



# **Advancing the Illinois Early Childhood Education Workforce: A Model College and Career Pathway (2017-3)**

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## Introduction



This policy brief proposes a postsecondary education and career pathway model for Illinois early childhood educators. This pathway model is grounded in recommendations for the early childhood educator profession from both the National Academy of Medicine and the National Association for the Education of Young Children, as well as work from the federal Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) grant awarded to Illinois in 2013–2017. This proposed pathway model, the *Illinois Early Childhood Educator Preparation Pathway*, provides clarity about competencies and qualifications for various levels of employment in early childhood education. The proposed pathway also draws from best practices in career pathway development by aligning stackable credentials to two- and four-year degree programs.

As a result, the *Illinois Early Childhood Educator Preparation Pathway* model offers resolutions to widely varying requirements for training, education, and employment across different settings which are perennial challenges in this field. It also offers those working in the field a

well-defined route to furthering their competence and education that sequences and articulates coursework across institutions and improves time to degree. Finally, the proposed pathway creates new options for innovation in the field to systematically develop, assess, and recognize key professional competencies. This policy brief delineates the proposed pathway within the Illinois context, describes the underlying rationale for its development, and concludes with recommendations for Illinois policymakers and state agencies, as well as higher education, to advance full implementation of the pathway and support the realization of attendant benefits to the early childhood education profession, children and families, and the state.

### Background

In their earliest years, young children grow rapidly, continuously learning from their environments. During this time, they develop the foundation for their linguistic, cognitive, social, and emotional capacities, making the first years of a child's life among the most formative (National

Research Council & Institute of Medicine, 2000). Importantly, high-quality, center-based early childhood education (ECE) supports this development, preparing students for success in kindergarten (Huang, 2017) and later academic achievements contributing to larger societal and economic benefits (Dodge, Bai, Ladd, Muschkin, 2016; Phillips, Gormley, Anderson, 2016; Peisner-Feinberg, Garwood, & Mokrova, 2016).



A patchwork of funding streams and regulatory systems has resulted in a fragmented workforce with widely ranging preparation, qualifications, and compensation, often varying by setting.

A growing body of evidence (Bredekamp & Goffin, 2012; Minervino, 2014; Schilder, 2016) suggests that well-trained, highly-skilled practitioners are at the core of effective early childhood (EC) programs. However, the early childhood workforce is disjointed and lacks shared knowledge or common set of competencies required for similar positions (Institute of Medicine & National Research Council, 2015). In Illinois (Lichtenberger, Klostermann, & Duffy, 2015; White, Mayconich Baron, Klostermann, & Duffy, 2016), and across the nation (Institute of Medicine & National Research Council, 2015), a patchwork of funding streams and regulatory systems has resulted in a fragmented workforce with widely ranging preparation, qualifications, and compensation, often varying by setting. Adding to the complexity of this professional landscape are disconnects in credentialing and professional development systems. This makes it difficult for both preservice and in-service practitioners to navigate their way to the degrees and credentials requisite for entering the workforce and improving their earning potential (White et al., 2016).



There has been a national call for better prepared early childhood educators across ECE settings and a recognition of the importance of credential attainment for both child and center outcomes.

To rectify this discordance in EC educator preparation and ensure that all young learners have access to high quality, early care, there has been a national call for better prepared early childhood educators across ECE settings and a recognition of the importance of credential attainment for both child and center outcomes (Bredekamp & Goffin, 2012;

Institute of Medicine & National Research Council, 2015; Minervino, 2014; Schilder, 2016). Recommendations to better equip early education professionals across settings with the knowledge and skills necessary to support the healthy development of young children, (Institute of Medicine & National Research Council) include (a) strengthening qualification requirements based on knowledge and competencies, including a phased transition to a minimum of a baccalaureate degree for lead educators; (b) improving higher education and ongoing professional learning; and (c) promoting evaluation that leads to continuous improvements in professional practices.

Moreover, the need for EC professionals and preschool teachers is expected to grow by 14% and 17% respectively, adding to the urgency to strengthen early childhood educator preparation and professional development (Limardo, Sweeney, & Taylor, 2016; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). Strengthening and expanding the EC educator workforce will require innovative, cross-system approaches allowing the field to overcome historic divides and to develop clear and accessible EC career pathways.

