

# Transforming the Early Childhood Workforce



## A Call to Action for the State of Illinois

A joint project of the  
**Illinois Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development**  
and the  
**University of Illinois at Chicago College of Education**

OCTOBER 2018

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“ **The early childhood field is at a crossroads.** With new attention to young children, we need a dynamic and creative workforce that can provide the support that children and families need. Working in this field is a **twenty-first century job** ... it takes **skill and commitment**. We need to build the capacity at all levels as we respond to the diversity of the families that we serve and the variety of roles that now define the early childhood field. ”

— JOAN LOMBARDI  
President, The Children's Project





*Transforming the Early Childhood Workforce:*  
**A National Call to Action**

**Children are born learning.** At every age and every stage—and in every environment—their growth and development are influenced by the quality of their interactions and relationships with caregivers and educators. In early childhood, their development is not only rapid, but cumulative.

The **foundation for lifelong learning** is laid during the first years of a child’s life—from birth to age eight. Young children thrive when they have secure, positive relationships with adults who are knowledgeable about how to support their development and learning and responsive to their individual progress. Thus, the early childhood professionals entrusted with the care and education of young children bear a great responsibility.



A growing body of research has provided valuable insights into the science of early childhood development and how we can best support our nation’s youngest learners with high-quality early childhood programming (see *A Critical Window of Opportunity: Why Quality Matters in Early Childhood Education* on page 4). The science of child development and early learning confirms the

critical importance of a well-prepared early childhood workforce, as well as consistency and continuity in early care and education.<sup>1</sup>

### **A Fragmented Early Learning System**

To help children grow and learn during the early years, caregivers and educators must have a

*continued on page 5*

# A Critical Window of Opportunity

## Why Quality Matters in Early Childhood Education

**O**VER THE PAST SEVERAL DECADES, research has consistently shown that high-quality early childhood care and education during this period of rapid brain growth can place a child on a healthy developmental trajectory and lay the foundation for later success in school and in life. The benefits of quality early childhood programming are particularly powerful for the most vulnerable children.



### Distinguishing Characteristics of High-Quality Early Childhood Programs

Research shows that effective early care and education programs have all of the following elements:

- Qualified and appropriately compensated staff
- Small group sizes and high adult-child ratios
- A language-rich environment
- A developmentally appropriate and well-implemented curriculum
- A safe physical setting
- Warm and responsive adult-child interactions

Programs with these characteristics are not only successful at preparing children for school and life, but provide substantial benefits to society as well.

### Benefits of High-Quality Early Childhood Programs

- Increased kindergarten readiness
- Fewer placements in special education
- Increased high school graduation rates
- Less criminal behavior in adolescence and adulthood
- Increased productivity and earning potential
- Improved health outcomes

Through rigorous analysis, economists have shown that public investments in early childhood care and education have a return on investment of anywhere from four to nine dollars per dollar invested.

A solid body of research, including longitudinal and meta-analysis studies, has consistently shown that high-quality early childhood education programs also have positive short- and long-term impacts on children's development, health, learning and academic outcomes.<sup>2</sup>

continued from page 3

clear understanding of child development and a specific set of core competencies, as well as access to pathways for continued professional growth. Although young children stand to benefit most from an integrated, unified system of early education that builds on previous knowledge as they grow and develop, the field of early childhood education is fragmented and inconsistent across systems and services.

### **Why is the field so fragmented?**

Today's early childhood programs evolved from an early model that focused primarily on child care for working parents. In the 1960s, Head Start was created to give disadvantaged children earlier access to educational opportunities as part of the war on poverty. In the 1980s and 1990s, research studies, advances in neuroscience and new brain-imaging technologies gave us new insights into the rapid development of children's brains between birth and age five—and helped us understand the impact of interactions with adult caregivers on brain architecture.<sup>3</sup> This caught the attention of early childhood advocates who, in turn, lobbied legislators to include funding for public preschool programs in state education budgets.

But the evolution of early childhood programs has been uneven. Why? Because the care and education of young children takes place in many different program models and settings with different practitioner traditions and cultures, is funded through multiple governmental and nongovernmental sources and operates under the management or regulatory oversight of a diverse assortment of agencies with varying programmatic objectives. For instance, the Illinois



Department of Human Services funds the Child Care Assistance Program to provide child care for low-income working parents. The Illinois State Board of Education, on the other hand, funds the Preschool for All program to provide high-quality preschool education and promote school readiness for children between the ages of three and five. This complex, uneven and decentralized oversight and influence presents a unique challenge for those of us who are tasked with transforming the early learning workforce to better reflect the science of early childhood development.

The current state of the early childhood care and education workforce in America is one of the most telling indications of this fragmentation (see *Education Requirements by Agency for Key Early Childhood Education Programs* on page 8). Despite its shared objective of fostering the future success of young children, the early childhood workforce is not cohesive or unified by a common qualifications

system that equips its members with the core skills and knowledge that they need to do their jobs well. Requirements for early childhood education professionals vary widely, depending on funding source, program type and the age of the children served—and some of the expectations and requirements for their preparation and credentials have not kept pace with advances in brain science and the field of child development.<sup>4</sup>

## Defining the Early Childhood Workforce

This report focuses primarily on adults who provide care and education for children from birth to age five in group settings—our early childhood workforce. However, we do not distinguish between the provision of care and education. Child development occurs within the context of both care and education—and learning happens in every setting all the time. Adults who care for children also teach them and, conversely, those who teach children also care for them. More important, we know that children learn best in the context of a warm and caring relationship. Similarly, we do not distinguish between child development and learning, as these processes are interrelated.

For the purposes of this report, all adults working with children in licensed child care centers and school-based group settings will be referred to as early childhood educators. We acknowledge that a significant number of children in Illinois are cared for and educated outside of school- and center-based programs. Although family-based programs are beyond the scope of this report, additional research and analysis will be

needed to determine and address the unique needs of the family-based child care workforce.

## A National Blueprint for Change

In 2014, the Institute of Medicine (since renamed the National Academy of Medicine) and the National Research Council were commissioned to explore the science of child development and its implications for the professionals who work with young children. The resulting 2015 report, *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation*, provided a blueprint for action to advance our nation's early care and education workforce, with a set of recommendations directed to stakeholders at the local, state and national levels.

To facilitate the implementation of these recommendations at the state level, the National Academy of Medicine launched the *Birth to Age 8 Workforce: State Pathways to Implementation* project through its Innovation to Incubation (i2I) program, which champions innovative ideas and cultivates pathways to action to increase the impact of the Academy's initiatives. Illinois—a national leader in the field of early childhood development—was one of the first states to be selected by the National Academy of Medicine to develop state implementation plans rooted in the recommendations outlined in the Academy's 2015 report.

## The Illinois Vision and Plan

This report represents the work and discussions of the Illinois Innovation to Incubation (i2I) Team, with input and guidance from other organizations and





early childhood collaborative bodies in Illinois. It outlines the four guiding principles of early childhood education, as well as recommendations for the development of uniform, research-based early childhood education workforce practices and policies. These recommendations are aligned with other early childhood workforce efforts currently underway in Illinois and reflect the latest research about the complex knowledge and competencies required to provide high-quality care and education for children from birth to age five.

Although the National Academy of Medicine report outlined recommendations for children from birth through age eight, we have limited the scope of this report to workforce recommendations for

professionals who work with children from birth to age five, as we have determined this to be the area where the fragmentation is the greatest.

This report is intended to help guide and inform our state's policymakers, advocates, government agencies and institutions of higher education as they work together to foster the development of a diverse and well-qualified early childhood education workforce and ensure that all early childhood professionals in Illinois have the skills and supports they need to give every child the best possible start in life.

You will find out more about the current Illinois early learning landscape—as well as the Illinois team's process, objectives and recommendations—on the following pages.

# Education Requirements by Agency for Key Early Childhood Education Programs<sup>5</sup>

	<b>Illinois Department of Children and Family Services</b> <b>Qualification requirements for working in licensed child care centers</b>	<b>Illinois State Board of Education</b> <b>Qualification requirements for working in Prevention</b>
	<b>Children six weeks to five years</b>	<b>Prevention Initiative (PI) Center-Based Model for Children 0-3</b>
TEACHER	<p>19 years old and 60 semester hours, with 6 semester hours in early childhood education or related coursework</p> <p><b>OR</b></p> <p>1 year of experience and 30 semester hours, with 6 semester hours in early childhood education or related coursework</p>	<p>Must meet minimum teacher qualification requirements for working in licensed child care centers (see column at left)</p> <p><b>PLUS:</b></p> <p>Program must meet ExceleRate™ Illinois Silver or Gold Circle qualification requirements (effective July 2018)</p> <p><b>For Chicago Programs:</b></p> <p>AA degree in child development (by 2020, BA/BS degree and an Illinois Gateways Infant-Toddler Level 5 Credential)</p>
ASSISTANT TEACHER	<p>High school diploma or GED</p>	<p>Must meet minimum teacher-assistant qualification requirements for working in licensed child care centers</p> <p><b>For Chicago Programs:</b></p> <p>At least 30 college credit hours, with at least 15 hours in ECE or child development (by 2020, an AA degree or 60 college credit hours, with at least 15 credit hours in ECE or child development)</p>

**Educational Requirements Embedded in ExceleRate™, the Illinois Tiered Quality Rating System**

## ExceleRate™ Illinois Requirements

### Bronze

30% of teaching staff must have an Illinois Gateways ECE Level 2 Credential

**(Early Childhood Block Grant)  
Initiative (PI) and Preschool for All (PFA) programs**

**U.S. Department of  
Health and Human Services  
Qualification requirements for working  
in Early Head Start and Head Start**

<b>Preschool for All Program for Children 3-5</b>	<b>Early Head Start for Children 0-3</b>	<b>Head Start for Children 3-5</b>
<p>Must meet minimum qualification requirements for working in licensed child care centers</p> <p><b>PLUS:</b> Professional Educator License (PEL) with an endorsement in ECE</p> <p>Additional endorsement in ECSE, Bilingual and ESL, as indicated by population served</p>	<p>Must meet minimum teacher qualification requirements for working licensed child care centers</p> <p><b>PLUS:</b> Child Development Associate (CDA) credential for infant-toddler caregivers</p> <p><b>OR</b> Equivalent credential with comparable competencies</p> <p><b>OR</b> Training or coursework in early childhood, with a focus on infant-toddler development</p>	<p>Must meet minimum teacher qualification requirements for working in licensed child care centers</p> <p><b>PLUS:</b> 50% of teachers nationally must have a BA/BS degree or an advanced degree in ECE or a related field</p> <p>All center-based teachers must have at least an AA or BA/BS degree in child development, ECE or equivalent coursework</p>
<p>Must meet minimum assistant teacher qualification requirements for working in licensed child care centers</p> <p><b>PLUS:</b> ISBE paraprofessional license</p>	<p>Child Development Associate (CDA) credential</p> <p><b>OR</b> Enrolled in program leading to CDA, AA, BA/BS degree or an advanced degree in child development, ECE or equivalent coursework, with the intention to complete within two years</p>	

