



Delivering on the Promise

*Leveraging the diversity of our early learning
workforce to help Latino teachers and
preschoolers realize their promise and potential*

Issued by the Logan Square Neighborhood Association
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Why is early childhood education so important? A growing body of research shows that **high-quality early learning programs can have a lasting impact** on children’s cognitive and social development—particularly for Latino children.

Children who attend early learning programs develop a **strong foundation for later learning**, which leads to higher rates of academic success in elementary, middle and high school. These early learners score higher on third-grade assessments, stay in school longer and are more likely to earn high school diplomas.

Early childhood education also has **benefits beyond the classroom**, leading to reductions in social problems such as teenage pregnancy and criminal activity.

Perhaps most interesting, investing in rich learning opportunities for children early in life provides a higher return on investment than interventions made later in life. According to University of Chicago Nobel Laureate Dr. James Heckman, **early childhood education is a sound investment**, with every one dollar invested yielding a seven to ten dollar return in the form of increased school and career achievement, as well as reduced costs in remedial education, health and criminal justice system expenditures.

Laying the Foundation for Success

Nationally, despite their potential, Latino preschoolers lag far behind their Caucasian, African American and Asian counterparts on measures of school readiness. According to a report from the National Research Center on Hispanic Children and Families, these gaps can have far-reaching implications for Latino children if they are not addressed.

But there’s good news as well. Studies also show that Latino children benefit more from preschool participation than children in other ethnic groups—and that **early childhood education can close the skills gap for Latino children** at the kindergarten level and beyond.

Latinos comprise 16.5 percent of the Illinois population and Latino children account for 20.3 percent—or more than a fifth—of the Illinois preschool population. To help these young learners achieve their full academic and social potential, we must provide early learning experiences that are responsive to the needs of Latino children and their families.





Developing a Diverse Workforce

How do we achieve this goal? By increasing the number of minority and bilingual educators in the early childhood workforce—and increasing the early childhood education credentials of educators who possess essential linguistic and cultural competencies.

Yet, to increase the credentials of these educators, we must advocate for community college and university programs that **better serve returning adult learners** with services such as counseling, tutoring, financial assistance and peer support through a cohort model.

This report—which provides a road map for the development of a more culturally and linguistically diverse early childhood education workforce—includes the following components:

- A description of the children served by Illinois preschools and their teachers
- A rationale for increasing the number and credentials of minority and bilingual early childhood educators
- Components of effective early childhood education credentialing programs
- A case study of a successful local program that supports Latinas pursuing advanced certificates and associate in applied science degrees

*“In other settings, I frequently note that the early childhood workforce is more **culturally and linguistically diverse** than its K-12 counterpart. These are individuals who have already demonstrated commitment to the learning of young children and the support of young children and families. This is a group of people who could and should be cultivated to advance their learning, their credential and degree attainment for work in the early childhood field and maybe in elementary or secondary education.*

This is a critically important workforce.

From a broader higher education and workforce development perspective, investments here also matter because early childhood professionals make it possible for working adults in other settings to go back to school.”

Stephanie Bernoteit

*Senior Associate Director for Academic Affairs,
Illinois Board of Higher Education*



The Illinois Early Childhood Landscape

Early childhood care and education in Illinois is **complex, fragmented and supported by a wide variety of funding streams**. Options for Illinois preschoolers include the state-funded Preschool for All program, the federally funded Head Start program, private early childhood centers and home-based programs that are ECE-site licensed¹ or license-exempt. Data collection differs across these programs and sometimes overlaps, making it difficult to get a clear picture of the children served and the educators responsible for their development.

About Our Preschoolers

Since 1985, the State of Illinois has made it a priority to **increase access to high-quality preschool programs** for children from low-income or single-parent families, children of teenaged parents and children from homes where a language other than English is spoken.