This report describes a collaborative pathway model which partners postsecondary institutions responsible for educator preparation, government regulatory and oversight agencies, and workforce development entities to design, advance, and support a pathway that builds upon an existing credentialing infrastructure in Illinois. This pathway model

- (a) advances competency-based qualifications focused on interdisciplinary core content knowledge and demonstrated skills;
- (b) prioritizes improved articulation agreements with streamlined and well-coordinated transfer requirements that fit traditional and adult learners' needs as they progress along their pathways; and
- (c) establishes a singular and flexible system, compatible with multiple sectors, with several entry and exit points aligned to stackable, industry-wide recognized degrees and credentials leading to a variety of career pathway options.



# Challenges for Preparing an Early Childhood Workforce

## Supporting Working Adults to Degree and Credential Completion

The pathway model describes how learners can enter and exit the early childhood workforce at various points in their career. This presupposes that many of the persons entering the EC educator pipeline will be nontraditional or adult learners; therefore, consideration should be made for the special circumstances of adult learners, which is detailed in this section.

Adult learners are prevalent and on the rise on college campuses as more students are accessing postsecondary education after entering the workforce, raising a family, and/or other life events. Recent data from the National Center of Education Statistics (NCES) indicate that nationally 74% of undergraduates possess at least one characteristic of a nontraditional student<sup>1</sup> (Radford, Cominole & Skomsvold, 2015). Having more pressures on their time due to family and work, adult students typically take longer to get a degree compared to traditional students. Although, the enrolled time does not differ much from traditional-aged students, the number of calendar years to complete a degree was 1.8 years longer for an associate degree and 3.1 years longer for a bachelor degree (Shapiro et al., 2016) for adult learners. The long time to degree is even more accentuated in the ECE field due to low earning potential even with a postsecondary degree and previous lack of aligned educational opportunities.

Along with this trend toward more adult learners, we also find that the frequency in which students transfer institutions is on the rise—more than 67% of bachelor-degree earners transferred colleges at least once (Shapiro et al., 2016). Unfortunately, this longer time to degree and more prevalent transfer patterns affect credit loss. On average students lose 13 credits with their first transfer. Although, about 39% of transfer students have no credit transfer (Simone, 2014). This loss of transfer credit has motivated the design of structured pathways for student enrollment and stackable credentials, in which institutions transfer credentials and degrees intact toward a higher credential or degree, to help to facilitate college completion. The Illinois model draws on the strengths of an existing

statewide system for supporting student transfer, called the Illinois Articulation Initiative, which has proven to be highly successful in supporting completion of two- and four-year degrees as evidenced by National Student Clearinghouse data (Illinois Board of Higher Education, 2015-16).

Education and skills development systems intended to serve the adult learner population—adult basic education, workforce development programs, and community and technical colleges—often were not designed with a goal of readying adults returning to education from the workforce for college and postsecondary attainment. As a result, many postsecondary institutions were ill-equipped to meet their needs and effectively advance their education and positioning in the labor market (Roberts & Price, 2015).

Meeting the needs of adult learners requires flexibility in course scheduling, such as evening, weekend, and distance learning options, and course offerings at convenient satellite locations. State-of-the-art adult learner services include child care options, financial aid for adult learners, advisement and financial aid services with evening and weekend hours, transitions programs, accelerated and personalized course formats, and prior learning assessment and credit (American Association of State Colleges and Universities, 2006; Ross-Gordon, 2011).

An innovation to improve time to degree for all learners is the guided pathways model (Complete College America, 2014). An essential component of guided pathways is pre-developed whole programs of study with accompanying course sequences. These pre-structured pathways avoid unused course credits and keep the student on track for an on-time graduation. Another key component of the guided pathways model is intrusive, on-time advising, in which an early warning system alerts advisors if a student is at-risk of academic trouble so the advisors can intervene before students make decisions that derail their path to graduation. These and other features of guided pathways help students make more informed and beneficial choices and increase transparency about degree pathways. In several examples of implementation, graduation rates have dramatically increased and led to improved time to degree (Complete College America, 2014).