<b>Silver</b>	<b>Gold</b>
<p>30% of teaching staff must have an Illinois Gateways ECE Level 3 Credential</p> <p>30% of teaching staff in infant-toddler classrooms must have an Illinois Gateways Infant-Toddler Level 2 Credential</p>	<p>20% of teaching staff must have an Illinois Gateways ECE Level 5 Credential</p> <p><b>AND</b> 20% must have an Illinois Gateways ECE Level 4 Credential</p> <p>40% of teaching staff in infant-toddler classrooms must have an Illinois Gateways Infant-Toddler Level 3 Credential</p>



# Poised for Transformation

**As the nation's fifth largest state**, Illinois is home to just under one million children between the ages of birth and five. Our state is becoming increasingly diverse, with cultural and linguistic minorities accounting for roughly half of the children entering public kindergartens each year. Additionally, 40 percent of Illinois children live in low-income families.<sup>6</sup>

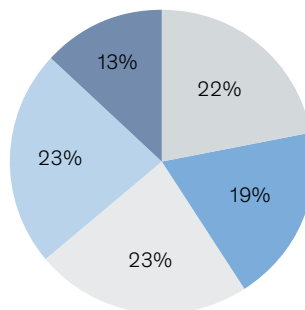
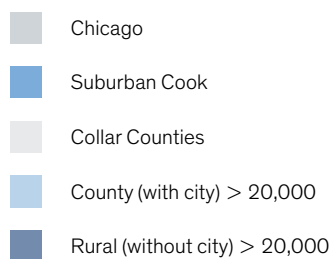


Children living in poverty—and those whose families do not speak English at home—are likely to benefit the most from high-quality early learning programs.<sup>7</sup> To meet the changing needs of children, Illinois has been at the forefront of the national movement to increase access to high-quality early childhood programming.

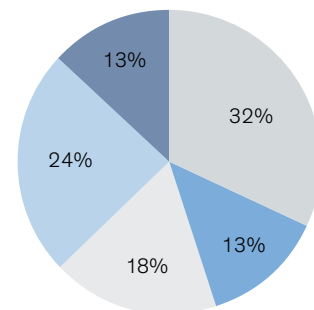
## A History of Innovation and Investment in Early Learning

Our state has a long history of innovation, national leadership and investment in early childhood education and development for children between the ages of birth and five. Because children with

### Where the children live



% of total population 0-5



% of children 0-5 under 100% FPL

# MILESTONES in Early Childhood Systems Development

## 1985

Illinois creates the **State PreKindergarten (PreK) program** for preschoolers at risk of academic failure.

## 1989

Illinois creates the **Prevention Initiative** program for families with children between the ages of birth and three.

## 1990

The federal government

enacts **Child Care and Development Block Grant** legislation to provide child care subsidies for low-income families.

## 1997

*TIME* magazine issues a **special report on brain science** and early childhood entitled: “How a Child’s Brain Develops and What it Means for Child Care and Welfare Reform.”

## 1997

Illinois establishes the **Early Childhood Block Grant** with an “infant-toddler set-aside”—a stable and sustainable funding mechanism designed to simultaneously protect and increase funding for birth-to-three and preschool programs.

## 1999

Public and private stakeholders launch the

**Birth to Three Project** to facilitate comprehensive systems building within the Illinois early childhood field.

## 2000

The National Academy of Science publishes **From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development**, a groundbreaking book that calls on the nation to thoroughly reexamine public policies that affect children



high needs comprise half of our state’s future workforce, it is imperative that they are well prepared in early childhood to succeed in school and in life. To achieve this goal, Illinois has been a leader in funding early childhood programming, as well as systems-building efforts to improve the quality of early learning experiences and address the fragmentation of services available to families with young children.

In the 1980s and 1990s, new technologies such as PET scans gave us greater insights into early brain development—and society began to recognize the fundamental importance of quality care and education during the first five years of life. In 1985, the state enacted legislation and appropriated funds to provide early childhood programming for three- and four-year-olds through the Illinois State Board of Education. This was a

crucial first step for the inclusion of early childhood programming within the public education sector.

The addition of this new state funding stream, which added to the complexity of an already fragmented early childhood care and education system, created a need for more coordination across programs and a larger, more specialized early childhood workforce.

Since the 1998 launch of the Birth to Three Project (a public-private collaborative effort to develop a more accessible statewide system of early childhood services and family support, which later became a project of the national BUILD Initiative for children from birth to age five), Illinois has been focused on the development of a more coordinated system of early childhood education for families with young children. This system-building focus led to the 2003 creation of the Illinois Early Learning Council

and increase investment in their well-being.

## 2002

The Illinois Department of Human Services establishes the **Professional Development Advisory Council** to develop, support and promote a professional development system for all early care and education providers.

## 2003

The Illinois General Assembly passes legislation to create the **Illinois Early Learning Council** (IELC), which was established to coordinate, expand and enhance early childhood programs throughout the state to build a high-quality early learning system for all Illinois children between the ages of birth and five.

## 2010

The Governor of Illinois establishes the **Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development** (GOECD) to guide the efforts of the Illinois Early Learning Council as it works to advance a comprehensive, statewide early childhood system.

## 2012

Illinois is awarded a federal **Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Fund**

**grant** for infrastructure building and system quality improvements.

## 2015

The Institute of Medicine publishes ***Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation***, an urgent call for early childhood policymakers across the nation to invest in the development of a diverse and well-qualified early childhood education workforce.



(IELC) to guide the development and administration of a high-quality, accessible, comprehensive and coordinated statewide early learning system.

In 2009, the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development (GOECD) was created by executive order on the recommendation of the Illinois Early Learning Council. Established to promote the quality and comprehensiveness of the Illinois early childhood system by overseeing the implementation of birth-to-five policies and programs; advocating for early childhood programs and services within the Governor's Office; and facilitating the work of the IELC, the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development represented another major step forward for early childhood programming in Illinois.

Throughout this expansion, Illinois has maintained a focus on expanding and

professionalizing the early childhood workforce.

The Professional Development Advisory Council (PDAC) was first convened in 2002 to coordinate, support and promote a statewide professional development system for early childhood educators. To achieve this goal, PDAC developed the Gateways to Opportunity® Credentials (a progressive credentialing system that recognizes specialized knowledge, skills and experience) and established the Gateways to Opportunity® Registry (a statewide professional development registry for early childhood professionals in Illinois licensed child care centers).

This history of public and private investment in Illinois has laid the foundation for our future efforts to align our early learning systems with the latest research on the best practices for supporting our youngest learners.





# A Vision for the Illinois Early Learning Workforce

“Early childhood is both the most critical and the most vulnerable time in any child’s development. In the first few years, the ingredients for **intellectual, emotional and moral growth** are laid down. We cannot fail children in these early years.”

— T. BERRY BRAZELTON, MD, and STANLEY GREENSPAN, MD  
*The Irreducible Needs of Children: What Every Child Must Have to Grow, Learn and Flourish* (2000)

**The publication of the National Academy of Medicine’s 2015 report**, *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation*, was a clarion call for early childhood policymakers across the nation.

The 700-page report—which focused on the science of children’s health, learning and development and how it can inform workforce supports—laid out a set of recommendations for stakeholders at the local, state and national levels.



The state of Illinois, with its long history of investment and innovation in the field of early childhood education, was one of the first states to be selected by the National Academy of Medicine to implement these recommendations.

With leadership from the Illinois Governor’s Office of Early Childhood Development and the College of Education at the University of Illinois at Chicago, the Illinois Innovation to Incubation (i2I) Team (see page 17) began meeting locally—as well

as nationally with other participating states and National Academy of Medicine staff members—in early 2016 to review the report’s recommendations and develop an implementation plan for the Illinois early childhood workforce.

During the first year, the team conducted a comprehensive review of existing workforce qualifications, systems and initiatives relative to the National Academy of Medicine’s recommendations. This review process informed the next phase: the development of Illinois-specific short- and long-term strategies and recommendations that aligned with the National Academy of Medicine’s recommendations.

From early on in the process, the team

focused on collaborating with and leveraging the momentum of existing efforts—including initiatives funded through the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge, as well as other state-level early childhood systems-building bodies such as the Professional Development Advisory Council and the Illinois Early Learning Council—to lay the groundwork for changes in workforce policy and practice. This process led to the guiding principles and recommendations outlined in this report. Because the process is ongoing, fluid and nimbly responsive to current contexts and opportunities, some of the recommendations in the pages that follow are currently being implemented, while others are in more nascent stages.



## About the Illinois Innovation to Incubation (i2I) Team

The **Illinois Innovation to Incubation (i2I) Team**—jointly led by the Illinois Governor’s Office of Early Childhood Development and the University of Illinois at Chicago College of Education—was funded by a two-year grant from the Robert R. McCormick Foundation. Members of the team include:

- **Stephanie Bernoteit**  
Illinois Board of Higher Education
- **Christi Chadwick, Bryan Stokes** and **Cynthia Tate**  
Illinois Governor’s Office of Early Childhood Development
- **Johnna Darragh**  
Heartland Community College
- **Sauna Ejeh**  
Illinois Head Start Association
- **Catherine Main**  
University of Illinois at Chicago College of Education
- **Karen McCarthy**  
Illinois State Board of Education
- **Joni Scritchlow**  
Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies
- **Joyce Weiner**  
Ounce of Prevention Fund
- **Karen Yarbrough**  
Independent Consultant

The work of the Illinois team—and this report—would not have been possible without the generosity and commitment of the **Robert R. McCormick Foundation**. We are grateful for their continued support.

*For more information, please contact Catherine Main, University of Illinois at Chicago College of Education, at [cmain@uic.edu](mailto:cmain@uic.edu).*





# Guiding Principles for the State of Illinois

**The guiding principles for transforming the Illinois early childhood workforce** developed organically as the Illinois Innovation to Incubation (i2I) Team considered the national recommendations set forth in the National Academy of Medicine report, *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation*. Although the Illinois team's recommendations have been tailored to the unique needs of our state's youngest learners, they are closely aligned with the national report's key messages.