In 2006, Illinois became the first state to offer voluntary, high-quality preschool programming for three- and four-

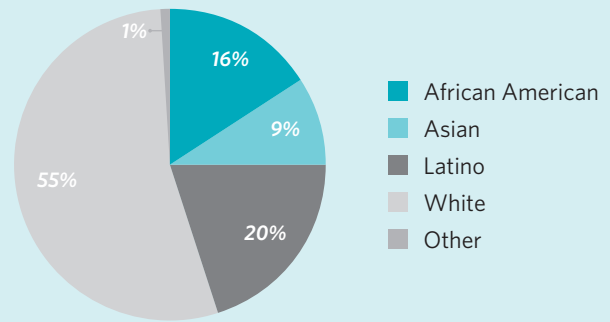
year-old children through the Preschool for All program. By 2015, approximately 230,000 Illinois children were enrolled in preschool programs. Twenty percent of these preschoolers were Latino. (See Figure 1 on page four.)

During the 2014-15 academic year, the Illinois Preschool for All program served 75,154 children, while Head Start served 40,000 children. Latinos made up approximately 11 percent of the children enrolled in licensed centers² and 31 percent of the

children enrolled in Preschool for All³ and Head Start/Early Head Start⁴ programs. (See Figure 2, below.)

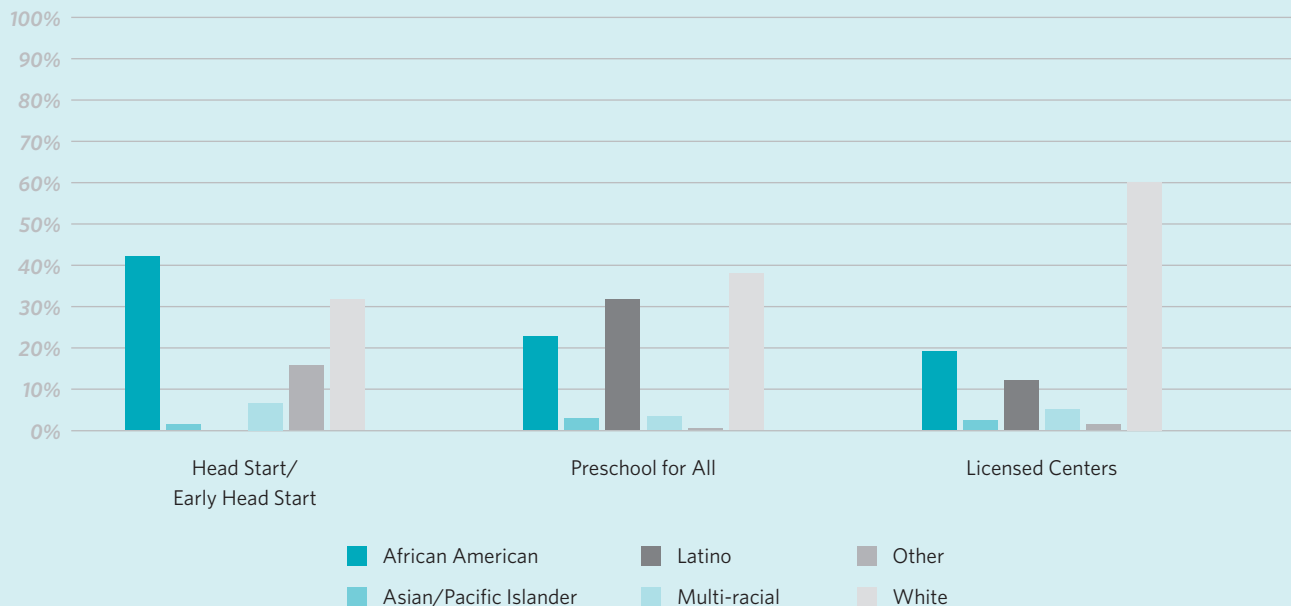
A significant percentage of children spoke a language other than English. During the 2014–15 academic year, 15.7 percent of children enrolled in Preschool for All programs were English language learners,⁵ and 24 percent of those enrolled in Head Start/Early Head Start programs reported Spanish as their home language. Slightly more than **55 percent of the children in a licensed center spoke a language other than English** and, among these, 33.7 percent spoke Spanish.⁶

