



Who will Teach our Children?

BUILDING A QUALIFIED EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE TO TEACH ENGLISH-LANGUAGE LEARNERS

FINDINGS FROM THE ILLINOIS EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE DIVERSITY SURVEY

Latinos accounted for three in five new workers in Metro Chicago's workforce over the last decade—representing a national trend that will intensify as the growing count of young Latinos in the U.S. comes of age (U.S. Census, 1980, 2010). To address this increasing diversity and invest in the future, Illinois passed a mandate designed to foster bilingual skills and early learning in young English-language learners (ELLs). Now the Illinois early childhood education (ECE) workforce is scrambling to comply. This situation in Illinois is indicative of two disparate, national trends: State boards of education are embracing the importance of quality in early childhood education as they simultaneously struggle to define what constitutes quality for diverse, young learners.

The New Journalism on Latino Children project, based at UC Berkeley, partnered with The Illinois Early Learning Council (ILELC) and the Chicago's Latino Policy Forum to survey early childhood programs across Illinois to better understand how the workforce is evolving as their children become more diverse. We present information on the education and certifications of teachers serving young children in programs funded through the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), as well as on teachers' reported need for and interest in obtaining additional education and certifications.

WHY LATINOS?

Latino children represent a particularly urgent call to action in early childhood education. Comprising more than 20% of U.S. kindergartners (U.S. Census, 2010)—a statistic that is rapidly growing—many Latinos start school with limited English-language skills. Latino children enter kindergarten about six months behind their non-Latino peers academically (Fuller et al, 2009; Reardon & Galindo, 2009). The achievement gap persists as children advance through school, often culminating in low academic outcomes: nationwide, 45% of Latinos drop out of high school (NCES, 2009).

KEY FINDINGS

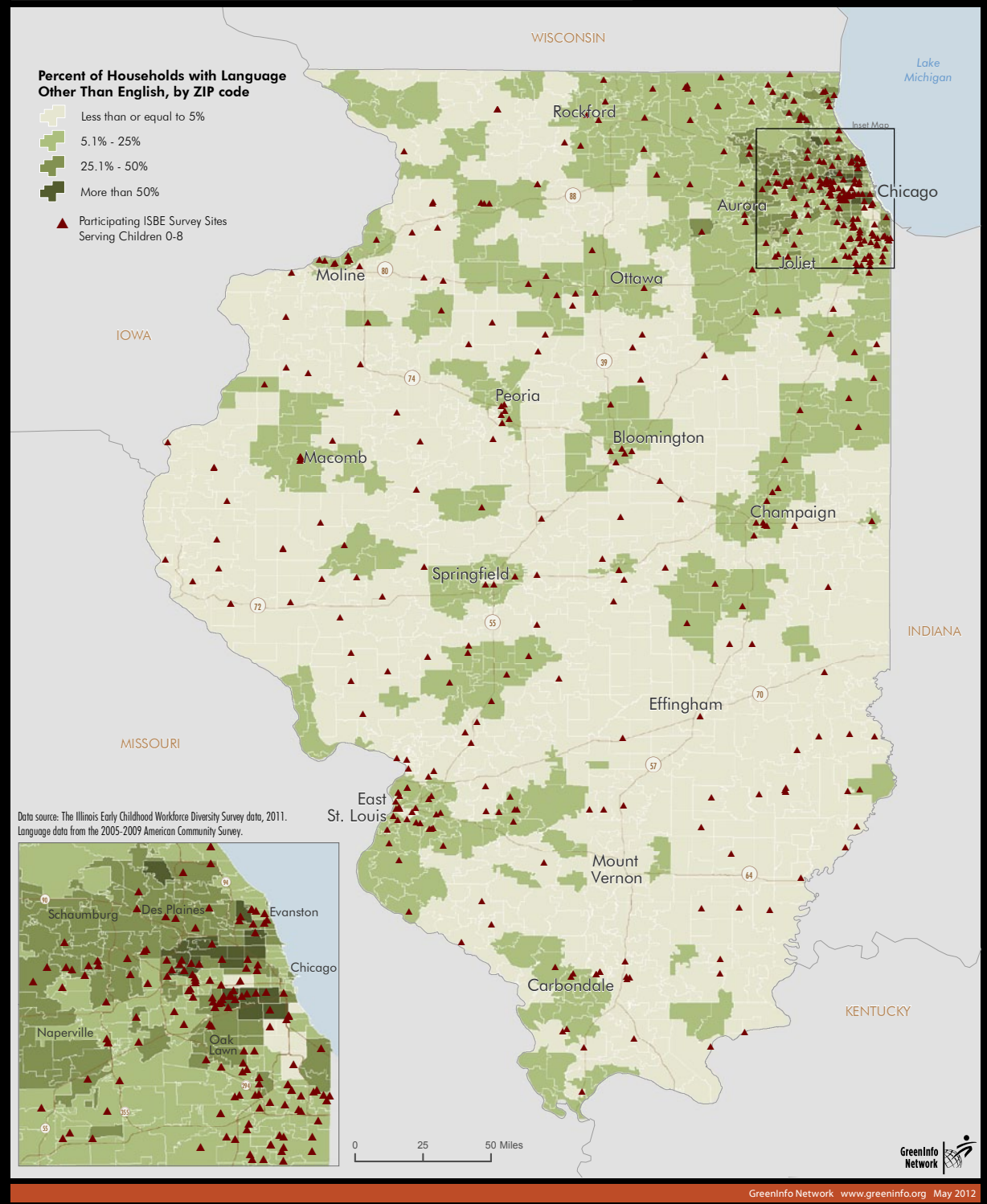
- Less than 6% of the early childhood workforce has training to work with Illinois' growing count of English-Language Learners.
- For programs in Latino communities, the ratio of young ELL students to teachers with bilingual training is 50:1.
- Administrators report that fewer than 25% of teachers are interested in pursuing qualifications for working with diverse language communities.