“ Teaching preschoolers is **every bit as complicated and important** as teaching any of the K-12 grades, if not more so. But we still treat preschool teachers like babysitters. We want them to ameliorate poverty even as they live in it themselves. ”

— MARCY WHITEBOOK  
Director of the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment  
at the University of California, Berkeley

# GUIDING PRINCIPLE

# 1

## **Adults are central to the healthy early learning and development of children. Educators have a greater impact on classroom quality than any other variable.**

This first guiding principle is aligned with the following key message from the National Academy of Medicine's 2015 report, *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation*:

### **Adults who care for and educate children, from birth through age eight, bear a great responsibility for their health, development and learning.**

Researchers have identified several indicators of high-quality early childhood education programs—including small group sizes and high adult-child ratios, language-rich environments, developmentally appropriate curricula and safe physical settings.<sup>8</sup>

However, the quality of adult-child interactions has the greatest impact on the health, development and future academic success of young children. Close relationships with caring adults give children the security and stability they

need to grow and learn.

Specifically, there are two key interrelated dimensions of adult-child interactions that are most beneficial for young children.

The first dimension is known as the “serve and return” interaction, which supports the learning and development of young children within the context of a warm, responsive relationship with an adult. According to the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, “One of the most essential experiences in shaping the architecture of the developing brain is ‘serve and return’ interaction between children and significant adults in their lives. Young children naturally reach out for interaction through babbling, facial expressions and gestures, and adults respond with the same kind of vocalizing and gesturing back at them. This back-and-forth process is fundamental to the wiring of the brain, especially in the earliest years.”

The second dimension involves intentional and explicit interactions between adults and children that support children's higher-order thinking skills



in general, as well as learning in specific content areas such as early math and language. In the 2013 report, *Investing in Our Future: The Evidence Base on Preschool Education*, the Society for Research in Child Development and the Foundation for Child Development noted that “Interactions that help children acquire new knowledge and skills provide input to children, elicit verbal responses and reactions from them and foster engagement in, and enjoyment of, learning.”

Adults not only interact with children, but create their learning environments and implement the curriculum. In fact, a teacher’s ability to effectively implement a curriculum is more important than the type of curriculum being used. Adults who understand early childhood development—and know how to interact with young children in a sensitive

and responsive manner—can develop supportive and affirming relationships with young learners and provide the stimulating, developmentally appropriate learning opportunities that are essential to high-quality early childhood education.

Conversely, adults who are underprepared, under-informed and overly stressed may contribute to adverse experiences for young children and undermine their development and learning. If we are to reap the rewards of high-quality early childhood education programs (see *A Critical Window of Opportunity: Why Quality Matters in Early Childhood Education* on page 4), then we must focus on the adults who care for and educate young children and the systems that prepare and support these early childhood professionals.

“The crux of quality in early childhood education lies squarely in the **interactions that transpire** between teachers and children.”

— DEBORAH PHILLIPS, LEA AUSTIN and MARCY WHITEBOOK  
“The Early Care and Education Workforce” (The Future of Children, Fall 2016)

## GUIDING PRINCIPLE 2

**Because adults are so central to the health and development of young children, early childhood educators must have a common set of core competencies, and early childhood workforce members must reflect the diversity of the children and families they serve.**

This second guiding principle is aligned with the following key message from the National Academy of Medicine's 2015 report, *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation*:

**Those who provide for the care and education of children from birth through age 8 are not acknowledged as a cohesive workforce, unified by the shared knowledge and competencies needed to do their jobs well. Expectations for these professionals often have not kept pace with what the science indicates children need, and many current policies do not place enough value on the significant contributions these professionals make to children's long-term success.**

Based on what we now know about brain development and learning in the early years — as

well as the profound impact of high-quality early childhood programs and the critical role that early childhood educators play in the growth and development of young children — it follows that early childhood educators must have a core set of professional competencies to work effectively with early learners.

The National Academy of Medicine report cites recent research showing that the cognitive, social and emotional development of young children is much more sophisticated than what may be observable from their outward behaviors. To help the nation's youngest learners achieve their full potential, concludes the Academy, early childhood educators must be equipped with knowledge that is every bit as sophisticated and complex as the knowledge required of those who teach children in elementary school and beyond.

Early childhood educators are best able to support the development and learning of young children when they *have and apply* the necessary knowledge, skills and dispositions. These are





defined as competencies: specific, measurable and observable behaviors that reflect a practitioner’s knowledge and ability to apply that knowledge to meet needs and expectations for roles ranging from teacher’s assistant to lead teacher or center director.

The National Academy of Medicine report recommends that early childhood educators across all age ranges and settings have the following competencies:

- A core knowledge of developmental science
- The mastery of practices that help children learn and develop on individual pathways
- A knowledge of how to work with diverse populations of children
- The ability to partner with children’s families and professional colleagues
- The ability to engage in ongoing professional development to keep up with new knowledge and developments in the field of early childhood education and continuously improve their professional practice

While a competent workforce is fundamental, a diverse workforce that reflects the sociocultural composition of Illinois families is also a high priority. Children’s experiences are embedded in their familial and sociocultural contexts. Thus, their development and learning can only truly be understood in terms of the practices, goals and values of their families and community cultures.<sup>9</sup> As our society becomes increasingly multiethnic, we must embed these cultural competencies in our qualifications systems and equip our early childhood educators with a knowledge of how to work with diverse populations of children; an understanding of minority culture, language and dispositions; and a respect for diversity in all of its forms.

While all early childhood educators should be equipped with these cultural competencies, educators who share a sociocultural background with the children and families they serve may provide additional benefits. According to a 2002 joint position statement of the National

Association for the Education of Young Children and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education, “Our youngest children are our most culturally diverse. Early learning standards must take this diversity into account. In addition, many children transition from culturally familiar child care programs and family environments into settings that do not reflect their culture or language. These discontinuities make it difficult to implement early learning standards in effective ways.”

In 2016, the Brookings Institution and the Center for American Progress projected that the majority of Illinois school children will be of a minority or mixed race by 2020. By recognizing and affirming diversity in the early childhood classroom, we can build bridges between home and school to promote language and social-emotional development, support cultural identity development and deepen learning.

The National Association of the Education of Young Children, the American Association for Colleges of Teacher Education, the Illinois Early Learning Council and the BUILD Initiative—which works with early childhood leaders at the state and national levels to better prepare young children to thrive and succeed—all recognize that a workforce that reflects the racial, ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity of young children is as essential to high-quality early childhood education as competencies.

Early childhood educators who share a common language with the children and

families they serve are one of the benefits of a diverse workforce. Bilingual educators can provide multilingual instruction such as dual immersion and transitional bilingual programming. These types of programs are not only better for dual-language learners, but also benefit children who speak only English.<sup>10</sup> Bilingual early childhood educators are also in a better position to facilitate home-school connections, which have been shown to lead to better academic outcomes.<sup>11</sup>

Beyond language, shared cultural understandings between teachers and parents often lead to more effective communication with parents and the development of trusting, collaborative relationships. By building bridges between home and school, we can promote language and social-emotional development, support cultural identity development and deepen learning.

There is also evidence that early childhood educators who live in the same community as the children they teach are more likely to serve as role models for parents. Teachers who are intimately familiar with the community and culture of the children in their care are often better able to recognize and build on the strengths of their young charges, rather than mistaking differences for deficits. This enables them to more accurately assess—rather than pathologize—children’s development. Teachers who work in their own communities are also likely to be more familiar with community norms and resources, which enables them to create learning experiences that build on prior knowledge.<sup>12</sup>

# Starting Early, Starting Strong

Infant-toddler teachers are charged with one of society's most important tasks: supporting children during the **critical window of development from birth to age three**. Yet this specialized segment of the early childhood workforce is often undervalued, undertrained and underpaid.

Why do those who care for and teach infants and toddlers get compensated with smaller paychecks than preschool and elementary school educators? Because the early childhood education system has not yet caught up with the science of early brain development.

Early experiences that are nurturing, active and challenging actually thicken the cortex of an infant's brain, creating a brain with more extensive and sophisticated neuron structures that determine intelligence and behavior. The quality of the social interactions that very young children have with the adult caregivers and teachers in their lives fundamentally shapes important parts of learning, such as their language development. Therefore, all those who interact with children in their earliest years have an enormous impact on how they approach learning and, ultimately, a person's lifelong development.

Yet those who care for and educate children between the ages of birth and three are in an especially precarious situation in the workforce. Overall, these educators are still being compensated at lower rates than their counterparts who teach in preschool or early elementary settings. According to 2017 Illinois Gateways Registry data, the mean average salary for Illinois preschool teachers is \$13.92 per hour, while the average salary for those who teach and care for infants and toddlers in Illinois is \$12.59. In other words, infant-toddler educators earn roughly 10 percent less than those who care for preschoolers, despite the fact that they need specialized skills to offer high-quality programming for children between the ages of birth and three. It is imperative that we create a more equitable compensation structure that reflects the importance of educating children at this critical stage of life (see *Inadequate Compensation: The Elephant in the Room* on page 68).

This is partly due to an entrenched, and increasingly anachronistic, view of the importance of care and education for our youngest learners. Our society continues to place a lower value on the care and education of children during the first three years of life than at any stage thereafter. Too often, infant-toddler workforce members are viewed merely as babysitters, when they should be regarded—and compensated—as specialized educators responsible for laying the foundation for all future learning and development.

We know from research and practice that teaching

children between the ages of birth and three requires a highly specialized skill set.<sup>13</sup> The Illinois Gateways Infant-Toddler Credential was developed to recognize these specialized skills. Originally developed as a voluntary credential designed to supplement the Early Childhood Education Credential, the Infant-Toddler Credential is not uniformly required by all early childhood programs. It is, however, embedded at higher levels of ExceleRate™ Illinois, a statewide quality rating and improvement system for early care and education programs. Thus, a growing number of early childhood professionals who work with infants and toddlers must obtain the Infant-Toddler Credential. This requirement, while important, places an additional burden on those who teach our youngest learners—a segment of the early childhood workforce that is already undervalued and underpaid.

To address this situation, the Illinois Infant-Toddler Teacher Quality Initiative Task Force was established in Spring 2016 to develop a comprehensive, statewide set of recommendations designed to ensure the development of a well-qualified infant-toddler workforce. These recommendations are available in the *Illinois Infant-Toddler Teacher Quality Initiative Task Force Policy Recommendations* report, which was published by the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (INCCRRA) in 2017.