Figure 1: Children Any Age Enrolled in Preschool in Illinois, 2011–2015



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011–2015 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates.⁷

Figure 2: Illinois Children in Preschool for All, Head Start/ Early Head Start and Licensed Centers



Note: Latinos comprised 31 percent of the children in Head Start/Early Head Start. Head Start collects racial and ethnic data separately.

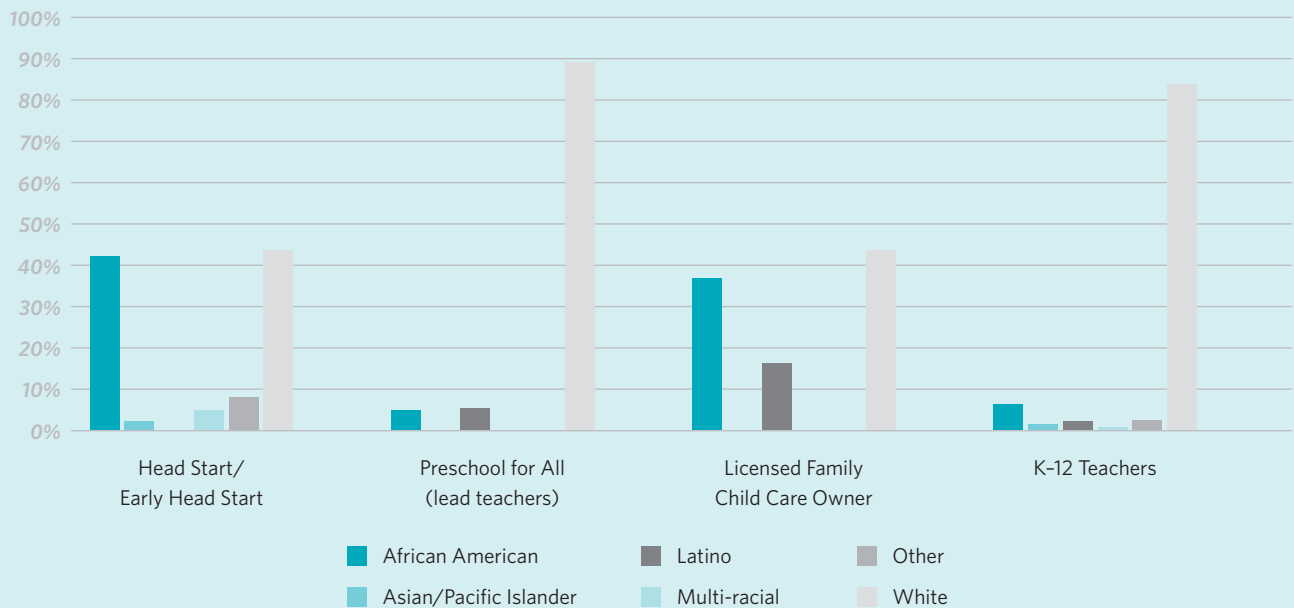
About Our Early Childhood Workforce

The Illinois early childhood education workforce is predominantly female (95 percent), with an average age of 39.⁸ The workforce is also **racially, ethnically and linguistically diverse**—although the Head Start and licensed family child care workforce is more diverse than the Preschool for All and K-12 workforces.⁹ An analysis of 2016 data about early childhood workforce in licensed centers and in-home family child care sites reveals a greater percentage of Latinos and

African Americans in the roles of family child care site owners (53.5 percent) and center-based assistant teachers (42.4 percent) than in the roles of center-based teachers (29.6 percent) and center-based administrators (30.3 percent).¹⁰ (See Figure 3 on page five.)

