



## Early Childhood Town Hall Q&A

Theme	Questions	Answers
Vision, leadership and decision-making	The early childhood landscape in Chicago has shifted significantly over the last few years and with historic new investments from the state on the way, how is the city planning to strengthen our local early childhood system infrastructure to meet the demands of the future?	The “how” will derive from a series of conversations over the next year to address a critical lever and turning point in our system: governance. ECRC will host working groups to collect stakeholder feedback on plan development in tandem with the state discussions on governance. Chicago is a significant component in the state’s plan, and we intend to align and coordinate to correspond with the state and maximize the opportunity.
	How will the city partner with community-based organizations and other stakeholders to advance the vision for early childhood?	In collaboration with Every Child Ready Chicago (ECRC), which aims to streamline and unite prenatal-to-five systems and support services to create a cohesive early childhood infrastructure, we seek to develop working groups and establish charges for the ECRC subcommittee carry out to ensure continuous communication and partnership with the Head Start collaborations and Early childhood network partners.
	With COVID relief and recovery funding coming to an end, what is the city’s plan for sustaining programs and services currently supported by those expiring funds?	The Mayor’s Office and all city departments are and will be reviewing funding streams and levels to assess needs and to drive advocacy for more sustainable funding, but also decision-making around priorities. The City’s Office of Business Management (OBM) is also currently undergoing a review of what we inherited with ARPA obligations and will make determinations as to what ARPA funds are unspent and can still be used. This assessment will further inform strategic planning.



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	<p>What are the city's plans for increasing investments in early childhood programs and services, prenatal to five?</p>	<p>The city is reviewing existing investments and funding streams as a part of the budget process to better make decisions and prioritize. Additionally, the multi-year SMART Start funding plan will clearly play a role in sustainability. And, as indicated on the town hall, the city will seek to consciously collaborate with the early childhood community stakeholders, partners, and ECRC Advisory Committee members regarding strategies focusing on long-term increased investments for the prenatal to five system.</p>
	<p>How is the city planning to ensure equitable distribution of funding across community-based and school-based programs?</p>	<p>The city will prioritize working with CPS and DFSS for the first year's investment of SMART Start funding and engage with the wider early childhood community for feedback on changes for the short-term future. As we know, the CPS budget timeline is different than the city's meaning the 2023-2024 school year budget is already set and approved, but we will engage stakeholders for feedback and recommendation to support the planning of a more equitable distribution in the future.</p>
	<p>What do you see as the role of CBOs in Chicago's early childhood ecosystem?</p>	<p>Community Based organizations play a crucial role in Chicago's early childhood ecosystem by providing essential services and supports to children and families centered around, early education, parental supports, health and nutrition, social services, advocacy, family and community engagement, and research and data collection. They are instrumental in providing education, support and advocacy to ensure that all children have the opportunity to thrive during their formative years. They bridge gaps in access to resources and play a vital role in promoting equity and improving outcomes for children in the city.</p>



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Workforce	What are the city's plans for addressing pay parity for teachers across community-based organizations and schools?	DFSS has implemented a system to allocate any funding increase it receives to agencies with the stipulation that they must first apply the increase to salaries. The purpose is to move closer to salary equity between CPS Teachers and CBO teachers who are required to have the same level of Degree and Credential.
	Early childhood workforce shortages are contributing to low enrollment because there aren't enough staff to keep classrooms open. How is the city working to address workforce shortages?	<p>The <a href="#">Chicago Early Learning Workforce Scholarship</a> (CELWS) aims to support Chicagoans interested in entering the early childhood profession and the current Chicago Early Learning workforce as they pursue coursework to earn a credential, degree, endorsement, or licensure to work with young children (birth through Pre-k) and families. CELWS includes a 3-year work commitment in a Chicago Early Learning program upon graduation/completion. In addition to receiving up to 100% coverage of tuition, fees and book costs, Scholars are paired with specialized Advisors who are versed in early childhood and the navigation of their college or university.</p> <p>Additionally, in partnership with City Colleges of Chicago- led by Harry S. Truman College- an inquiry of Chicago's current and former early childhood professionals is being completed to best understand challenges and recommendations first-hand and ensure recruitment and retention of the field. Feedback is also being gathered to inform the development of the Education Workforce Center, an initiative which will allow for engagement with individuals pre-, during, and post-academically. As a "one-stop shop", the EWC seeks to be responsive to both- the human and professional aspects of individuals.</p>