Too often, infant-toddler workforce members are **viewed merely as babysitters**, when they should be regarded, trained and compensated as highly specialized educators responsible for laying the foundation for all future learning and development.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLE 3

**Illinois early childhood professional development programs and pathways must support the development of an increasingly diverse early learning workforce and meet the needs of adults who are pursuing additional education and credentials while juggling academic demands with full-time employment and family responsibilities.**

This third guiding principle is aligned with the following directive from the National Academy of Medicine's 2015 report, *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation*:

**To train, retain and recruit highly effective early childhood practitioners, we must provide extensive and ongoing professional learning opportunities, as well as supports that are relevant and responsive to the needs of current and aspiring workforce members.**

This principle highlights the importance of developing policy and professional development programs and systems that are tailored to the needs of current and future workforce members. We cannot develop early childhood education policies without thinking about the impact of these policies on current workforce members,

as well as those who aspire to a career in early childhood education. We must offer innovative and nontraditional pathways that are tailored to the specific needs of those currently in the field, while attracting new individuals from diverse backgrounds to the workforce.

To develop user-centered policies and programs, we must consider the makeup of the workforce, the skills and knowledge that early childhood educators need to do their jobs well, the tasks that they must carry out and the environments in which they work.<sup>14</sup>

Developing and maintaining a highly qualified early childhood workforce in Illinois is a complex undertaking that requires innovation, creativity and careful attention to issues related to equity and access in higher education. To effectively address these challenges, we must consult with our current workforce—the people on the ground—to better understand their strengths and needs.

While some studies show that a push for more qualifications can lead to a “whitening” of



the workforce,<sup>15</sup> we contend that, through the implementation of policies and pathways that are user-centered and focused on equity, we can accomplish both. **We argue that, by understanding the needs and strengths of the existing workforce, we can increase the qualifications of workforce members while maintaining workforce diversity.** When asked if it is better to have teachers who look like the children they serve or teachers who are educated, we argue that—with the right programs and policies in place—we can have both.

Our early childhood workforce, like the burgeoning population of “nontraditional” postsecondary students, generally faces several obstacles to earning degrees. Many workforce members are first-generation college students who live at or below the poverty line—in part because of the low wages that many early childhood workers earn.<sup>16</sup> In addition, many early childhood educators, like the families they serve, are non-native English speakers who may

struggle with the academic demands of classes conducted in English—even if they are well educated in their native tongue. Largely minorities, these early childhood educators lack the social and cultural capital to navigate the postsecondary educational system and to seek out the supports they need to increase their knowledge and advance their careers.<sup>17</sup> Yet, as previously noted, they do possess social and cultural competencies that enable them to provide high-quality early childhood programming for children and their families.

While these early childhood educators tend to have considerable gaps in their education, their transcripts often reveal that they have been in and out school for many years and have taken courses at multiple institutions. This demonstrates considerable perseverance and a continued commitment to the early childhood profession.

Because community colleges tend to serve all segments of society through open-access admissions policies and affordable tuition fees,



the majority of the early childhood workforce members who attend four-year institutions of higher education transfer in from community colleges.<sup>18</sup> Data from the state of Illinois, as well as national studies, shows that community college students who transfer to four-year institutions are as successful as students who start out at four-year colleges and universities.<sup>19</sup>

Moreover, most are working full-time jobs and are responsible for dependents. These factors make it more difficult for these students to complete their degrees and put them at risk of leaving their degree programs in worse financial shape than when they began, but they also make it possible for the students to continually practice and apply what they are learning in their day-to-day work activities.

All of these contextual features about the Illinois early learning workforce were carefully considered as we continued the process of making recommendations. Specifically, our recommendations for the Illinois early childhood education workforce focused on qualifications, pathways and an improved knowledge base. These recommendations are outlined on the pages that follow.





## GUIDING PRINCIPLE 4

**Policy decisions regarding early childhood programming and the early childhood workforce must be guided by a knowledge base consisting of relevant scientific research, accurate and comprehensive data from the Illinois early child care system and input from the stakeholders ultimately responsible for implementing these policy decisions.**

This fourth guiding principle is aligned with the following key message from the National Academy of Medicine's 2015 report, *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation*:

**This knowledge base will provide a unifying foundation that will inform the coordinated change that is critically needed across our early child care systems.**

Decisions about the early childhood workforce are too important, given the profound potential impact of these decisions on children and families, to be made in siloed systems without the benefit of the most recent scientific research, accurate and relevant contextual data and the expertise of key stakeholders actively working in the field.

As has been discussed in previous sections of this report, scientific research has provided us with compelling evidence regarding early childhood

development and the critical role that early childhood educators play in this development. Studies have also shed light on the societal and economic benefits of high-quality early childhood programming (see *A Critical Window of Opportunity: Why Quality Matters in Early Childhood Education* on page 4).

To develop a knowledge base of best practices and policies for the Illinois early childhood education workforce, the Illinois i2I Team relied heavily on research presented by the National Academy of Medicine in its comprehensive 2015 report, *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation*. The 2015 report is based on a thorough review of empirical evidence conducted by a range of experts across different disciplines to answer the following question: "How can the science of children's health, learning and development inform workforce recommendations and supports?" The information presented in the National Academy of Medicine report reflects the latest research on early childhood learning and development.





The Illinois i2I Team used this information to expand the knowledge base with relevant data regarding the Illinois early childhood workforce. The team gathered data from a range of agencies supporting early learning programs in Illinois, including the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (INCCRRA), the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and the Illinois Department of Human Services (DHS). These data sources provided important information about existing qualification requirements, as well as demographic and educational background information on some segments of the Illinois early childhood workforce. The team supplemented this existing data by developing and conducting a survey of early childhood administrators and hiring managers across the different funding streams that support early learning programs in Illinois (see a summary of the *2017 Illinois Early Childhood Workforce Hiring Survey Report* on page 32).

The Illinois i2I Team also relied on input from

expert stakeholders to interpret the research and data. The team was continually guided by input from these stakeholders at the national and local levels, including high-level governmental groups such as the Governor’s Cabinet on Children and Youth, committees such as the Illinois Professional Development Advisory Council (PDAC) and the Illinois Early Learning Council (ELC) Quality Committee and advocacy group ad hoc committees (including recommendations from the Ounce of Prevention Fund and the Latino Policy Forum to increase the number of linguistically and culturally diverse early childhood workforce professionals). Recommendations from the National Academy of Medicine report, as well as recommendations specific to the Illinois context, were also presented for feedback to professional organizations that would be directly affected by these recommendations, including the Illinois Association of Early Childhood Teacher Educators (ILAECTE) and the Illinois Association for the Education of Young Children (ILAEYC).

# Voices from the Front Lines of Early Learning

*Program administrators talk about the state of the Illinois early learning workforce*

The *2017 Illinois Early Childhood Workforce Hiring Survey Report* brings together voices from the field of early childhood education and offers **the first statewide assessment of hiring and retention practices, experiences and challenges** across funding streams and regulatory bodies in Illinois.<sup>20</sup>

Based on a survey of more than 700 Illinois early childhood program administrators—which included questions about program setting, size, funding streams and the age of the children served, as well as staffing needs, hiring and retention experiences and staffing challenges—this report:

- examines the relationship between the need for qualified early childhood teachers and assistants and the hiring experiences of program administrators across targeted age ranges (e.g., infants and toddlers versus preschoolers), program types (e.g., school-based, center-based and home-based) and funding sources (e.g., Early Childhood Block Grant (ECBG), Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), private tuition, Early/Head Start); and
- provides insights into the experiences and perspectives of administrators tasked with the recruitment, hiring and retention of qualified staff.

## Key Findings

The leaders, owners, directors, administrators and others responsible for hiring and retaining qualified early childhood personnel in their centers, schools and organizations have been encountering and reporting staffing problems for years. The lack of funding for adequate compensation is the greatest barrier to hiring and retention, leading to

high turnover rates across all program types, with detrimental outcomes for children and families.

While some programs are larger—with multiple levels of teaching staff and ancillary human resources staff—

many programs are operating on a much smaller scale. Forty-seven percent of the programs described in the survey have four or fewer

classrooms, while nearly 20 percent have just one. Despite policies that encourage program directors to access multiple funding streams to enhance the quality of their programming, 36 percent of the programs surveyed accessed only one funding stream, while another 40 percent accessed just two funding streams. Those responsible for hiring in small programs were also more likely to be working directly with teachers, teacher assistants, children and families at their sites. Because these are also our most vulnerable programs, their feedback is essential as we work together to identify the barriers to hiring and retaining qualified staff and provide recommendations for support and solutions.

# 36%

Percentage of programs surveyed that access **only one funding stream**

**Turnover rates are high across all program types.** Findings from the survey confirm

“The most important thing is to observe and **consult the people on the ground** who know the most.”

— ANTHONY S. BRYK  
President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and author of *Learning to Improve: How America's Schools Can Get Better at Getting Better*

widespread anecdotal reports about the challenges related to the hiring and retention of qualified staff in Illinois early childhood programs. These difficulties are especially pronounced for DCFS-licensed child care (nonschool-based) and for lead teachers (especially infant-toddler lead teachers). Turnover rates for lead teachers in licensed child care centers were twice as high (42 percent) as turnover rates in school-based programs (21 percent). On average, it takes nearly a quarter of a year to fill a lead infant-toddler teacher position, a hiring gap that leaves many of the state's youngest children without qualified teachers for months at a time. The open-ended comments submitted by survey respondents confirmed these hiring and retention challenges, with many respondents indicating that there are just “not enough” qualified candidates at all levels.

**42%**  
**Turnover rate for lead teachers** in licensed child care centers

**The lack of funding for adequate compensation is the greatest barrier to hiring and retention.** Inadequate salary and benefits were the most frequently cited barriers to hiring and retaining qualified staff. While there is variation in wages across specific positions, the age range of the children taught and funding streams, inadequate compensation is a persistent and well-documented problem. According to the National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE),

46 percent of child care workers in Illinois earn salaries that qualify them for some form of public benefits, including the earned income tax credit (EITC), Medicaid, food stamps and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)—at a cost of \$71.4 million to the state of Illinois.<sup>21</sup>

**46%**  
Percentage of child care workers in Illinois who earn salaries that **qualify them for public benefits**

**Salary data collected in the survey showed significant differences in salaries earned by licensed child care and school-based preschool teachers.** Teachers in school-based

settings earn 44 percent more, on average, than teachers in licensed child care facilities. Licensed child care teachers earned an average salary of \$13.18 per hour, while school-based preschool teachers earned an average salary of \$19.03 per hour. The NSECE data also points to a great variation in pay among professionals with the same level of education across different settings.<sup>22</sup> For example, teachers with a bachelor's degree in a school-based preschool program earn more than teachers with a bachelor's degree in a community-based

**\$13.18**  
**Average salary** of licensed child care teachers

preschool program—even when both programs are publicly funded. This kind of scenario perpetuates turnover in community-based programs.