<sup>1</sup> These characteristics include being financially independent, having one or more dependents, being a single caregiver, not having a traditional high school diploma, delaying postsecondary enrollment, attending school part-time, and being employed full-time (NCES, 2015).



Ultimately, the goal is to transform the ECE workforce to ensure that postsecondary institutions properly prepare practitioners to help young children thrive at each stage of their development.

The proposed Illinois pathway model will require overcoming these disconnects, improving coordination, and updating program offerings and policies in order to achieve the cross-system alignment necessary for guiding adult learners along the early childhood professional pathway. Ultimately, the goal is to transform the ECE workforce to ensure that postsecondary institutions properly prepare practitioners to help young children thrive at each stage of their development. To enable and sustain these systemic changes requires institutional leaders and the governing and funding entities to develop a shared vision, commitment, and understanding of each other's roles so that programming, policies (e.g., credit transfer, credentialing, quality standards and metrics), and investments align to support the common goal of strengthening the early childhood workforce (Roberts & Price, 2015).

## A Fractured Early Childhood Workforce

Employment workforce requirements for early childhood educators are wide ranging. Some aspiring assistant teachers may only need a high school diploma in licensed care centers, whereas teachers in early childhood centers associated with K-12 schools need a baccalaureate degree, with varied requirements in between for other positions. It is not surprising, then, that EC educators enter or re-enter the postsecondary system with a range of credentials and degrees. Currently, the credential and degree requirements for Illinois EC educators are varied, determined by where the teacher is working, if that setting is licensed, and how that setting is funded. This complexity makes it difficult for EC educators to navigate the education system to advance in their profession or choose to work in another type of setting.



The credential and degree requirements for Illinois EC educators are wide-ranging and varied, determined by where the teacher is working, if that setting is licensed, and how that setting is funded.

Concomitantly, early childhood educators may re-enter the postsecondary system not only with varied credentials, but also with varying degrees. Common degrees for EC educators include the Associate of Applied Science degree, the

Associate of Arts degree, and the Bachelor of Arts degree. Because four-year institutions expect the transfer of general education courses from the associate degree programs, yet the two-year degrees, particularly the Associate of Applied Science, include many early childhood courses, transfer to four-year programs has been problematic and can result in much credit loss for EC educator transfer students.

Given the fractured nature of this workforce's preparation and development, a great deal of variation in education, certification, and professional learning exists among early childhood professionals. To unify the workforce and move it in the direction of evidence-based practice, a National Research Council (NRC) and Institute of Medicine (IOM) report (National Research Council & Institute of Medicine, 2000) makes a number of recommendations regarding preparation programs and ongoing professional development. Among these recommendations is a call for high-quality training programs designed for specific professional roles centered around a core set of interdisciplinary coursework and field experiences so that those in similar positions, regardless of the setting, operate from a comparable foundation of knowledge and competencies.

National recommendations also encourage greater coherence around professional learning supports and easing access to appropriate, high-quality professional development resources for both preservice and in-service practitioners (National Research Council & Institute of Medicine, 2000). Commensurate with these recommendations, this report also suggests that the entities responsible for regulating and overseeing early childhood settings strengthen and align competency-based

qualification requirements across the workforce. More specifically, this report calls for a tiered, multi-year preparation pathway aimed at equipping all lead educators with at least a bachelor degree with specialized knowledge and competencies in child development, ECE

knowledge, and educational practices—a move consistent with child development and early learning science.