The early childhood education workforce is also linguistically diverse. Of those working in Illinois licensed early childhood education sites, 12.3 percent of family child care owners reported Spanish as their primary language, compared to

Figure 3: Workforce Diversity by Program



Note: Twenty-nine percent of Head Start/Early Head Start teachers are Latino.¹¹ Head Start collects racial and ethnic data separately.

*“Our relationship with the Logan Square Neighborhood Association is **a vital partnership** that has been a great boon to our college and program. We have been thrilled to be able to **build relationships with students** and their sites over multiple semesters. Watching students grow and engage with material and each other has been a true honor. Students’ touch point in the community, via Lucy and the Logan Square Neighborhood Association, was essential in student recruitment and retention.”*

Kate Connor

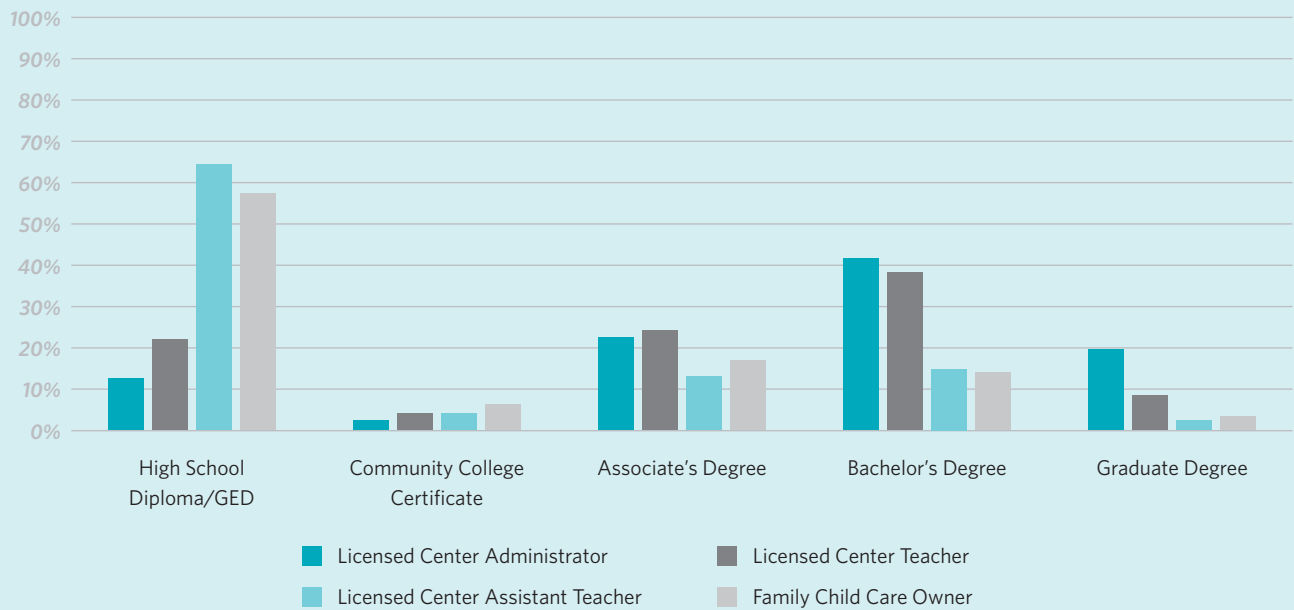
College to Careers Dean, Truman College

eight percent of assistant teachers, four percent of teachers and three percent of administrators in centers.¹² More than 20 percent of Head Start and Early Head Start teachers reported a language other than English as their native tongue.¹³ From 2011 to 2013, nearly 19 percent of early childhood educators in Illinois were immigrants.¹⁴

The **educational attainment of teachers varies** from program to program, in part because qualification requirements have increased in some programs. Preschool for All lead teachers are required to hold a bachelor’s degree and an Illinois Professional Educator License with an endorsement in early childhood education. Similarly, Head Start requires that at least half of its lead teachers in center-based programs have a bachelor’s degree or an advanced degree in early childhood education or a bachelor’s degree in a related field with preschool teaching experience. All assistant teachers in Head Start center-based programs must have at least an associate credential in child development, be enrolled in a program leading to an associate or baccalaureate degree or be enrolled in an associate degree program in child development and complete the degree within two years.¹⁵ (See Figure 4 on page six.)