**High turnover rates are detrimental to children and families.** The analysis and interpretation of the survey data reveals a vicious cycle of staff turnover that undermines the quality of Illinois early childhood programs. When survey participants were queried about the impact of high turnover on their programs, 73 percent responded that administrators were diverted from their duties to fill vacant teacher positions, while 66 percent reported teacher burnout due to inadequate staffing.

**73%**  
Administrators who reported being **diverted from their duties** to fill vacant teacher positions

The science of early learning highlights the importance of consistency and continuity in relationships and adult well-being for optimal learning and behavior. Administrators who must spend time in the classroom due to teacher turnover often neglect other crucial duties, and cannot provide the supports needed for teacher learning and effectiveness. In turn, teachers working without leadership and administrative support often suffer from burnout, and cannot provide the emotional and educational support that young children need. Children with lower levels of emotional and educational support are more likely to exhibit

challenging behaviors. These factors create working conditions that lead to more turnover.

## Conclusions

The survey respondents provided many suggestions for addressing the challenges related to hiring and retaining qualified staff. The most frequently noted themes were the need for additional funding, a larger pool of qualified candidates, resources for finding qualified candidates and more and improved pathways for helping current staff members attain needed degrees and credentials. Not surprisingly, when asked about the resources required to address hiring and retention challenges, the vast majority of respondents cited increased funding for salaries and benefits.

Their message is clear: The system does not fully support the cost of quality early care and education. The problem of high turnover and its detrimental impact on children and families will not be resolved without funding to ensure adequate compensation and compensation parity across program types.

The survey respondents—many of whom work directly with teachers, teacher assistants, children and families—understand the complexity of the work and are well aware of the importance of a skilled workforce. They offered a range of proposals for recruiting more people into the field and providing additional professional development and educational attainment opportunities for the existing workforce. Overall, the results from this survey suggest a need for a more unified system of qualification requirements and increased access to pathways that enable new and existing workforce members to meet these qualifications.





# Recommendations for the State of Illinois

**Consistency is needed** among the various entities with oversight and influence over the many professional roles working with children birth through age 8.

— *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation*  
(National Academy of Medicine, 2015)

The recommendations of the Illinois i2I Team are organized into three major categories: **Qualifications, Pathways and Knowledge Base**. These categories are not mutually exclusive, but synergistic, as any recommendations for increased qualifications must be accompanied by “pathways,” or mechanisms, that enable existing workforce members to meet new qualification requirements.



As new qualification requirements are implemented, data must also be collected to assess the impact of these new qualifications, with attention to the following questions:

- **Are there enough qualified educators** to meet the needs of children and families throughout the state?
- **Is the early education workforce diverse enough** to reflect the shifting demographics of children in Illinois?

The following workforce recommendations for the state of Illinois are closely aligned with key messages from the National Academy of Medicine report.

# Illinois Workforce Qualifications Recommendations

Our qualifications recommendations for the state of Illinois focus on two central themes: **providing coherence across qualifications and increasing minimum qualifications.**

Key messages in the National Academy of Medicine report address the lack of consistency in qualifications across the various sectors of early childhood care and education, as well as outdated qualification requirements that do not reflect what we now know about the science of child development and early learning.

To unify and strengthen the workforce, the National Academy of Medicine report recommends the development of a core curriculum of interdisciplinary coursework and field experiences, so that workforce professionals in similar positions, regardless of the setting, are equipped with a comparable foundation of knowledge and competencies. In order to eliminate educational disparities among educators, all entities responsible for regulating and overseeing early childhood programs (including the Illinois State Board of Education, the Illinois Department of Human Services and the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services) must align their qualification requirements with a common, competency-based qualification system.

## Where We Are Now: The Illinois Context

Children in Illinois have vastly different experiences in different early childhood settings. Why do

early childhood programs vary so widely? Because programs are governed by different agencies and supported by a range of funding sources. Each public funding stream has its own enabling legislation that specifies the program purpose and target population, as well as its own set of administrative rules for program implementation. These funding streams also have different qualification requirements for early childhood administrators, teachers and assistants, which creates a fragmented early childhood workforce with different levels of education and expertise (see *Education Requirements by Agency for Key Early Childhood Education Programs* on page 8).

These disparate funding sources and their varying requirements present great challenges as we work to ensure consistent qualifications across all sectors of the early childhood workforce in Illinois. Yet many Illinois early childhood programs are already raising the bar for workforce members by voluntarily implementing incremental changes to their qualification requirements to improve program quality. Following are some examples of Illinois early childhood programs that are taking steps to ensure that their staff members possess the specialized skills and knowledge needed to provide high-quality early childhood care and education:

- Lead teachers in the Preschool for All (PFA) program, which is funded through the Illinois State





Board of Education’s Early Childhood Block Grant, are now required to possess a bachelor’s degree and an Illinois Professional Educators License with an early childhood education endorsement.

- Lead teachers in Preschool for All programs serving dual-language learners are required to possess an additional ESL endorsement or bilingual approval.
- Directors in licensed child care facilities are required to possess an Illinois Gateways Director’s Credential.
- Illinois school principal preparation programs are required to include specialized knowledge and skills related to early childhood education and development.
- Higher levels in the ExceleRate™ Illinois Quality Rating and Improvement System require higher percentages of early childhood professionals to hold degrees, as well as Illinois Gateways Credentials for specialized knowledge and skills.

As noted above, qualification requirements for some sectors of the Illinois early childhood workforce currently meet or exceed national recommendations. Yet, in other sectors, qualification requirements do not measure up to national recommendations. For example, lead teacher positions in licensed early childhood centers require just 30 college semester hours, with only six of these hours in an early childhood concentration. Lead teacher positions in Early Head Start programs, which serve Illinois’ youngest and most vulnerable children, require only a Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential or the equivalent in

“ Across professional roles, shared and specialized knowledge should reflect **standards of effective, consistent instructional and support practices**, which result in children learning, growing and thriving in high-quality learning environments. ”

— *A Shared Vision for Transforming the Workforce* (Foundation for Child Development, October 2016)

coursework or training.

Equally problematic is the lack of consistency and foundational qualifications for early childhood teacher assistants across programs. Head Start is the only program that requires teacher assistants to possess the foundational knowledge and skills recognized by the Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential.™ Teacher assistants in licensed child care centers need only a high school diploma. While teacher assistants in Preschool for All (PFA) programs are required to earn a paraprofessional certificate issued by the Illinois State Board of Education, this certificate does not require any early childhood knowledge or training.

These inconsistent qualification requirements create a great deal of variation in the skills, knowledge and experiences that early childhood

professionals bring to similar jobs. This variation creates a job market in which educators who earn higher education degrees and credentials are continually leaving less lucrative positions in child care settings for better-compensated employment in settings such as public schools—or moving within child care settings from less-resourced to better-resourced programs. This inconsistency in employment qualifications ultimately leads to real inequities for children and families across program types.

To address this challenge, the National Academy of Medicine report recommends a uniform system of competencies designed to ensure that workforce members in similar positions, regardless of the setting, are operating from a comparable base of knowledge, skills and experiences. A competency-based system will define, in measurable terms, the knowledge and skills that workforce members need to provide quality care and education for young children at foundational, lead and specialized levels.

A competency-based system is currently being developed in Illinois, using the Illinois Gateways to Opportunity® Early Childhood Education (ECE) Credentials as a framework. This process began in 2016, when one four-year institution and several community colleges used the Gateways ECE Credential as their common point of reference and began a deliberative process of translating the 347 benchmarks in the Illinois Gateways ECE Credential into 57 competencies to better facilitate the transfer of early childhood education credits

between the two institutions.<sup>23</sup>

This credentialing system provided an ideal starting point for the development of a competency-based system because it outlines a progression of knowledge and skills for early childhood educators, more than 80 institutions of higher education in Illinois already align their programs and credentials with the system and Illinois Gateways Credentials are already included as qualification requirements across some sectors of the early childhood workforce. For example, the Illinois Gateways Director's Credential is required for directors of licensed child care centers and the Illinois Gateways Infant-Toddler Credential will be required for lead teachers in the Chicago Department of Family and Support Services (DFSS) Prevention Initiative program by 2020. The ExceleRate™ Illinois Quality Rating and Improvement System also uses the Illinois Gateways Credentials as a measure of teacher qualification.

According to the most recent available data, more than 10,000 members of the Illinois early childhood workforce possess Illinois Gateways Credentials.<sup>24</sup> Work is now underway to establish competencies based on the benchmarks in the Illinois Gateways credentialing system (e.g., the Infant-Toddler Credential, Illinois Director Credential and Family Specialist Credential) and develop related assessments.

This effort to align the benchmarks that undergird the Illinois Gateways Credentials with workforce competencies represents an important first step in the development of a competency-



based system that, as the National Academy of Medicine report recommends, has the potential to create consistency across programs and, ultimately, more equity for children and families. In the 2017 Illinois Education Research Council (IERC) report, *Advancing the Illinois Early Childhood Education Workforce: A Model College and Career Pathway*, the authors advance the Illinois competency system-development work and propose a model of uniform competency-based qualifications for each professional role across all sectors of the early childhood field. This model is significant because it not only aligns competencies within the Illinois Gateways Early Childhood Education credentialing and degree requirements, but provides a unifying

framework of qualification requirements for key workforce roles such as teacher assistant and lead teacher. According to the report's authors, the proposed pathway model will enable employers to determine whether applicants possess the competencies required for a given position.<sup>25</sup>

### **Where we need to go—and how to get there**

Every child in Illinois deserves the best possible start in life. To ensure consistently high-quality early learning experiences across all program types and funding streams throughout the state of Illinois, workforce qualifications must be based on a common set of competencies.

Early childhood workforce qualifications for all sectors should be aligned with a uniform competency-based system that identifies foundational competencies for all members of the early childhood workforce, as well as specialized competencies for workforce members in leadership positions and those working with infants and toddlers, dual-language learners and children with special needs. A uniform competency system must be fully developed and adopted as the qualification requirements structure across all sectors. Qualifications requirements that currently do not meet the national recommendations outlined in the National Academy of Medicine report should be increased incrementally over a specified timeline. Each of the recommendations described in this report will require substantial work and commitment and should be undertaken concurrently.



## RECOMMENDATION

**Adopt workforce qualifications for all sectors that are aligned with a uniform, competency-based system that specifies the knowledge, skills and practice expectations required for early childhood educators across all sectors teaching children of different ages and abilities.**

To achieve this goal, a high-level, cross-sector group (e.g., The Governor’s Cabinet on Children and Youth) must require Illinois agencies governing early childhood education workforce qualifications to align their requirements with a uniform set of competencies. This governmental cross-agency group must be tasked with the implementation and oversight of the alignment process and address key policy issues and questions such as where the unified competency-based system should be housed and how it should be governed. This integrated and coordinated effort will require participating governmental agencies to relinquish

some autonomy and fully participate in the development and implementation of a uniform qualification system.

