FOCUS GROUP FEEDBACK

Illinois Early Childhood Funding Coalition

Focus Groups on Emerging Recommendations

ABOUT THE FOCUS GROUPS

- Three focus groups, including one parent-only group
- Approximately 50 total participants;
- Discussion topics focused on M&O & Mechanisms recommendations
- Focus groups were each 90 minutes in length on Zoom

RANGE OF PARTICIPANTS

- Non-profit providers—mostly Chicago Metro based
- For profit providers
- Parents—from Chicago, Downstate, and Chicago Suburbs
- Intermediaries
- 1/3 of the participants had unknown roles
- We did not hear from school districts

POSITIVE FEEDBACK OVERALL

- Excited about change
- Optimistic about the prospect of new state agency
- Desire to eliminate silos and overburdensome bureaucracy
- Interested to learn about improving and upholding quality and accountability
- Thought high-level recommendations could ease burden on parents and providers, if well-implemented
- Felt educator compensation should be equitable and competitive
- Eager to learn more about implementation plans and had more feedback to give

OVERARCHING REQUESTS

- Explicitly state how equity goals relate to quality/excellence
- Center racial equity in explicit in design of new system
- Advocate for representation of providers and parents in implementation decisions
- Ensure regional representation
- Build in consistent communications vehicles to parents and providers
- Provide additional clarity on trade-offs in recommendations
- More infrastructure should support disenfranchised communities

Feedback on Management & Oversight

- Overall participants thought the goal should be a new state agency
- New agency would elevate the field and allow us to imagine a new way to support children and families
- Felt IDHS would be better than ISBE if consolidation occurred
  - Felt IDHS had a better understanding of community-based programs, wrap around services, whole child programs/issues
- Need additional clarity on regional and local governance and implementation
- New agency should support small providers
- New agency must have capacity for technical assistance during transition

Open Questions on Management & Oversight

What are the goals around equity and quality?

What are the metrics of success for a new agency; in initial and subsequent years? Is the priority improved access or quality?

How will the state ensure we hear the voice of small providers is included?

What are lessons learned from Chicago's structure?

Feedback on Funding Mechanisms

- Like that recommendation says equitable RFP.
  - Equal and equitable are not the same.
- Appreciate the goal of adequacy
- Providers prefer multi-year funding for existing providers, but parents were concerned about accountability
- Funding formulas should include GREATLY improved salaries for the workforce
- There should be some flexibility baked into the mechanisms
- Parents and providers said there was a need transparency in decision-making

FUNDING MECHANISMS

- How will equity be achieved in an RFP? Providers need support to be successful.
- What data will be collected at the agency? How will data collection eliminate burden on providers and families?
- What will accountability look like?
- How will quality be communicated to parents?
- How do we ensure providers are accountable to excellent standards of care and service?

Considering Paid Family Leave & Other considerations

- Parent participants wanted to know how paid family leave it into the new state plan
- Parents advocated for a state plan for paid family leave especially for the first year of life
- Parents also advocated for more dedicated funding for parent outreach and communications since many only find out about critical resources through other parents

CONTINUING TO LISTEN

- All participants wanted more sessions with parents and providers of different types
- Need clarity around regional and local governance structures
- Many questions remained on what will happen first (Is the priority to increase access or improve quality?)
- All participants wanted clarity on how stakeholders would be engaged in implementation decision-making
  - Funding commission should recommend process for implementation decision-making and inclusion of stakeholders

Who else needs to be engaged?

- Central and Southern Illinois were not well represented in the focus groups
- We must engage more small and home-based providers, including FFN caregivers
- We must engage more parents

Additional focus groups scheduled

- Open meeting (capped at 40) on September 25th
- Spanish language only focus group September 29th
- Erikson Institute focus groups with Barbara Bowman and Executive Fellows scheduled for the end of September

STAFFING THE FOCUS GROUPS

- Illinois Action for Children lead the staffing of the focus groups on behalf of the coalition
- Advance Illinois, Latino Policy Forum, Erikson Institute, Fight Crime Invest in Kids, the Ounce of Prevention, Ready Nation, and Voices for Illinois Kids, Illinois AEYC, INCCRRA, and Teach Plus Illinois contributed significant time and thought leadership to the focus group materials and session