This change in requirement has led to an increase in the percentage of Head Start lead teachers with bachelor’s degrees. According to the latest available data, 80 percent

Figure 4: Educational Attainment Levels by Position



Licensed centers can be funded through Preschool for All, Head Start or private funding sources.

of Head Start lead teachers hold bachelor's degrees. For the sake of comparison, only 50 percent of Head Start assistant teachers held associate's or bachelor's degrees in 2014-15,¹⁶ and less than 20 percent of licensed center-based assistant teachers and family child care owners held bachelor's degrees.

At the same time, Illinois utilized funding from its \$52 million *Race-to-the-Top/Early Learning Challenge* grants to **enhance training opportunities for early childhood educators**. This effort resulted in an increase of 4,912 early childhood education credentials, 2,529 infant and toddler credentials and 854 program director's credentials¹⁷ between 2012 and 2015. In 2014, Illinois began mandating that Preschool for All programs with 20 or more English language learners must be taught by a teacher with a bilingual certificate.¹⁸ Early childhood education teachers working outside of public schools earn relatively low salaries, with assistant teachers earning the least—around \$20,000 annually.¹⁹ Racial and ethnic minority educators are overrepresented in these support roles.²⁰ These low salaries and competing responsibilities, such as caring for their families while working for a living, make it difficult for assistant teachers to pursue higher education degrees. Yet it is precisely this population—which already possesses the **linguistic and cultural competencies** needed to foster the development of our growing population of Latino children—that should be supported with opportunities for advancement.





An Early Investment with a Big Return

Early childhood education is a timely investment with big dividends. High-quality preschool programs not only enhance the social, cognitive and physical development of early learners, but deliver a return on investment years down the road—**increasing the number of years spent in school, as well as high school graduation rates and earning potential**, while decreasing crime and teenage pregnancy rates.²¹ The earliest investments in children have the highest returns through both short- and long-term savings on social safety net programs, as well as increased productivity and well-being.²²

Who benefits the most?

According to a 2017 Brookings Institute report, low-income children and dual-language learners benefit more from preschool programs.²³ This report also noted that Latino children benefited more from preschool programs than other groups—a finding that was duplicated in a number of studies.

One of these studies also found that **Latino children who speak Spanish at home benefit the most from high-quality preschool programming.**²⁴ The lead author of the report noted that, in comparison with other groups of children, dual-language learners may have underdeveloped pre-literacy and pre-math skills. However, because these children are

learning two languages, they possess stronger cognitive abilities (referred to by the author as “stronger brain circuits”), which can **enhance self-regulation and increase a child’s capacity to incorporate new information** and switch from one task to another.²⁵

These findings are particularly important in light of the 4.7 percent increase in the Latino population in Illinois (from 12.3 to 17 percent) between 2000²⁶ and 2016.²⁷ Of the more than 1.9 million Latinos in Illinois over the age of five between 2011 and 2015, 42 percent were immigrants and 79 percent spoke a language other than English.²⁸ Thus, the majority of Latino children in Illinois were learning Spanish first, or at the same time that they learned English.