Recommendation 1 is also dependent on the continued investment in and development of uniform competencies and related assessments for specialized roles such as program directors and teachers working with infants and toddlers, dual-language learners and children with special needs.



## RECOMMENDATION

**Increase qualification requirements for all positions across the early childhood workforce that do not currently meet or exceed national recommendations.**

To achieve this goal, educator qualification requirements should be changed in statute and/or rules and regulations based on role

“Increased coherence in qualification requirements across professional roles would **improve the consistency and continuity** of high-quality learning experiences for children birth through age eight.”

— *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation*  
(National Academy of Medicine, 2015)



requirements, using terminology reflective of a uniform competency-based system. The new qualification requirements should then be rolled out incrementally over multiyear timelines to give workforce members a reasonable timeframe in which to earn the required degrees and credentials. Progress towards these goals should be carefully monitored and studied to identify (and, if necessary, mitigate) unintentional consequences.

Ultimately, all lead teachers working with young children in licensed Illinois child care centers should be required to hold a bachelor's degree, coupled with an Illinois Gateways Level 5 ECE Credential. The Professional Development Advisory Council (PDAC) recommendation to require an Illinois Gateways Level 4 ECE Credential for all lead teachers by 2030 represents a first step towards this goal. DCFS child care licensing regulations should be changed to reflect this recommendation. A timeline should be established to raise the qualification requirement from an associate's degree with an Illinois Gateways Level 4 ECE Credential to a bachelor's degree with an Illinois Gateways Level 5 ECE Credential.

Ultimately, all teacher assistants in both licensed centers and school-based early childhood programs in Illinois should also meet minimum qualifications that include foundational competencies in early childhood education. The Professional Development Advisory Council (PDAC) recommendation to require an Illinois Gateways Level 2 ECE Credential for all teacher assistants in licensed child care programs by 2025

represents a first step towards this goal. To maintain consistency across settings, the Illinois State Board of Education should also require all teacher assistants and paraprofessionals working in Preschool for All school-based classrooms to hold the Illinois Gateways Level 2 ECE Credential by 2025.

As more specialized credentials for roles such as working with dual-language learners and children with special needs are developed and incorporated into the uniform competency-based system, additional discussion will be needed to determine the application of these credentials and the timelines for their integration into qualification requirements.

## Conclusion

Our Illinois qualification recommendations—which are aligned with the National Academy of Medicine report recommendations—have been widely vetted and supported by stakeholders throughout the state.

We recognize that these qualification recommendations are extremely ambitious. But we believe that the development and implementation

Practices and policies do not always reflect the **knowledge and competencies** indicated by the science.

— *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation* (National Academy of Medicine, 2015)

# The Bachelor's Degree Debate

## How much education does an early childhood educator need?

Why did the 2015 National Academy of Medicine report, *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation*, set forth a recommendation to transition to a minimum bachelor's degree qualification requirement, with specialized knowledge and competencies, for all lead educators working with children from birth through age eight?

This quickly became the most publicized, and perhaps the most controversial, recommendation from the National Academy of Medicine report, which has frequently been referred to as the report “that requires everyone to get a bachelor's degree.”

We support this minimum bachelor's degree qualification requirement because it acknowledges that the science and practice of early childhood education is sophisticated and complex—and that adults working with young children must have specialized training and competencies to help our nation's youngest learners achieve their full potential. Unlike other National Academy of Medicine report recommendations that focused on system building and coordination, this recommendation had a more personal impact because it effectively raised the bar for lead teachers in the early childhood system.

Prior to making this recommendation, the i2I Team authors reviewed the available research on early childhood workforce qualifications, as well as the impact of these

workforce qualifications on child outcomes. Not surprisingly, the evidence base linking early childhood teacher qualifications to child outcomes is very limited. The studies examined by the report authors focused, for the most part, on just one domain of development (e.g., social-emotional) or isolated academic skills (e.g., letter recognition). This lack of evidence connecting teacher qualifications to child outcomes supports what we do know: The younger the child, the more difficult it is to gather reliable and valid assessments. This is due to the widely variable nature of early childhood development and the substantial impact of cultural and environmental influences on early learning.

Rather than focus solely on limited child outcome data, the authors of the National Academy of Medicine report made recommendations based on the substantial body of scientific research that does exist regarding the importance and complexity of the role of the adult in children's development and learning. The care and education of young children is not babysitting, and early childhood educators must be as well

of a unified qualification system—combined with targeted increases in qualification requirements—is imperative for the professionalization of the early childhood workforce and, by extension, high-quality early childhood programming throughout the state of Illinois.

These recommendations are realistic and achievable if stakeholders engage in a collaborative, coordinated and deliberate process to develop pathways for workforce members to attain the new qualifications.

We have outlined a series of recommendations for the development of these pathways in “Pathways to a More Qualified Workforce,” which begins on page 47. A unified qualification system—and the accompanying pathways to credential or degree attainment—must be developed and implemented in tandem to ensure that the proper supports are in place to realize the vision of a diverse and well-qualified early childhood education workforce in Illinois.

prepared to meet the needs of their students as educators working with older children. Educational expectations for lead teachers working with children ages 0-5 should be on par with expectations for teachers of older children. In addition, educational expectations for lead teachers should be the same for all lead teachers working with young children, regardless of the setting.

Since the publication of the National Academy of Medicine report, other national studies on the impact of the bachelor's degree requirement on teaching quality have yielded more information that supports the National Academy of Medicine's recommendations regarding teacher preparedness, teaching quality and turnover. For example, the *Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES)* includes classroom observations that measure quality using both the Early Childhood Environment Ratings Scale-Revised (ECERS-R) and the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS™). Analysis of the FACES data reveals that—as the number of Head Start teachers with bachelor's degrees increased from 40 percent to 70 percent between 2006 and 2014—average scores in both the ECRS-R domains of Teaching and Interactions and Provisions for Learning and the CLASS™ Instructional Support domain rose as well.<sup>26</sup>

While the data from the FACES analysis does not reveal a causal relationship between degree attainment and an increase in teaching quality, it does show a correlation trend

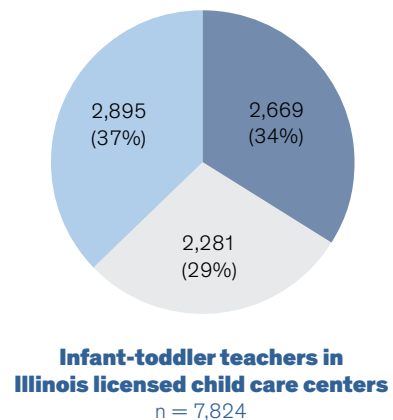
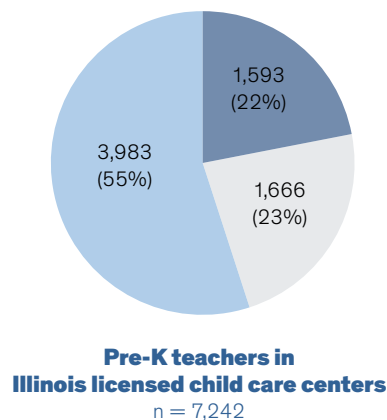
that warrants attention. From the K-12 sector, studies show that turnover rates for teachers with less preparation are two to three times higher than turnover rates for teachers who receive comprehensive training before they enter the field.<sup>27</sup>

Finally, a universal bachelor's degree requirement, coupled with specialized competencies, has the potential to professionalize the field. A profession that requires a bachelor's degree with specialized competencies is, by its very nature, populated with workforce members who are equipped with the skills and knowledge they need to do their jobs well. This workforce, in turn, requires less monitoring to enforce program compliance, which frees up time and resources for more meaningful professional development opportunities.

In Illinois, those most likely to be affected by the recommended minimum bachelor's degree qualification requirement are lead teachers in licensed child care settings. Yet even this group is well on its way to meeting the recommended bachelor's degree requirement. According to 2017 Illinois Gateways Registry data, more than half (55 percent) of Illinois preschool teachers in licensed child care centers hold degrees at the bachelor's level or higher and 23 percent hold degrees at the associate level or higher. Center-based teachers working with infants and toddlers have less education than those working with preschoolers, with 37 percent holding bachelor's degrees (see *Level of Education by Ages of Children Served*, below).

## Level of Education by Ages of Children Served<sup>28</sup>

- Teachers with a bachelor's degree or higher
- Teachers with an associate degree
- Teachers with a high school degree (and possibly some college, but no college degree)







# Illinois Workforce Pathways Recommendations

“ Just when **consistent, continuous support is so important**, the systems and services that children encounter—and the systems that support the adults who work with them—are fragmented. ”

— *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation*  
(The National Academy of Medicine, 2015)

In the National Academy of Medicine report, *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation*, **pathways represent the access, opportunities and support** that members of the early childhood workforce need to successfully meet the qualification requirements for working with young children.



The recommendations for increased qualifications outlined in the previous section *must* be implemented in conjunction with affordable, accessible and clear pathways for meeting those qualifications. Our **pathways recommendations for the state of Illinois** focus on three central themes: creating clear and coordinated professional pathways, increasing access to these pathways for targeted populations and supporting these populations as they pursue their degrees and credentials.

The National Academy of Medicine report recommends that all states develop and implement comprehensive pathways and multiyear timelines at the individual, institutional and policy levels for transitioning to a minimum bachelor's degree qualification requirement. The *Illinois Public Agenda for College and Career Success* calls for an increase in the affordability and availability of high-quality, postsecondary credentials to further develop an educated citizenry and has set a goal to have 60 percent of the state's adult population earn high-quality, industry-recognized credentials and degrees by 2025.

The *U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Policy Statement on Early Childhood Career Pathways* provides specific recommendations for institutions of higher education and state agencies to provide “career advancement pathways with meaningful supports needed for individuals” in the early childhood workforce. These recommendations include:

- shared terminology for different roles and credentials that cross sectors, settings and auspices;
- competency-based professional preparation and ongoing professional development;
- a coherent sequence of credentials that represent increasing educational attainment and demonstrated competency;
- financial assistance and culturally responsive programming to increase access to professional development and higher education;

- career and academic advising and coaching; and
- articulation agreements and credit for prior learning.

At both the federal and state levels, from both an early childhood perspective and the broader workforce context, the message is clear: we need more and improved pathways to degrees and credentials.

## **Where We Are Now: The Illinois Context**

In 2012, The Chicago Community Trust funded the “Appraising Early Childhood Teacher Education in Illinois” project, which brought together policymakers and early childhood faculty at institutions of higher education to review Illinois early education teacher preparation programs.