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These national statistics are reflected in Illinois, where one-in-four children under the age of 5 is Latino, and one-in-three babies born in the Chicago region has a Latino parent (Latino Policy Forum, 2011; U.S. Census,

2010b). Linguistic data for Illinois' preschoolers have not been collected historically, but ISBE reports that nearly 20% of Illinois kindergartners are ELLs—as are 36% of kindergartners in Chicago. Of those ELLs across the state, nearly 80% are Spanish-speaking (ISBE, 2011).

WHAT IS QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION?

Research suggests that both bilingual skills and academic achievement can be advanced through enrollment in quality early childhood education programs (Bassok, 2010; Loeb et al., 2007). The question is: what constitutes quality in an increasingly diverse, early childhood classroom? A cornerstone of quality education is teacher effectiveness—how prepared teachers are to teach. However, as the composition of the classroom changes, the conventional wisdom on the best teacher preparation is shifting: cultural and linguistic competence has new relevance. We know that promoting literacy and building on content in a student’s home language facilitates English-language acquisition (Rolstad et al., 2005; Slavin & Cheung, 2005; Thomas & Collier, 2002). Research also tells us that exposure to rich language and explicit instruction in phonological awareness form the foundation of robust language development (Dickinson et al., 2004; Geva & Wang, 2001. And—importantly—children learn most effectively in the context of strong, supportive relationships with their teachers (Hamre & Pianta, 2001, 2005). Thus, research suggests the importance of building cultural and linguistic competence into standards of preschool quality.

In Illinois, the legislature has answered the call for an updated measure of quality education with the provision of bilingual preschool. In 2009, the definition of ELLs in the state school code was expanded to provide preschool-age children with the bilingual services that previously were not available until kindergarten. The new approach extends the assessment and provision of bilingual services to eligible preschool children in school district-administered programs funded through the state’s Early Childhood Block Grant.¹ This change shifts the meaning of quality related to the early childhood workforce—and the skill, education, and certification requirements for many early childhood teachers.

As a result, Illinois needs early childhood teachers with diverse language skills and Bilingual/English as a Second Language (ESL) certificates.

But as Illinois’ education policy evolves to keep up with demographic shifts in classrooms, how prepared is its workforce? Illinois represents a trend as schools across the country—faced with shrinking funding sources and growing numbers of students to serve—scramble to address the changing academic needs of our youngest learners. In this brief, we analyze the results of a 2011 survey designed to measure how Illinois’ current early childhood education workforce stacks up against this evolving definition of quality.

¹ The change extends the requirements for ELLs in K-12 public schools to those 3- and 4-year-olds in preschool programs administered by public districts—if the preschool has at least 20 ELL students who speak the same language. By 2014, teachers in bilingual preschool classes must be certified in Bilingual Instruction or English as a Second Language in addition to standard certification in Early Childhood Education.

WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE STUDY?