# Initiative to Redesign Illinois' Early Childhood Educator Programs



The proposed Illinois pathway model fits within the existing credentialing and postsecondary system with some redesign. The Illinois early childhood credentialing system has existed since 2001, developed by the Professional Development Advisory Council and the Illinois Department of Human Services and enacted in Illinois statute in 2009. Illinois EC educators can obtain a series of leveled industry-recognized credentials through the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Association (INCCRRA)'s professional development system, known as Gateways to Opportunity. These leveled credentials allow EC educators to gain the knowledge and skills necessary for a variety of ECE workforce positions in varied settings, beginning with Level 1 training designed to supplement high school education and Levels 2 through 5 attained through a combination of postsecondary education and experience. The credentialing system is built upon a comprehensive set of 347 benchmarks of Gateways Levels 2 through 5 that map onto seven core content areas: human growth and development (HGD); health, safety, and well-being (HSW); observation and assessment (OA); curriculum or program design (CPD); interactions, relationships, and environments (IRE); family and community relationships (FCR); and personal and professional development (PPD).

In alignment with the core content areas, Level 1 gives some training in health, safety, and other related topics at the secondary level. Level 2 prepares EC educators to work as assistant teachers and requires postsecondary education and practical experience in human growth and development, and health, safety, and well-being, and other areas of early childhood knowledge and skills. Level 3 prepares educators to work as entry-level EC teachers and requires additional postsecondary education in each of the seven ECE content areas as well as documented hours of experience in EC settings. Level 4 prepares EC educators to become EC teachers. This level requires an associate degree and additional coursework in the ECE content areas, as well as additional experience in EC settings. Level 5 prepares competent early childhood classroom lead teachers with leadership and advocacy knowledge and skills, and possible educator licensure through the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE). This level requires a bachelor degree, additional postsecondary hours in the ECE content areas and additional documented EC experience. This integration of credentialing and postsecondary degrees in a seamless pathway is essential to the advancement of early childhood educators.

The connections between the credentialing system and the state's colleges and universities were further strengthened as part of the state's Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge. Under the auspices of this federal initiative, the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) along with other stakeholder partners including the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) and INCCRRA launched a series of higher education initiatives to advance the preparation of the state's early childhood workforce. These initiatives included a grant program to support two-year and four-year institutions in collaboratively redesigning their EC educator preparation programs to support transfer and articulation, as well options for attaining Gateways credentials as part of the candidate's work within their degree programs. One of the grant partnerships investigated questions about how they would jointly determine candidate attainment of desired knowledge and skills as represented by the sequence

# ILLINOIS EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATOR PREPARATION PATHWAY

## GATEWAYS ECE CREDENTIALS\*

## POSTSECONDARY COMPETENCIES

## ADDITIONAL POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

## PREPARATION

### LEVEL 5

#### Lead Teacher (Level 5):

- Human Growth and Development (HGD5, HGD6)
- Health Safety and Well-Being (HSW7, HSW8)
- Observation and Assessment (OA7, OA8)
- Curriculum or Program Design (CPD10)
- Interactions, Relationships, and Environments (IRE6, IRE7)
- Family and Community Relationships (FCR7)
- Personal and Professional Development (PPD7, PPD8, PPD9, PPD10)

Completion of additional ECE coursework, supervised experience, and possible specialization in

- Infant/Toddler
- ESL/ Bilingual
- Early Childhood Special Education.

Prepares competent early childhood classroom lead teachers with leadership and advocacy knowledge and skills, and possible educator licensure through ISBE.

**BACHELOR DEGREE**

### LEVEL 4

#### Teacher (Level 4):

- Human Growth and Development (HGD4)
- Health Safety and Well-Being (HSW6)
- Observation and Assessment (OA4, OA5, OA6)
- Curriculum or Program Design (CPD4, CPD5, CPD6, CPD7, CPD8, CPD9)
- Interactions, Relationships, and Environments (IRE5)
- Personal and Professional Development (PPD5, PPD6)

Completion of general education, 3 additional hours of ECE, and child development practicum

Prepares competent early childhood classroom teachers with proficient knowledge and skills.

**ASSOCIATE DEGREE**

### LEVEL 3

#### Entry-Level Teacher (Level 3):

- Health Safety & Well-Being (HSW3, HSW4, HSW5)
- Observation and Assessment (OA1, OA2, OA3)
- Curriculum or Program Design (CPD1, CPD2, CPD3)
- Interactions, Relationships, and Environments (IRE3, IRE4)
- Family and Community Relationships (FCR4, FCR5, FCR6)
- Personal and Professional Development (PPD3, PPD4)

Completion of 3 hours each of English, math, and general education

Prepares competent entry-level early childhood classroom teachers with basic knowledge and skills.

