Executive Summary

In June 2005, the Illinois Early Learning Council called for a concerted effort to create an interactive, Web-based tool—to be called the Illinois Early Childhood Asset Map (IECAM)—to support “transparent” decision-making frameworks for awarding funding for Preschool for All. This decision-making tool would bring together data on early care and education from state agencies, Head Start, and the private sector. IECAM would also include data on early childhood (birth to 5) programs and community demographic information that could be used consistently by federal, state, and local government agencies to inform resource allocation processes in Illinois. The goal is to use resources as efficiently as possible while creating a comprehensive early childhood system for the state.

At the Council’s request, Chicago Metropolis 2020 and the University of Illinois’ Early Childhood and Parenting (ECAP) Collaborative took on leadership of the IECAM project, with financial support from the Spencer and Irving Harris Foundations and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and the assistance of a diverse work group representing state agencies, advocacy organizations, and experts. During the Planning Phase, the IECAM team produced the IECAM Interim Data Collection, which brings together existing data for use in fiscal year 2007 resource allocations. This collection of data is available for public use at [http://iecam.crc.uiuc.edu](http://iecam.crc.uiuc.edu).

During the Planning Phase, the IECAM project received funding commitments for Phase 1 development from the Joyce Foundation, the Illinois State Board of Education, and the Illinois Department of Human Services. Additional fund raising is underway to complete the budget.

The IECAM Planning Phase Final Report details decisions made by the IECAM team that will be implemented fully in Phase 1 of the IECAM project. During the Planning Phase, the IECAM team:

- drew distinctions between resources currently available and IECAM’s nature and purposes;
- built a case for creating an interactive rather than a static tool;
- defined the audiences to be served during Phase 1 ((1) state and local agencies, (2) legislators and their staff, (3) early childhood advocates and policy-oriented foundations, and (4) school district, child care, and Head Start administrators);
- detailed the geographic levels of analysis to be offered in Phase 1 (counties, elementary/unit school districts, Illinois Senate and House legislative districts, ISBE regions, and IDHS regions);
- began work on specific projections that relate to the eligibility standards of programs, most notably working with the Census Bureau on county-level
projections of numbers of children in families up to four times the poverty level (the new eligibility requirement for Preschool for All Children legislation);

• clarified the Phase 1 goal of bringing together information on the entire state, except for the City of Chicago;

• detailed IECAM’s approach to the complex issue of determining need and demand for early care and education services in the state; and

• created the initial Work Group, which has become the Advisory Committee for the IECAM project.

In Phase 1, IECAM will focus on the following early childhood data-related activities:

• providing a collection of data that accurately depicts the capacity of the early care and education system in the state of Illinois in state-funded PreK, Head Start and Early Head Start, Migrant Head Start, licensed and license-exempt child care centers, and state-funded programs for children ages birth to 3;

• including (where possible and appropriate) location information for each classroom or program;

• negotiating with the agencies that produce these data sets to create data-sharing agreements and updating schedules;

• working with data producers to refine definitions and notes that accurately describe the data, to find ways to avoid duplication of counts of children in more than one program or programs with multiple funding streams, and to incorporate eligibility criteria for early childhood programs and services; and

• consulting as needed with an Advisory Committee of data experts, demographers, and other stakeholders in the IECAM project.

In addition to early care and education services data, IECAM will focus on building a better demographic understanding of the young children and families in Illinois than is currently available. Based on input from a variety of sources, IECAM made the decision to add a demographer to the University of Illinois team. The goal will be to prepare and present updated demographic information tied to the eligibility criteria of multiple early childhood programs that builds on the data gathered in the 2000 Census, but also takes into account changes in communities brought about by family mobility and immigration.

A comprehensive public awareness plan for IECAM during Phase 1 as an essential component of the project was created during the Planning Phase. Public awareness activities will include printed materials, working with other groups to add links from their Web sites to IECAM, email alerts to potential users in the targeted groups, conference presentations, and articles in the professional literature. A responsive user support plan, which includes toll-free telephone assistance for users and offers a variety of online help options, is also planned for Phase 1. A plan for continuous improvement of IECAM by incorporating feedback from users and from usability studies will also be implemented in Phase 1. Recommendations for IECAM development in Phase 1 and Phase 2, including adding the data related to the City of Chicago in Phase 2, were also prepared during the Planning Phase.