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Access	What are the city's plans for increasing early childhood options for infants, toddlers, and Pre-K?	The city is reviewing the former recipients of ECBG PI to determine where there is staff, capacity to increase and ability to operate additional classrooms or Home Visiting groups. We are monitoring capacity, staffing and ability to operate additional 3-year-old classrooms.
	Governor Pritzker announced plans to increase preschool seats by 5,000 per year. How is the City of Chicago planning for this expansion and how many seats are expected to increase for community-based organizations?	The Governor's announcement of 5,000 seats per year is a state-wide expectation focused mainly on areas where child care deserts exist. Although, the district (Chicago) is accountable for expansion there is not an identified seat number requirement for the overall district which includes both school-based and community-based organizations. Therefore, based on currently data, active waiting lists, and facility availability for expansion, DFSS will work with current agencies who have capacity, qualified staff and children age eligible in their communities. DFSS agencies will continue to focus on enrolling 3-year-old children as a priority for pre-k programs.
	How is the city planning to increase early childhood programming in communities where there is the most need?	<p>The District (CPS) continually evaluates preschool enrollment trends to determine where additional seats and programs are needed. The goal is to leverage the larger ECE community through partnerships like Every Child Ready Chicago (ECRC) to connect families with programs. The District also hopes that the CECIDS initiative will help all early childhood partners align our work and utilize shared data to drive our vision and planning.</p> <p>DFSS funds CBOs in communities that have been identified as <b>High Need</b> based on the results of Community Needs Assessments showing numbers of children age and income eligible for services. We also fund programs by a second criteria which is <b>Low Capacity</b>, where data is showing there is a gap in the number of agencies in specific communities</p>



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		(i.e. child care desert) to operate programs to meet the needs of the children and families.
	How does the City (DFSS, CPS) plan to coordinate with the other major funders of home visiting to ensure alignment in expansion of slots and compensation under Smart Start?	DFSS currently works in partnership with Major Funders across the state of Illinois regarding Home Visiting on alignment and expansion. These include ISBE, IDHS, IHSA and IDHS Head Start Collaboration.
	The online application system for early childhood education in Chicago is confusing and requires technology access and literacy that creates barriers to enrolling young children in preschool and childcare. Why can't we utilize other methods to apply for preschool programs?	Having a centralized enrollment process relieves the burden on families to travel to multiple locations to find out if space is available and apply for preschool. Managing all applications centrally also ensures that families are given seats according to their need, rather than on a first-come first-served basis. Collecting the information digitally also ensures that families get their seats in a timely manner and that programs have all the information they need to complete enrollment.
	Why is the school day still ending at 3 pm when parents work until 5 pm? Is anyone doing anything to address this? It's a huge stressor for me and even more for my four-year-old.	The Office of Early Childhood Education works in partnership with CBOs to provide extended day Out of School Time (OST) support to preschool students within the district. Additionally, an increasing number of elementary schools are offering OST to Pre-K students within their buildings.
Priority Population	Diverse learners face many barriers to inclusive early childhood programs and services. How is the city ensuring that diverse learners have equitable access to inclusive, high-quality early childhood programs across a variety of settings?	DFSS collaborates with CPS and has a co-located team of Subject Matter Experts who work directly with our funded programs. Their role is to provide support to teaching staff, observe in classrooms and assist and ensure diverse learners and families are receiving the necessary access for children to move through the process obtaining an IEP and receiving required services. In addition, DFSS contracts with Erikson Institute to



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		provide an additional layer of support to assess system and service delays and work with DFSS and its subrecipients to help resolve and troubleshoot any concerns.
	How is the city planning to partner with Early Intervention to support infants and toddlers with developmental disabilities and delays?	DFSS has a formal partnership with Early Intervention through its Child and Family Connections Offices. The MOA outlines how we work together to ensure infants and toddlers with developmental disabilities and delays are receiving services. In addition, DFSS contracts with Erikson Institute to provide an additional layer of support to assess system and service delays and work with DFSS and its subrecipients to help resolve and troubleshoot any concerns.
Family and Community Engagement	What is the process by which the city will engage the ECE community to create a vision and plan to ensure Chicago's children arrive at kindergarten ready to thrive?	DFSS identified Kindergarten Readiness as a goal in 2019 for all the children supported by the funding we allocate and have continued over the last years to engage the CBOs we fund in discussions on this vision, and we review annually with the CBOs. We continue to utilize supports to improve instructional quality driving toward an increase in the number of children leaving that are kindergarten ready and able to thrive through 3 <sup>rd</sup> grade and beyond.
Data and research	What is the current status of the Chicago Early Childhood Integrated Data System?	The Chicago Early Childhood Integrated Data System (CECIDS) is currently in a pivotal phase of development. Over the past year, significant progress has been made in consolidating and integrating data from various early childhood programs and funding streams. We have successfully established the foundational infrastructure for CECIDS, which will serve as a central repository for comprehensive early childhood data. However, we are still in the process of finalizing data collection and integration due to changes in Provider's data systems. We