### LEVEL 2

#### Assistant Teacher (Level 2):

- Human Growth and Development (HGD1, HGD2, HGD3)
- Health Safety and Well-Being (HSW1, HSW2)
- Interactions, Relationships, and Environments (IRE1, IRE2)
- Family and Community Relationships (FCR1, FCR2, FCR3)
- Personal and Professional Development (PPD1, PPD2)

Completion of 2 additional hours

Prepares competent early childhood assistant teachers with foundational knowledge and skills.

**HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA OR GED**

### LEVEL 1

A series of basic trainings on health, safety, and other topics aligned with the Illinois Department of Human Services requirements that may be used to supplement high school education.

\*Gateways to Opportunity  
<http://www.ilgateways.com>

Figure 1. Infographic of the proposed Illinois Early Childhood Educator Preparation Pathway.

**HGD** = human growth and development; **HSW** = health, safety, and well-being; **OA** = observation and assessment; **CPD** = curriculum or program design; **IRE** = interactions, relationships, and environments; **FCR** = family and community relationships; and **PPD** = personal and professional development.





## FURTHER GRADUATE EDUCATION AND GATEWAYS LEVEL 6

### ENTRY TO EMPLOYMENT

LEAD TEACHER

TEACHER

ENTRY-LEVEL TEACHER

ASSISTANT TEACHER



Credit for assistance with competency-based pathway to Diane Christianson, Johnna Darragh Ernst, Nancy Latham, & Wendy Mertes, faculty consultants. Illinois ECE Technical Assistance Project, 2015 – 16.



ILLINOIS  
EDUCATION  
RESEARCH  
COUNCIL

of Gateways credentials, Levels 2–5. This investigation resulted in a comprehensive mapping of the 347 EC educator credential benchmarks to employment options and increasingly sophisticated expectations of knowledge and skills. The higher education partnership’s resulting work yielded a well-articulated set of 56 competencies from the EC educator credentials, clearly aligned with the underlying benchmarks (Sanden et al., 2017; see Figure 1).



The higher education partnership’s resulting work yielded a well-articulated set of 56 competencies from the EC educator credentials, clearly aligned with the underlying benchmarks.

As the EC educator Gateways competencies were developed and shared with the wider ECE field, state leaders recognized opportunities for leveraging the competencies to reduce credit loss and improve attainment of credentials and degrees. The IBHE, along with INCCRRA and ICCB, launched two technical assistance projects spanning 2015–2107. Through the technical assistance projects, ECE

faculty at both two-year and four-year institutions were given expert peer consultation to support the alignment of ECE coursework to competencies, thereby creating coherent course sequences that further supported student transfer and completion. Additional support was provided in attaining institutional approvals for curriculum changes, and making refinements in marketing, admission, and advising systems to better highlight the career pathway. This project also equipped institutions with competency-based assessment tools to align ISBE requirements and Gateway credentials and set institutions on the course of developing coherent articulation pathways for EC credentials and degrees.



## Early Childhood Educator Preparation Pathway Model

Career pathways provide an opportunity to redesign education and workforce development systems to strengthen cross-system alignment and provide multiple entry points for earning credentials and entering or re-entering the workforce (Center for Law and Social Policy, 2014). Recognizing the complexities of systems change, the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) developed a framework for effectively planning and implementing a pathway model (U.S. Department of Labor, 2016). The key steps in this framework are relevant for the alignment and development of EC educator pathways: (a) build cross-agency partnerships and clarify roles; (b) identify industry sectors and engage employers; (c) design education and training programs; (e) identify funding needs and sources; (f) align policies and programs; and (g) measure system change and performance. Similarly, the “core activities” outlined in the *Shifting Gears* (CLASP, 2014) pilot evaluation report also point to the importance of alignment and collaboration; state leadership and commitment; policy change; and outreach to the field and other stakeholders in order to realize the systems changes necessary for establishing a pathway model.