In an attempt to understand how the early childhood workforce in Illinois is responding to the growing diversity of its student population, preschool programs across the state were surveyed. Respondents include 307 program directors, principals, superintendents, teachers, coordinators, and other administrators, representing 354 preschool program locations, which comprise about 60% of ISBE Preschool for All programs and about 55% of ISBE Prevention Initiative programs (see Table 1). Preschool for All programs aim to provide high-quality preschool education for 3- to 5-year-old children, particularly those at risk for academic failure, or provides funding to programs serving families of low to moderate income and other families who choose to participate (IL School Code: 105 ILCS 5/2-3.71). In contrast, the Prevention Initiative aims to provide voluntary, comprehensive child development and family support services for expectant families and families with children aged 0 to 3 years (IL School Code: 105 ILCS 5/2-3.89).

The survey findings correspond to 64,482 children— 17,106 (27%) of whom are English-Language Learners (ELLs), and 2,599 ISBE-certified teachers (see Table 2). In comparison to data published by ISBE, our target sample had more ELLs in the 3-5 age group than in pre-kindergarten programs in Illinois school districts (8,903 versus 7,260, respectively; ISBE, 2011). In addition, more than two-thirds (68%) of the programs were located in Cook County, as shown in Figure 1. This geographic concentration may reflect several issues: (1) the majority of ELL children in Illinois are enrolled in school districts in Cook County² (54.8%; Illinois State Board of Education, 2011); (2) respondents from programs with a higher percentage of ELL children may have been more motivated to participate in the survey, given their awareness of the upcoming change in staffing requirements; and (3) our efforts to recruit programs located in Latino communities, given the preponderance of ELLs who are Latino.

Table 1. Participating Program Types

Program Types ^a	Total (%) ^b
ISBE Preschool for All Only	172 (56.0)
ISBE Preschool for All Plus	104 (33.9)
ISBE Prevention Initiative Plus	31 (10.1)
Total Programs/Locations Represented	307/354

a Categories are mutually exclusive. ISBE Preschool for All Plus includes programs marked as ISBE Preschool for All plus another type (i.e., ISBE Prevention Initiative, Head Start, Early Head Start, Childcare, or Other), and ISBE Prevention Initiative Plus includes programs marked as either: (a) ISBE Prevention Initiative only; or (b) ISBE Prevention Initiative plus another type excluding ISBE Preschool for All (i.e., Head Start, Early Head Start, Childcare, or Other).

b Percentage calculated based on total number of programs for which each particular characteristic was provided.

² Cook County includes the City of Chicago and its surrounding suburbs.

Table 2. Breakdown of Students and ISBE-Certified Teachers by Child Age Group (n=307)

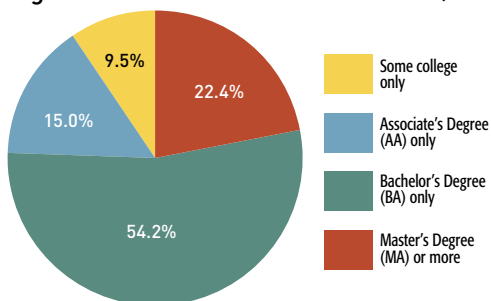
	0-3 years	3-5 years	K-3rd	Total
ISBE-Certified Teachers	53	1,388	1,158	2,599
Children/Students	3,711	33,201	27,570	64,482
ELLs ^a	1,374	8,903	6,829	17,106

a ELLs = English-Language Learners; respondents did not distinguish between ELLs, DLLs (Dual-Language Learners) and LEPs (Limited-English Proficient). The term ELL is used given that this term is preferred in Illinois in lieu of LEP (http://www.isbe.state.il.us/research/pdfs/ell_program_stat_report10.pdf).

WHAT IS THE LEVEL OF EDUCATION OF ISBE-CERTIFIED TEACHERS?

Teacher education and content-related training are essential aspects of early childhood teaching quality, with higher levels of education and training associated with higher levels of quality (Early et al., 2007; Fukkink & Lont, 2007). In Illinois, the mandate addresses this with the four-year college degree being the basis for ISBE certification. The survey captured the education levels of approximately 72% of the teachers in participating programs: 15% had an Associate’s Degree (A.A.), 54% had a Bachelor’s Degree (B.A.), and 22% had a Master’s Degree (M.A.) or doctorate (See Figure 2). Of those with at least a B.A., about 54% were ISBE-certified. While Latinos and students with limited English-language skills are generally less likely than middle-income students to have teachers with professional training and experience (Gandara & Contreras, 2009), education levels in this sample were similar for teachers regardless of the community concentration of Latino families.³ However, there were differences in teacher education levels across program types, reflective of hiring requirements. Following the laws pertaining to ISBE Preschool for All Only programs, more than 90% of the teachers in those programs had a B.A. or higher, compared to about 65% of teachers in ISBE Preschool for All Plus programs and about 72% in ISBE Prevention Initiative Plus programs.