The resulting report identified key challenges related to the recruitment, preparation and support of a highly qualified early childhood workforce and outlined recommendations for coordination and collaboration across all entities involved in the preparation of the Illinois early childhood workforce. These recommendations were based on the organizing principle of “strengthening partnerships within and among institutions of higher education and between these institutions and the various entities involved in early childhood education teacher preparation and development in Illinois.” According to the report, these partnerships—and coordinated efforts across entities—are essential to grow and support the early childhood workforce.<sup>29</sup>

In Illinois, there have been several efforts to coordinate professional pathways for early childhood

educators. Articulation between two- and four-year degree programs is a crucial feature of these programs. Articulation agreements streamline pathways to educational attainment by outlining the courses that can be transferred from one institution to another.

In 2013, with support from the Illinois Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Fund grant, the Illinois Board of Higher Education led an initiative to provide grant funding for two- and four-year institutions to strengthen connections between institutions through curriculum alignment and transfer opportunities. These Early Childhood Educator Preparation Program Innovation (EPPI) grants generated a wave of innovation as two- and four-year institutions collaborated to provide seamless pathways to degrees and credentials for individuals entering the field or currently working as early childhood professionals.

This project was unique because the EPPI grants gave faculty members in early childhood education teacher preparation programs a voice—and an opportunity to improve pathways within the field. For example, one of the most pressing challenges that

exists with regard to transfer pathways for students in early childhood programs is that many earn Associate of Applied Science (AAS) degrees, rather than Associate of Science (AS) or Associate of Arts (AA) degrees. The AAS degree programs offer the course content needed for employment, but lack the general education coursework typically required for the pursuit of a bachelor's degree. Several of the EPPI grant teams addressed this challenge by developing model pathways from AAS degree programs to bachelor's degree programs. For more detail on these model pathways and other innovations, see the Illinois Education Research Council (IERC) publications, *Voices from the Field: Collaborative Innovations in Early Childhood Educator Preparation* (2016) and *Innovations for High-Quality, Aligned Early Childhood Educator Preparation* (2016).

The EPPI grant initiative also provided a model for collaboration not only across institutions of higher education, but also among state agencies, higher education and, in some cases, programs serving young children and families. This multisector collaboration played a pivotal role in translating solutions developed by EPPI teams within individual

“ The miscellany of institutions involved in preparing the early childhood education workforce must identify the points of intersection among their many and varied initiatives and leverage them to **avoid duplication and hasten progress** in improving young children’s learning and development. ”

— *Breaking It Down and Building It Out: Enhancing Collective Capacity to Improve Early Childhood Teacher Preparation in Illinois*, Executive Summary (University of Illinois at Chicago College of Education, 2012)



higher education institutions into broader statewide initiatives. For example, one of the EPPI teams developed competencies and related assessments to provide a unifying structure for articulation and transfer across higher education programs.<sup>30</sup> Currently, state leaders are engaging early childhood education faculty at institutions of higher education in a strategic-planning process to advance current efforts to align preparation programs with this competency-based system. This system also has the potential to serve as the foundation for the development of the future statewide unified qualification system recommended in the previous section (see page 42).

The alignment of early childhood workforce preparation programs across two- and four-year institutions—and with specific qualification requirements for various roles within the early childhood field—is critical to improving pathways for the early childhood education workforce.

The development of a highly qualified, diverse

workforce also requires “meaningful supports” that make it easier for students to enroll in and complete programs leading to early education degrees and credentials. Recent data regarding the educational levels of the early childhood workforce reveals two persistent problems.

First, a significant proportion of the Illinois early childhood workforce has completed some college coursework without earning a college degree. Nearly a third of the teaching staff members in licensed child care centers who report that their highest degree is a high school diploma or a GED also report that they have taken some college-level courses. Within this group, more than 42 percent have 60 credits or more—the equivalent of an associate degree. Yet these individuals have not yet earned degrees. Additionally, more than 3,000 teachers in Illinois hold bachelor’s degrees and Illinois Gateways Level 5 ECE Credentials, but have not earned Illinois Professional Educator Licenses with endorsements in early childhood education.<sup>31</sup> Currently, no viable

Illinois State Board of Education Professional Educator License (PEL) pathway exists for these workforce members.

Second, while our early childhood workforce generally reflects the diversity of the children and families served, most of that cultural and linguistic diversity is found among early childhood educators in roles that require lower qualifications. Conversely, diversity is underrepresented in positions that require higher qualifications. For example, 90 percent of all Illinois Preschool for All teachers—the position that requires the PEL—are white.<sup>32</sup> But nearly 40 percent of teachers in licensed child care centers—where qualification requirements are the lowest—are non-white. Nearly half of all teacher assistants in both school-based and licensed child care centers are non-white.<sup>33</sup>

To meet the need for a diverse, highly qualified workforce, institutions of higher education should be expanding their early childhood education programming. Yet early childhood teacher preparation programs are getting smaller and, in some cases, shutting down altogether due to a combination of two factors: decreased demand and a loss of funding.

These programs have always been challenged by extremely minimal capacity. Many early childhood programs at both two- and four-year universities have just one full-time faculty member. With administrative, teaching and possible research responsibilities, as well as student mentoring and supervision duties, these faculty members are overburdened and under-resourced.<sup>34</sup>

According to the 2018 Illinois Board of Higher

Education (IBHE) report, *The College Enrollment and Completion Patterns of Gateways Credential Holders*, the number of early-childhood-related degree program enrollments has decreased by 27 percent since 2010, and the number of these graduates has decreased by 29 percent in not-for-profit private colleges and universities. At public universities, enrollment has decreased by 37 percent, and the number of program graduates has declined by 14 percent.<sup>35</sup>

This data comes as no surprise to faculty in Illinois early childhood teacher preparation programs. Why is this? The decrease in enrollments and program graduates at Illinois public universities has coincided with substantial disinvestment in Illinois public higher education. According to a 2017 report by the Center for Tax and Budget Accountability (CTBA), Illinois slashed per-student higher education funding by 54 percent between 2008 and 2015.<sup>36</sup> Faculty at four-year institutions also attribute the declines in enrollment to changes in the Illinois State Board of Education's ITAP requirements for admission to Professional Educator License (PEL) programs (see *The Illinois Test of Academic Proficiency: Is it doing more harm than good?* on page 56).

Many two-year early childhood education preparation programs are experiencing disinvestment and decreased enrollments because degrees and credentials in early childhood education are not considered “economically viable.” Because early childhood teachers—even those with degrees and credentials—earn very low wages, college advisors often steer students away from early childhood degree programs into other degree programs that



will prepare them for careers with greater earning potential.

Several years ago, during the City Colleges of Chicago Reinvention process, the City Colleges AAS degree programs in early childhood education were almost eliminated because of the low labor-market returns and the perception that the degree was terminal, with no pathway towards advanced degrees. While policies at the Chicago City Colleges have changed under new leadership—and multiple pathway options now exist to support students as they transition from AAS degree programs to bachelor’s degree programs—the threat of discontinuation remains at other two-year programs across the state.

But higher education is not the only problem. The early childhood workplace also bears some responsibility for supporting students as they work towards increased educational attainment and credentials. Because of the very low barriers for entry into the field, many students in early childhood education programs are often already working directly with young children and families. These students are balancing work and school, and many are heads of households with family responsibilities. Many employers—in both public and private

settings—make significant efforts to cover for these employees so that they can attend class and/or gain experiences working with children at different age levels. Yet many programs lack the organizational structure and conditions needed to fully support the professional development of their employees and create a workplace where children and their teachers can learn and grow. These conditions should include, at a minimum, time devoted to joint planning; continuous, meaningful feedback on teacher performance; and teacher input on decision making. While some early childhood programs do have robust professional development activities and programs, these activities and programs are not yet aligned with a competency-based system or credit-bearing coursework at institutions of higher education.

### **Where we need to go—and how to get there**

Clearly, the push to create more coherent pathways for the early childhood education workforce is well underway. But, as we continue this work, we must also provide supports that are relevant and responsive to the needs of current and aspiring workforce members—what the *U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Policy Statement on Early Childhood Career Pathways* calls “meaningful supports needed for individuals.”

Our early childhood workforce is too often characterized as lacking in the skills essential for academic success, such as academic preparation for the rigors of college-level coursework, literacy skills

and English-language proficiency, as well as the material and social resources needed to support their academic pursuits.<sup>37</sup> We need to shift away from describing our workforce in terms of what it might be lacking and, instead, identify and build on the strengths that our workforce does possess. These strengths include a deep knowledge of local neighborhoods and communities, as well as cultural and linguistic competencies, all of which enable these early childhood practitioners to create and sustain positive relationships with the children and families they serve. According to the *2017 Illinois Early Childhood Education Workforce* report, more than a quarter of the teacher assistants working in licensed child care centers identify as bilingual. These individuals represent an incredibly rich resource and should be targeted for access to opportunities to increase their education and earn credentials.

To tap into this rich human resource and maximize the potential of early childhood practitioners with cultural and linguistic competencies and a deep knowledge of the communities they serve, we recommend a competency-based approach that focuses on what students can do and targets areas in need of further development. We also recommend policy changes designed to target and support minority practitioners and students, workplace practices that support professional development and educational attainment and higher education programs designed to increase access, retention and completion.

## RECOMMENDATION



### **Continue to develop clear, coordinated, competency-based pathways for early childhood educators.**

To achieve this goal, we must first develop and adopt a unified system of qualifications. Once this system has been adopted, institutions of higher education can leverage the support of state agencies such as the Illinois Board of Higher Education and the Illinois Community College Board to:

- align coursework with competencies,
- develop and incorporate shared assessments related to these competencies, and
- increase coordination between two- and four-year institutions to develop and support articulation and transfer.





**Develop and implement public policies and early childhood educator preparation programs that intentionally target and support minority students and workforce members to increase their degree and credential attainment.**

To achieve this goal:

- Changes must be made in public policy, such as giving members of the early childhood workforce access to funding from the Illinois Grow Your Own Teacher program, allowing teachers and teacher assistants in licensed child care centers to complete student-teaching requirements while employed, and removing barriers like the ITAP (see *The Illinois Test of Academic Proficiency: Is it doing more harm than good?* on page 56).
- Institutions of higher education must provide more intensive advising for students and offer programming and program-delivery options that are tailored to the needs of working adults and minority students, such as cohort models, online coursework, evening/weekend course offerings, courses offered in communities where students live and work and credit for prior learning.

In 2017, a group of stakeholders convened by the Latino Policy Forum and the Ounce of Prevention Fund identified key barriers to building a diverse

workforce and developed a set of recommendations designed to increase workforce diversity. These recommendations, which are available from the Latino Policy Forum or the Ounce of Prevention Fund, provide action steps for implementing recommendations to strengthen our bilingual workforce.