*Illinois’ Early Childhood Educator Preparation Pathway* model (Bernoteit & Holt, 2016) is underpinned by the components of systems change outlined in both the USDOL framework and the *Shifting Gears* “core activities.” These include engagement and collaboration among state agency leadership and key stakeholders to design a lattice of education and training on and off ramps with a commitment to aligning policies, resources, and programs to make systems change possible (Bernoteit, Darragh Ernst, & Latham, 2016). The remainder of this section provides highlights regarding the cross-agency, cross-sector collaboration and the resulting pathway model. More detailed information can be found in the book, *Voices from the Field: Collaborative Innovations in Early Childhood Educator Preparation* (Bernoteit, Darragh Ernst, & Latham, 2016).



The proposed pathway model addresses national recommendations to develop a system of multi-year preparation, leading to higher credentials and to bachelor degree preparation and beyond, while strengthening and aligning competency-based qualifications.

*The Illinois Early Childhood Educator Preparation Pathway* model in Figure 1 lays out the alignment among the Gateways credentials, postsecondary competencies, additional postsecondary coursework, and degree requirements, associated with each educator level and employment options. Further, the proposed pathway model addresses national recommendations to develop a system of multi-year preparation, leading to higher credentials and to bachelor degree preparation and beyond, while strengthening and aligning competency-based qualifications.

The foundation for this pathway model is grounded in the leveled credentials awarded through INCCRRA and the competency-based model developed through IBHE’s Illinois EC Education Technical Assistance Project in 2015–2016.<sup>2</sup> This pathway is based on a hierarchical set of credentials and postsecondary degrees with a defined set of core competencies assigned to each Gateways EC educator level. Key features of this pathway model include (a) a competency-based model, (b) competencies aligned with degree requirements and workforce needs and options, and (c) the potential to bring coherence to the EC educator workforce requirements across different employment settings.

Gateways levels two through five are each mapped onto a set of the competencies in the seven core areas (see Figure 1), which provide early childhood educators with the knowledge and skills needed for the associated workforce options (Sanden et al., 2016). This sequence of competencies builds upon prior levels and both eliminates redundancy and creates vertical alignment within the system. Instead of selecting from a smorgasbord of course options, courses are designed to scaffold candidates in specific competencies. This proposed pathway model allows employers to be assured that a hire with certain

<sup>2</sup> by Diane Christianson, Johnna Darragh Ernst, Nancy Latham, & Wendy Mertes, faculty consultants to IBHE.





This proposed pathway model allows employers to be assured that a hire with certain credentials has training on the key competencies needed for the position.

credentials has training on the key competencies needed for the position. Basing the pathway on competencies also supports clear articulation between community college and baccalaureate programs. Moreover, the vertical alignment of competencies prevents EC educator candidates from taking redundant courses resulting in extra, unneeded college credits and sets the foundation for a series of vertically-aligned assessments that can be used in both the two-year and four-year sectors. Potentially, this competency model could be personalized to meet individualized student needs based on competencies previously attained through professional development and/or workplace learning and is compatible with a system for granting prior learning credit.



Early childhood educators or EC educator candidates can enter the pathway at multiple entry points and exit the pathway with the skills aligned with workforce role needs.

This model represents a pathway for college and careers in early childhood with stackable EC credentials and degrees. Early childhood educators or EC educator candidates can enter the pathway at multiple entry points and exit the pathway with the skills aligned with workforce role needs. This provides a flexible system for both traditional and adult learners in which they can exit the pathway and enter EC workforce knowing that there are options to increase their skills and move into positions of increasing responsibility by meeting the next set of competencies and additional postsecondary requirements (see Figure 1).

This reduces the cost to the student/educator by decreasing duplication in course taking and allows them to have a seamless system of credentials and degrees to move up the career ladder.

Each level on the pathway is aligned with career opportunities that match the educator's skill set, moving from an assistant teacher at Gateway ECE Level 2, to an entry-level teacher at Gateway ECE Level 3, to a teacher at Gateway ECE Level 4, to a lead teacher at Gateway ECE Level 5. This aligned pathway allows for further specialization with graduate education or additional training to other career advancements in early childhood, such as the infant-toddler specialization, or the director credential. This pathway model has the potential to create smoother transitions by aligning the requirements for various workforce options and creating transparency in their path to advancement in the profession.