Figure 2. Teacher Education Levels^a (n=269)



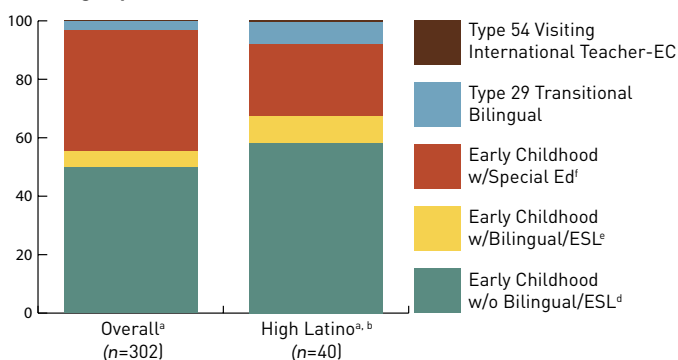
a Percentage based on the number of teachers for whom education was provided.

3 “High Latino” communities are those in zip codes where 20% or more of the population is Latino (n=36).

ARE TEACHERS CERTIFIED TO TEACH ELL STUDENTS?

As noted above, the foundation of teacher preparedness to work with young ELLs and provide quality ECE is education and training—in Illinois, this means ISBE Early Childhood Certification with Bilingual or ESL. Nearly half of the sample (49.8%) held an Early Childhood Education certification – but without the additional endorsement in Bilingual Instruction or English as a Second Language (ESL) that will be required under the new Illinois mandate (see Figure 3). Just under 6% of teachers across program types possessed this dual endorsement; about 9% of teachers working in high-Latino communities were dually certified. Under the new Illinois mandate then, less than 6% of teachers meet the shifting standards of quality in ISBE programs.⁴

Figure 3. ISBE Teacher Certification by Community Demographics



- a Percentage calculated based on total number of teachers for whom each particular characteristic was provided.
- b High Latino programs are those in zip codes where 20% or more of the population is Latino (n=36).
- d Includes the following: Type 04 Early Childhood, Type 05 Provisional Early Childhood, Type 43 Provisional Alternative Early Childhood, and Type 44 Initial Alternative Early Childhood.
- e Type 04 Early Childhood with Bilingual/ESL Approval.
- f Includes the following: Type 04 Early Childhood with Special Education Approval and Type 10 Special Education: Preschool-Age 21.

WHAT ARE THE STUDENT-TO-TEACHER RATIOS?

Low student-to-teacher ratios benefit young children by providing them with more opportunities to interact with teachers in more focused ways, and by supporting their strong relationships with teachers (Hamre & Pianta, 2001, 2005; Turnbull et al., 2009). ISBE recommends a 10:1 student-to-staff ratio for preschool classrooms (ISBE, 2009); the ratio of young students to ISBE-certified teachers was 30:1 across program types. It is important to note that median student-to-teacher ratios were calculated based on ratios for individual programs, but the survey did not account for the total number of adults present in classrooms, only ISBE-certified teachers. As a result, the actual student-

4 The mandate applies to programs administered to school district-administered programs funded through the Early Childhood Block Grant that have at least 20 ELL students who speak the same language. By 2014, teachers in bilingual preschool classes must be certified in Bilingual Instruction or English as a Second Language in addition to standard certification in Early Childhood Education.

to-staff ratios—which may include teacher aides, who tend to have lower levels of education and training—may be lower. For ELLs, the corresponding quality marker in ratios is the number of children in relation to the number of ISBE-certified teachers with Bilingual or ESL endorsement. As shown in Table 3, across programs, the ratio of young ELL students to teachers with bilingual training was 35:1; in “high Latino” communities⁵, the ratio of young ELL students to certified bilingual or ESL teachers increased to 50:1. These high student-to-teacher ratios may not indicate a lack of compliance with the Illinois bilingual preschool mandate—given that the policy change applies only to state-funded, school district-administered preschool programs with 20 or more ELL students speaking the same language in a classroom—but they raise questions about quality.

Table 3. Median Student-to-Teacher Ratios

	Overall ^a	High Latino ^{a,b}
Median ratio of students to ISBE-certified teachers		
0-3	23:1	13:1
3-5	30:1	30:1
K-3 ^d	20:1	16:1
Median ratio of ELL students to teachers with bilingual/ESL qualifications^c		
0-3 ^d	35:1	50:1

a Percentage based on the total number of teachers whose certification was reported.
 b High Latino programs are those in zip codes where 20% or more of the population is Latino (n=36).
 c Including teachers with any of the following qualifications: Type 04 Early Childhood with Bilingual/ESL Approval, Type 29 Transitional Bilingual, and Type 54 Visiting International Teacher.