Fortunately, a child’s brain is better equipped to learn two languages during the preschool years,²⁹ and the language skills developed during the acquisition of a child’s first language can aid in the acquisition of a second language. Learning more than one language also **enhances cognitive development**; helps children maintain strong ties with their families, communities and cultures; and positions them for success in school and our global society.³⁰

Meeting the Needs of Minority Preschoolers

An examination of professional standards across four national organizations reveals the following two early childhood education standards that reflect this research and the growing diversity of our preschool populations:

1. Early childhood educators should be equipped to work effectively and equitably with children of different ability levels from diverse cultural, socioeconomic and linguistic backgrounds.
2. Early childhood educators should partner with family members to support children’s learning and development,³¹ and be prepared to create a culture of mutual respect, open communication and understanding and integrate aspects of the family’s cultural background into educational and social programming.³²

Regrettably, our current credentialing programs offer little in the way of training to prepare our early childhood educators for the challenges of teaching a diverse preschool population—and many teachers retain their own biases in practice.³³

This unmet need is substantiated by Preschool for All teachers who have expressed a desire to pursue more training so that they can better support dual-language learners.³⁴ In 2016, the New America Dual Language Learners Network, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Education also cited a lack of professional development opportunities for teachers with a desire to better support dual-language learners, as well as a **dearth of linguistic diversity in the work force**.³⁵

These findings all underscore the value of current early childhood educators with bilingual skills. According to a 2016 policy statement on supporting the development of dual-language learners in early childhood programs, “These individuals are existing language assets in programs and should be supported in advancing in their field. States and communities should develop plans targeted at ensuring that more of these individuals are on a career pathway, starting with an entry-level credential, and that they are offered technical assistance and supports.”³⁶

Moreover, **minority teachers serve as positive role models** and are invaluable in responding to the needs of minority children. As Marcy Whitebook of the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment notes in *Building a Skilled Teacher Workforce: Shared and Divergent Challenges in Early Care and Education and in Grades K-12*, “Minority teachers typically hold higher expectations for minority children, and are less likely to misdiagnose them as special education students. Minority teachers often are more attuned to the challenges related to poverty, racism and immigration status that many children of color face in their communities (Learning Point Associates, 2005). For children younger than five, teachers who speak the home language of the young children are a critical asset in promoting their school readiness, engaging with families and communicating with children who are learning English as a second language (García, 2005).”³⁷

The early childhood education workforce is projected to grow at a rate of seven percent³⁸ nationally and 14 percent³⁹ in Illinois by 2024 to meet the needs of our nation’s youngest learners. As the **need for bilingual educators and leaders** continues to increase, we urgently need more experienced minority and bilingual early childhood educators to obtain the education and training that they need to better support children’s development and to serve as lead teachers and administrators.





Prepping Minority Educators for Success

The critical need for more minority and bilingual early childhood educators in Illinois, and throughout the nation, is clear. Yet **equipping minority and bilingual educators with the degrees and credentials that they need** to effectively support our early learners is a complex and multifaceted undertaking.

Early childhood educators earn low salaries, have less formal education and must divide their time between competing family and work responsibilities. Thus, credentialing and degree program flexibility, duration, affordability and accessibility are all factors that must be considered for this subset of the early childhood workforce.

According to a 2015 report issued by the Institute of Medicine and the National Research Council, we can increase access to essential education and training programs—and ensure program completion—for early childhood educators by providing financial assistance and offering additional supports such as counseling, tutoring and cohort models.⁴⁰

Learning Together: The Cohort Model

Cohort models show great promise as a support mechanism for minority and bilingual educators. One such program is a California project that supported six cohorts consisting primarily of older women of color as these women pursued their bachelor's degrees. The average graduation rate among the cohorts was 81 percent.⁴¹ A year after completing their bachelor's degrees, the graduates identified financial assistance, flexible class schedules, supportive faculty,

academic assistance, convenient class locations and **taking courses in a cohort** as factors that were critical to their success.⁴² The takeaway from this program was clear: By supporting the development of culturally and linguistically diverse educators, we can enable these educators to advance in their profession and, ultimately, enhance the early learning experiences of minority, dual-language learners.



