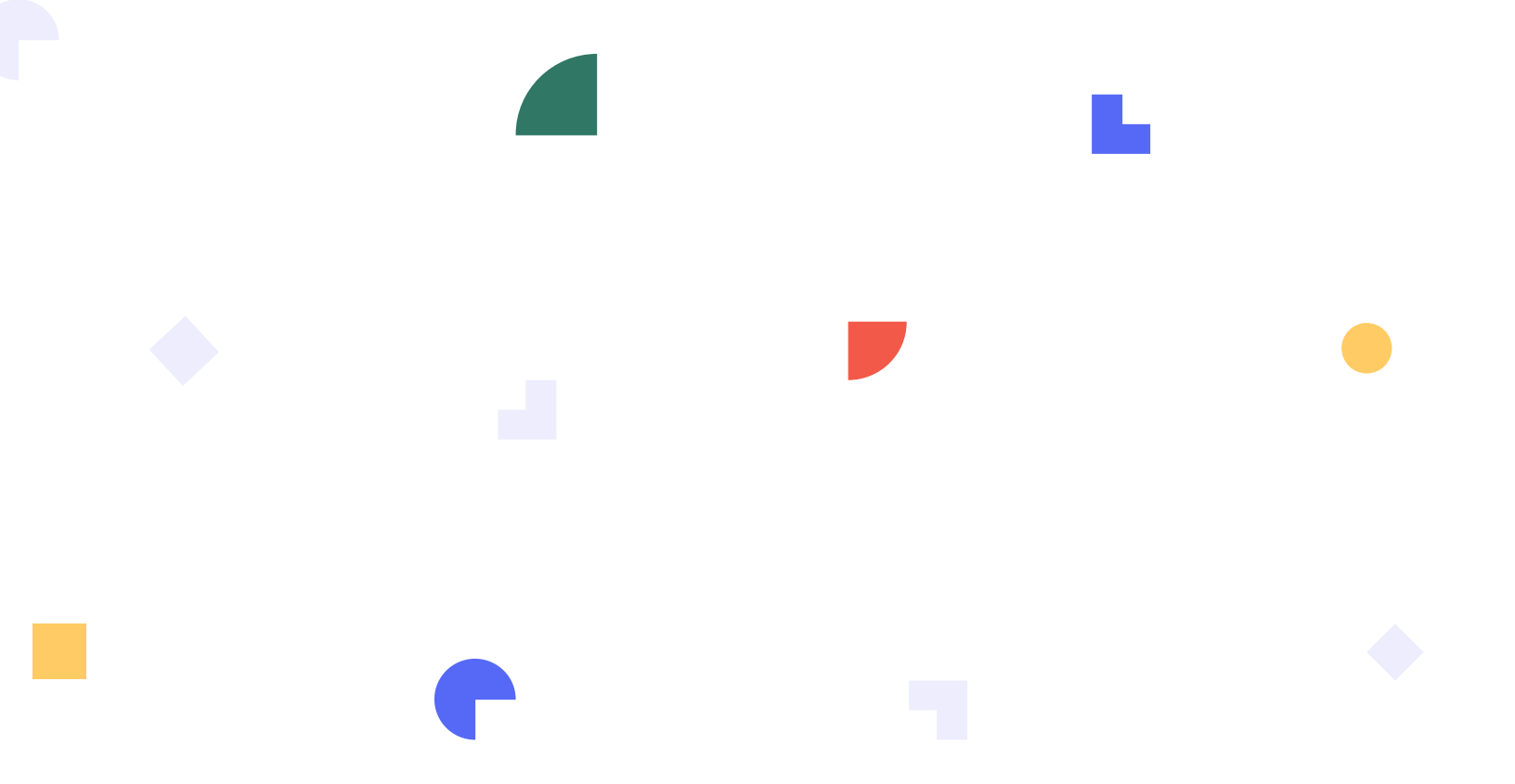
- In partnership with Illinois Early Childhood Asset Map (IECAM), audited available PN3 data to more effectively tell the story of PN3 services and supports in Illinois today, with focus on gaps in the system of supports and subpopulations that are furthest from opportunity.

Family & Community Leadership and Engagement:

- Continued to steward the Coalition’s Family Leaders program, with parents from diverse backgrounds embedded across policy work groups to anchor and guide authentic decision making.
- Facilitated the testimony of five Family Leaders before joint committees of the Illinois General Assembly and a state agency’s public hearing in support of increased state funding for PN3 services.
- Developed the Community Conversations Toolkit to support local partners in regions across the state in hosting stakeholder meetings to elevate PN3 issues across contexts and report local qualitative data.

Thought Leadership & National Presence

- Amplified Chicago and Illinois inclusion efforts nationally through presentations:
 - Division for Early Childhood at the Council for Exceptional Children national conference.
 - Erikson Institute Executive Fellows, a presentation to policy makers.
 - National Head Start Association conference.
 - Region V officials as a part of Start Early site visit.
- Consultation on expulsion and I/ECMHC to Minnesota and North Carolina.
- "Equity from the Start" panelist at the national TA Center of Excellence on I/ECMHC, speaking about Illinois' I/ECMHC work.
- Presented on Illinois expulsion work at the Alliance for Early Success national meeting.
- Co-authored an article with University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) researchers regarding expulsion that was accepted to Early Childhood Research Quarterly.
- Presentation at the Division for Early Childhood at the Council for Exceptional Children national conference on the NICU to home project and other strategies to identify and serve children under the age of one in EI.



 /startearlyorg

 @startearlyorg

 /startearlyorg

 /startearlyorg