¿HABLAS ESPAÑOL?

Other than English, Spanish was the most common language spoken by children (85.8%) and bilingual ISBE-certified teachers (92.6%), as well as the most common language in which ISBE-certified teachers had bilingual approval (91.8%). This is consistent with a previous report indicating that, after English, Spanish is the most common home language of pre-K children in Illinois (Illinois State Board of Education, 2010).

IS THERE A WILL, IS THERE A WAY?

As the 2014 implementation of the Illinois bilingual preschool mandate approaches, responding administrators⁶ perceived little need for and teacher interest in seeking certifications to work with diverse language communities, as shown in Table 4. About 45% of respondents suggested there was little need for their ISBE-certified teachers to obtain ESL approval; about 21% of those from programs in high-Latino

communities responded likewise. Similar corresponding percentages— 43% across respondents from all programs and 21% of those in high Latino communities—estimated that none of their ISBE-certified teachers would be interested in pursuing the coursework. The most challenging barriers to obtaining certification and endorsement requirements for working with culturally and linguistically diverse children were “lack of time” (45%) and “cost” (43%).

One possible explanation for this apparent lack of need or interest in obtaining additional certifications is that many teachers may already have the linguistic and cultural competence they need: the majority of respondents estimated that at least half of their teachers share or are familiar with their young students’ backgrounds. However, if the low levels of perceived need reflect some sample programs not serving ELLs, rapidly changing demographics suggest a more diverse classroom may be coming soon. Illinois Latinos are more likely to live in Chicago’s suburbs than in the city itself, a trend that will continue in the future (Latino Policy Forum, 2011).

Table 4. Ratings of Need for and Interest in Teacher Qualifications by Proportion of ELL Children^a (in percentages)

Need for and Interest in Qualifications	Overall n=307	High Latino n=38
Need for ISBE-certified teachers to obtain an ESL approval:		
Little need	44.6	21.1
Some need	24.1	28.9
Significant need	22.5	42.1
Monolingual English, ISBE-certified teachers interested in coursework for ESL approval:		
None	42.7	20.5
About 25%	23.5	17.9
About half	10.4	17.9
About 75%	2.6	10.3
All of them	12.1	25.6
Teachers who share/are familiar with children’s backgrounds:		
None	5.9	7.7
About 25%	14.0	15.4
About half	10.4	5.1
About 75%	14.7	23.1
All of them	43.0	41.0

a Percentages within a category may not add up to 100% due to missing data.

HOW DO WE MOVE FORWARD?

Quality early childhood education provides a strong start to students’ success in school, in work, and in life. As classrooms across the country become increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse, the quality paradigm—

⁵ “High Latino” communities are those in zip codes where 20% or more of the population is Latino (n=36).
⁶ Program administrators responded on behalf of their staff; results should be interpreted as such.

and the teacher preparation and training that support it—must shift, too.

While there is no comprehensive measure of cultural competency, a tangible proxy exists in Illinois with the state's new bilingual education mandate: teachers who work with young, linguistically diverse students are required to have training in Bilingual Instruction or English as a Second Language. Survey results indicate that very few teachers in the Illinois early childhood workforce—about 6%—have the needed education and training to work effectively with the state's growing cohort of ELLs.

Efforts to build a dually-certified early childhood workforce will be tested by a variety of factors. Program administrators report a lack of interest among teachers in seeking out the certification and endorsements to become qualified. Future preschool teachers pursuing coursework and training to work with ELLs have limited options for training tailored specifically to serving young learners. While the requirements of Illinois' bilingual preschool mandate

can be fulfilled by standard K-12 bilingual or ESL training, only two programs in the state are specifically designed for preschool-age ELLs. For teachers pursuing training in either type of program, ongoing fiscal woes limit the state and district financial resources available to assist them. And overall, the diversity of Illinois' education workforce does not match that of its students: As of 2011, just 5% of all state teachers and administrators in Illinois identified themselves as Latino (Northern Illinois University, 2012).

Despite the challenges, the shift in how we provide quality early childhood education for culturally and linguistically diverse children is overdue. Latino students—currently 20% of our country's kindergartners—will soon account for 20% of our country's workforce. An investment in these future worker's current teachers—teaching them how to foster Latino and ELL students' learning potential—is something that we cannot afford to miss. And we can start at the beginning with re-defining quality early childhood education in relation to the students served.

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