Case Study: *The Early Childhood Cohort Program*

The Logan Square Neighborhood Association (LSNA) serves a community in Chicago that is roughly 50 percent Latino.⁴³ LSNA plays a vital role in this community by working to ensure that more children in the Logan Square area enter kindergarten ready to achieve their full potential. This mission-directed goal—coupled with LSNA's commitment to improving the lives of adults in the community—led to the creation of the **Early Childhood Education (ECE) Cohort Program**.

Made possible by a partnership between LSNA and Truman College, one of the City Colleges of Chicago, the ECE Cohort Program supports community members as they pursue Associate in Applied Science (AAS) degrees in child development.

This vital program, which combines in-person class time with online study modules, employs a stackable credit model that enables students to earn a basic certificate with 16 credit hours, an advanced certificate with 31 credit hours and an

Associate in Applied Science degree with 62 credit hours.

Between 2014 and 2017, the Logan Square Neighborhood Association enrolled 54 women in three ECE cohorts. The first cohort launched with 13 participants in 2014, followed by a second cohort of 11 participants who entered the program in Fall 2016 and Spring 2017. A third cohort consisting of 20 students entered the program in Fall 2017.

The majority of the students in Cohort 1 had children under the age of 18. All but one were Latina and lived or worked in the Logan Square community. Their median age was 34, and more than half spoke Spanish as their first language and had some prior college education. As of January 2017, all but one of the participants were employed in an early childhood education setting, with most working in home-based day care or at a private, center-based site for less than six years. The following program outcomes represent data collected from Cohort 1 only.⁴⁴

ECE Cohort Experiences and Outcomes

Participants in the ECE Cohort Program rated their overall experience, professors, curriculum, advising, tutoring, transfer and career service as “good” or “excellent.” Financial aid was the only service that did not rate in the “good” category or above. The students also appreciated the hybrid online/in-person course model because it was convenient and flexible, and they had “access to the internet everywhere.”

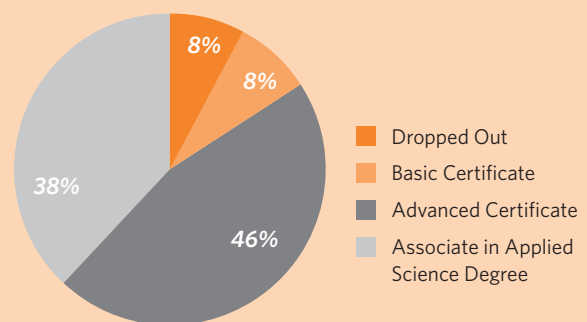
The ECE Cohort Program participants received support from Truman College faculty members, their fellow cohort members, the Logan Square Neighborhood Association and their families. The women felt very supported by the Truman faculty and noted that their professor suggested sites for observation assignments, as well as programs that the cohort members might want to pursue after completing their associate degrees. The professor also provided access to a financial aid advisor and registration personnel during class sessions, so that the cohort members could access these services without taking time away from work to make another trip to the Truman campus. As one student noted, “The teachers were amazing. Very helpful and very responsive.” Truman also provided a shuttle to transport the cohort members to and from the campus. Six out of the 11 Cohort 1 participants rode the shuttle to Truman College and appreciated the convenience of having the shuttle, which reduced their commute time and cost.

The women also provided critically needed support for their fellow cohort members. **“It has been a good experience in terms of support,”** noted one cohort member. “We shared our phone numbers, and when we had a question or something about how to do the homework, we texted each other, or we called each other or we got together and we [did the homework together].”



The women expressed their gratitude to the Logan Square Neighborhood Association, and to the association’s education director, for making this experience possible. One focus group participant made the following observation: “I think [the LSNA support] was very important because you’ve got a lot of things on your mind and a lot of things to do that sometimes you put things [to] the side. But then, when [LSNA staff members] call and they are like ‘How are you doing? How is everything going?’ you feel like ‘Okay, I’ve got to do this.’ So, I think it’s important [to have] a little push and support.”