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		<p>expect CECIDS to be fully operational and provide real-time, accurate data in the near future.</p> <p>Additionally, we continue to think about the financial health and sustainability of the project. CECIDS development has been supported by this public investment and a significant start-up investment from private donors. Looking forward beyond 2024, as CECIDS consistently demonstrates its value in bridging gaps between fragmented early childhood programs and funding streams, providing a comprehensive and integrated platform, the next version will necessitate expanded and sustained public funding for its longevity. This continued and expanded investment will empower stakeholders with real-time, accurate data crucial for understanding Chicago's early childhood education landscape, ensuring equitable access for all young children.</p>
	<p>How can researchers best support the city right now?</p>	<p>Researchers can play a crucial role in supporting the city's efforts to strengthen its early childhood data infrastructure by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Collaborating:</b> With the recent launch of Early Childhood Research Alliance of Chicago (EC-REACH), there will be a new capacity and structures to support researchers who are interested in collaborating with city agencies, community organizations, and CECIDS to analyze and interpret data, identify trends, and develop evidence-based solutions.</li><li>• <b>Conducting Research:</b> Researchers can conduct studies and evaluations to assess the impact of early childhood programs and policies, providing valuable insights for decision-makers.</li></ul>



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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Providing Expertise:</b> Researchers can offer their expertise in data analysis, research methodologies, and program evaluation to help enhance the quality and relevance of data collected and disseminated.</li><li>• <b>Advocating for Data Use:</b> Researchers can advocate for the use of data-driven decision-making in early childhood policy and program development, emphasizing the importance of transparent and easily accessible data.</li></ul>
Health	What is the city doing to increase access to health-related services for families with young children?	<p>CDPH is scaling Family Connects with the goal offering nurse home visiting services and referral connections to the estimated 28,000 infants born in Chicago each year.</p> <p>CDPH provides flu shots and recommended immunizations for infants, children, and some uninsured adults at walk-in clinics and mobile community events. Vaccines for Children works with more than 44,000 healthcare providers in the city to increase immunization knowledge and uptake.</p> <p>The City has invested \$43M and received a 50% increase in base funding from HUD to expand CDPH's Lead Poisoning Prevention and Healthy Homes program and provide an additional 1,700 eligible households with children under age six with home inspections and lead abatement and home health hazard mitigation to create safe home environments over the next several years.</p>





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		<p>CDPH is working with Greater Chicago Food Depository and community partners to pilot mobile WIC services to reach more eligible pregnant people, infants, and children under five where they are.</p> <p>CDPH's Disease Control Bureau works with early childhood settings to provide education and consultation as well as outbreak mitigation. This year, they will distribute air purifiers to early childcare centers that need improved ventilation.</p> <p>The City invested \$28M in CRP funds to support regional Healthy Chicago Equity Zones (HCEZ), which are partnerships established between CDPH and community partners to close the racial life expectancy gap. HCEZs receive funding and capacity-building support so they can lead local strategies that are responsive to local health needs.</p>
	<p>How can CDPH's maternal and infant-serving programs (Family Connects Chicago, WIC, Lead Poisoning Prevention and Healthy Homes) regularly coordinate with Chicago Early Learning programs to centralize or at least streamline referrals to the most appropriate services for each family? Can a formal mechanism be established, i.e, something like the coordinated entry system operated for permanent supportive housing programs for unhoused populations in Chicago?</p>	<p>CDPH staff serves on ECRC and DFSS Health Services Advisory Committee to align and share resources across departments. CDPH programs regularly conduct outreach and education activities at early childhood centers across the city. There is opportunity to expand interdepartmental collaboration, such as establishing systems integration meetings to ensure eligible families enrolled in Family Connects are linked to CEL programs and vice versa. Family Connects is also strengthening nurses' knowledge of long-term home visiting models and incorporating a warm handoff to those programs. In 2024, CDPH will formally evaluate how referrals made by Family Connects nurses result in successful linkages to resources, with a particular focus on connections to the range of early childhood programs.</p>