## Recommendations for Policymakers and State Agencies

Preparing an early childhood workforce requires a cross-system and agency approach because of the multiple state agencies and stakeholder groups that are involved with early childhood educator preparation. The current EC educator preparation system is intertwined within these multiple groups and has undergone a complex development process to address all certification, credentialing, and workforce needs. Yet, improvement and continual monitoring of the current system will be needed to address the challenges previously noted and provide a robust, aligned early childhood educator preparation system for the future. This can be accomplished with the following recommendations.

- » **Continue to align federal and state policies and administrative rules, as well as funding streams, to elevate the education and qualifications of EC professionals for employment roles across settings.**

Through the RTT-ELC grant, the state of Illinois made substantial strides on this front, but the work needs to continue. The Gateways to Opportunity credentials are codified in administrative rule but not yet fully embedded in administrative rules for employment across settings. Administrative rules codifying the pathway model, with the recommended requirements for entry to employment, need to be advanced across all relevant state agencies. This effort will require a willingness to examine administrative rules for continuity across state agencies and may benefit from a coordinating entity, such as the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development.

- » **Continue partnerships between state agencies and institutions of higher education to ensure those working in early childhood education have access to programs and related supports to attain the requisite credentials and degrees.**

Coordination across state agencies and institutions of higher education yielded some of the most important innovations described in the model pathway. Further collaboration across these entities will provide opportunities to address implementation issues in a cross-system manner, study outcomes, and pursue implementation at scale.

- » **Pursue state-level strategies to address compensation parity.**

Three key compensation concerns among EC educators are well documented. These are the “pervasive economic insecurity, the low value accorded educational attainment, and an irrational wage structure” (Whitebrook, Phillips, & Howes, 2014, p. 81). These concerns have led to recommendations to increase public funds for compensation of the early childhood workforce and to establish regional, transparent guidelines for a compensation schedule based on education and training and experience (Whitebrook et al., 2014). The Illinois Early Learning Council Workforce Compensation Subcommittee convened to address compensation parity within the Early Care and Education workforce and recommended a specific salary amount (\$24/hour) that in 2016 would achieve compensation parity for bachelor-prepared EC educators (Krajec & Scritchlow, 2016). These efforts require initiatives at state and local levels to achieve compensation parity for the EC workforce.

## Recommendations for Higher Education Institutions

This pathway model allows higher education institutions the flexibility to innovate curricula, assessments, and methods for credit granting, as well as other areas related to early childhood educator preparation. These recommendations provide guidance for the essential elements of institutional partnership and innovation.

- » **Support the maturation and expansion of ongoing partnerships between two-year and four-year partners to build a seamless pathway for early childhood educators' postsecondary training and advancement.**

Through these partnerships, develop course sequences that lead to smooth transfer from community college to baccalaureate programs. Develop institutionalized, sustainable partnerships that support future EC educators through seamless transfer, effective advising practices (e.g., intrusive advising), and shared assessments. Develop systems for continuous improvement of the partnership, as institutional, state, and discipline standards evolve.

- » **Use the competency-based pathway model to promote higher education innovations and stronger connections to related ECE professional development systems.**

Using a competency-based approach allows for innovation in tailoring coursework to missing core competencies through various forms of professional development, training, and/or varying credit coursework. This creates a system whereby the EC educator candidate avoids course duplication and accumulating unused credits. Unbundling the required competencies from the traditional course structure can lead to innovation in content delivery, including personalized learning based on the candidate's knowledge and skills.

- » **Leverage partnerships with employers and other stakeholders to help working adults continue their education and learning.**

Partnerships with employers can benefit working adults by providing innovation in such areas as workplace site-based learning; workplace cohort models with flexible scheduling around adult learners' work schedules; and awarding prior learning credit for workplace learning. Further, by acknowledging the benefit of using workplace settings to apply ECE principles, postsecondary institutions create richer and more integrated learning environments for the adult learner.



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