Figure 5: Certificate and Degree Completion for Cohort 1



The members of Cohort 1 increased their knowledge about early childhood education while attaining higher credentials that have, in many cases, led to salary increases.

- Of the 12 women, all but one completed the requirements for an advanced certificate by May 2017.
- Of the women who completed the advanced certificate, five completed an associate in applied science degree by August 2017 and five have enrolled in general education courses in 2017-18 and anticipate graduating in Spring 2018. (See Figure 5, above.)
- Seventy-one percent of the participants received a subsequent increase in compensation.
- More than 70 percent of participants reported a change in job position after participating in the ECE Cohort Program.

The cohort members also provided examples of the ways that they had benefited professionally from their participation in the ECE Cohort Program. Participants noted that they had **gained the skills and knowledge that they needed** to develop age-appropriate lessons and provide opportunities for hands-on learning and also gained a better understanding of early childhood education standards. This observation by a cohort participant is a case in point: “I’ve noticed that I see things



differently now.. The [teaching techniques that I learned in the cohort] helped me see exactly [what the children know]. Today, I was asking the kids if they knew what a shape was, and one of my three-year-olds [said] ‘An octagon is a shape’ and that blew my mind. I wasn’t expecting that.”

Moreover, the ECE supervisors of three participants noted that the **teachers shared what they learned** and routinely indicated new practices that they should adopt. One ECE supervisor cited significant changes in the way that one participant worked with children, parents and her colleagues: “We’re talking about black and white here. [Before participating in the cohort, this teacher] actually feared to put lesson plans together on her own, and she was struggling to [hold] the children’s attention during the circle time. [Now she is no longer afraid] to create her own lesson plans. She creates awesome lesson plans. She captivates the children. These classes have totally transformed her teaching style and her confidence in the classroom.”

A Successful Model for Early Childhood Workforce Development

Assistant Professor Connor identified key factors that contributed to the success of the cohort program. Faculty turnover was minimal, which gave the professors an opportunity to get to know and support the women in the cohort. By renting books to the cohort, they were able to ease the financial burden of purchasing textbooks. By offering all classes on the same weeknight over a three-year period, they were able to provide the consistency that cohort members needed to plan their busy lives and make child care arrangements. The **online course modules offered much-needed flexibility** and the cohort provided invaluable peer support. Finally, Professor Connor noted that the partnership between Truman College and the Logan Square Neighborhood Association—and the relationships between LSNA and the

cohort participants—were critical to the success of the ECE Cohort Program.

Despite the program’s success, there were still hardships. Returning to school as a full-time working mom is not an easy undertaking. The women in the cohort noted challenges such as juggling the demands of school, child care, work and other family responsibilities while keeping up with classwork. The cost of education was a concern for many, and participants often used more than one payment method to cover their tuition. More than half of the women paid out of pocket, while a couple took out loans. Nonetheless, the women achieved their educational goals because the ECE Cohort Program was designed to meet their needs and they were well supported.

All participants acknowledged the support that they received from the Logan Square Neighborhood Association—and many of them commented on the **support that they received from their cohort peers**. The participants also noted that the Truman faculty was consistently helpful and responsive to their needs. It was evident that this close-knit group of women had achieved something that they thought was out of reach and that they were proud of their accomplishments and grateful for the support that made these accomplishments possible.

With **increased knowledge and credentials**, this group of women is better prepared to support the social, cognitive and physical development of young children in the Logan Square community, while advancing their careers in early childhood education and enjoying a higher quality of life.

*“The future of Chicago’s children depends on our ability to **prepare the next generation of early childhood educators**. We look to build upon our partnerships with community organizations like the Logan Square Neighborhood Association and create a clear pathway—from our communities into our colleges and back again—of Chicagoans ready to care for and develop our youngest residents.”*

Juan Salgado
Chancellor, City Colleges of Chicago

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