**Promote workplace conditions that support teacher development and increase access to opportunities for workforce members to attain needed degrees and credentials.**

To achieve this goal, we must first convene a group of stakeholders, including owners and operators of smaller child care centers, to identify policies and practices that will support the professional development of a diverse and well-qualified early childhood workforce. Inside the workplace, conditions and routines must be established to promote and support teacher learning, such as collaborative planning time and teacher evaluation practices that focus on continuous improvement. Early childhood programs—public and private, large and small, school- and community-based—must also collaborate with institutions of higher education to promote professional development outside of the workplace. These collaborative efforts could be as simple as





creating more flexible work and school schedules to enable workforce members to pursue degrees and credentials, or as complex as a partnership designed to provide credit-bearing professional development opportunities for early childhood educators at their workplace.

Another key step for achieving this goal is to gather data about workplace conditions. This can be done using tools such as the Early Education Essential Organizational Supports Measurement System (Early Ed Essentials), the Early Childhood Work Environment Survey (ECWES) and/or the Program Administrative Scale (PAS). The data collected from these tools should be used to identify workplace strengths and deficiencies and then to create plans for improvement.

## Conclusion

Our Illinois Pathways Recommendations—which

are aligned with the National Academy of Medicine report recommendations—represent an effort to build on the many early childhood workforce initiatives, policies and programs that have been developed and implemented over the course of the past decade.

The recommendation to increase qualifications outlined in the previous section (see *Raising the Bar: Illinois Workforce Qualifications Recommendations* on page 38) cannot be realized without the implementation of the pathways recommendations outlined in this section.

It is our hope that these recommendations will result in future workforce pathways that are more coordinated, accessible and equitable—so that more members of our diverse workforce can obtain the degrees and credentials they need to provide high-quality educational opportunities for our youngest learners.

## Is it doing more harm than good?

“ The admission standards at the state level have done more to **impede minorities** in the classroom than any other factor. ”

— JAMES ROSBORG, PHD  
Director of the McKendree University master’s education program and  
president of the Illinois Council of Professors of Educational Administration

In 2015, the National Academy of Medicine’s landmark report, *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation*, drew national attention to the **sophisticated and complex knowledge and skills that early childhood educators need** to help young children achieve their full potential.

Yet, decades before the National Academy of Medicine issued its report, the Illinois State Board of Education recognized the specialized knowledge and skills that early childhood educators need to support young learners by creating the Type 04 early childhood teaching certificate. This certificate—now called the **Professional Educator License** (PEL) with an endorsement in early childhood education—is required for all educators in Illinois Preschool for All programs.

Although the PEL requirement is good for Illinois children and families because it represents the acquisition of the knowledge and skills needed to support young learners in public school settings, it works at cross purposes with the state’s goal to grow a diverse early childhood workforce.

The problem can be traced back to the standardized tests that all prospective students

must pass before they can enroll in the teacher licensure programs and student-teaching experiences that they must successfully complete before applying for a PEL. One of these standardized tests is the Illinois Test of Academic Proficiency (ITAP).

In 2012, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) raised the minimum score required to pass the ITAP—and the number of teacher candidates with passing test scores plummeted. Without a passing score on the ITAP, teacher candidates cannot enroll in Illinois teacher-preparation programs.

The ripple effect of this high failure rate has been profound. In 2012, the Illinois State Board of Education issued 1,365 licenses with early childhood endorsements (Type 04 certificates). But, by 2017, only 599 PELs with endorsements in

early childhood education had been issued—a 56 percent decrease over a five-year period.<sup>38</sup>

To make matters worse, this precipitous decline in the number of licensees has coincided with the expansion of Preschool for All programs that serve children in our most under-resourced communities, resulting in a shortage of licensed early childhood educators where they are needed most.

Researchers have also found that state-mandated tests appear to reduce the number of ethnically and linguistically diverse teachers entering the workforce—a trend that is particularly pronounced for Latinos.<sup>39</sup> In 2017, using data available from ISBE, the Latino Policy Forum analyzed ITAP pass rates by race over a two-year period from 2015 to 2017. The analysis revealed that Caucasians had a pass rate of 35 percent, multiracial Americans had a pass rate of 24 percent, African-Americans and Asian/Pacific Islanders had a pass rate of 22 percent and Latinos had a pass rate of 14 percent.<sup>40</sup>

The high ITAP failure rates may also be deterring some minority students from even taking the test. Although the percentage of Caucasian test-takers remained steady at 56 to 58 percent from 2015 to 2017 and the percentage of Latino test-takers remained at 14 to 15 percent, the percentage of African American test-takers dropped from 11 percent in 2015 to just 3 percent in 2017.

Illinois may have raised the bar on the ITAP to ensure the development of a high-caliber workforce. But the link between performance on



standardized exams and teacher effectiveness in the classroom has not been substantiated by research. In fact, a number of studies designed to examine this link have found *no correlation between higher scores on state-mandated tests and increases in teacher quality.*<sup>41</sup>

These statistics—coupled with the previously cited research showing that state-mandated tests have little or no bearing on classroom performance—tell us that the ISBE policy regarding the ITAP test has failed us. It has created an unnecessary teacher shortage and reduced the diversity of our workforce. Rather, program admissions should be determined by the faculty members and administrators who design and implement teacher preparation programs. Although scores on tests of academic proficiency or readiness for college coursework should be considered, they must be weighed in conjunction with other factors such as grade-point average and work/life experience, as well as other factors that are necessary for effective teaching, such as bilingualism and cultural competencies.



# Illinois Workforce Knowledge-Base Recommendations

These recommendations focus on building a better knowledge base for **decision making about early childhood workforce policies and practices** through adherence to principles; **improved data collection** and use; and **improved practice, research and policy partnerships**.

The National Academy of Medicine report, *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation*, recommends that we “build a better knowledge base to inform workforce development and professional learning services and systems.”



We recognize the importance of expanding the broader knowledge base of child learning and development referenced in the National Academy of Medicine report—as well as the importance of using this knowledge base to inform best practices in early childhood education.

But our focus in this report is a more targeted one. To build a highly qualified early childhood workforce in Illinois, we believe that it will be essential to build a knowledge base specifically designed to better inform early childhood workforce policies such as qualification requirements and pathways to

increased educational attainment and credentials. These policies, in turn, will lead to continuous quality improvement in programs for young children and their families.

Data that accurately describes the characteristics of our current workforce should be



**Without good data, we're essentially guessing.** A dearth of data reinforces the status quo. Without data, anecdote—and even bias—drives policy decisions. Without data, resources could be misdirected to communities that do not need them and away from communities that do. Without data, we risk repeating the same mistakes because we don't know how effective a program or policy is.



— *The Workforce Data Deficit: Who It Harms and How It Can Be Overcome*  
(Marcy Whitebook, PhD, Caitlin McLean, PhD, and Lea J.E. Austin, EdD, 2018)

a foundational element of this knowledge base. Researchers and policymakers can then use this data to gain a greater understanding of workforce characteristics such as educational levels across different sectors. Over time, this data will also enable researchers to study the impact of workforce policy initiatives and changes on workforce characteristics. This research becomes part of our knowledge base.

But data and research are not enough to create a comprehensive and useful knowledge base. Our early childhood workforce data must be considered through the lens of the practitioner. This can be accomplished by including the voices and perspectives of early childhood professionals who work directly with children and their families.

## **Where We Are Now: The Illinois Context**

In 2009, the Illinois Gateways to Opportunity<sup>®</sup> Registry was established to collect and report information on characteristics of the Illinois early childhood workforce. The registry is administered through the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (INCCRRA) under the auspices of the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS). In 2012, the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) mandated that all educators working in licensed family child care

homes and child care centers must register with Illinois Gateways to Opportunity<sup>®</sup> and report their demographic and educational backgrounds.

This mandate has given policymakers and researchers a robust data set on early childhood educators working in DCFS-licensed homes and centers. To give just one example, the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (INCCRRA) drew on more than 61,551 individual Illinois Gateways to Opportunity<sup>®</sup> Registry records representing 49,281 licensed child care staff members and 11,067 licensed child care providers for its 2017 *Illinois' Early Childhood Education Workforce* report.

Analysis of the Illinois Gateways to Opportunity<sup>®</sup> Registry data has given us a clearer picture of a substantial segment of our workforce. But this data is only one piece of the puzzle. What the registry lacks is demographic, educational and employment data about workforce members in school-based programs, which is collected by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE). The ISBE data and the Illinois Gateways to Opportunity<sup>®</sup> Registry data are stored in separate databases, which leaves us without a unified data system for the early childhood education workforce.

In 2013, seven Illinois agencies (the Illinois State Board of Higher Education, Illinois Community



College Board, Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Illinois Department of Employment Security, Illinois Department of Human Services, Illinois Student Assistance Commission and Illinois State Board of Education) and the Office of the Governor entered into an intergovernmental agreement to establish the Illinois Longitudinal Data System (ILDS). The ILDS—which facilitates the exchange of data between state agencies—helps policymakers and communities make better-informed decisions by providing data that is critical to our understanding of the state’s future education and workforce needs.

After establishing early childhood as a priority area for data integration, the ILDS merged early childhood data maintained by the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) with data maintained by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) to get

an unduplicated count of all children served by state programs in Illinois.<sup>42</sup>

More broadly, Illinois has used data and research for decades to generate public support, and ultimately secure public funding, for early childhood programs. For example, longitudinal studies on early childhood programs such as the Abecedarian Project, the Chicago Longitudinal Study and the Perry Preschool Program have enabled researchers and economists to show that these high-quality programs have a substantial return on investment—not just for the children and families served, but for their communities and society as a whole.<sup>43</sup> (See *A Critical Window of Opportunity: Why Quality Matters in Early Childhood Education* on page 4.)

While these cost-benefit analyses have advanced the field of early childhood education by paving the way for increased investment in early

childhood programs, a singular focus on “return on investment” puts continuing pressure on the state to produce quantifiable child-outcome data. Yet, due to the sporadic and uneven nature of child development and learning, child outcomes are difficult to quantify.

Current early childhood education programs and research efforts are hindered by a scarcity of resources, as well as increasing pressure to use immediate or short-term measures of academic outcomes to evaluate teacher and program effectiveness.<sup>44</sup> Because of the inherent difficulties in assessing young children, many experts have raised concerns about the use of child assessment data for accountability purposes.<sup>45</sup>

Data regarding the quality of teacher interactions and teacher effectiveness is also important to our knowledge base. We do have tools—such as the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS<sup>®</sup>) and the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS)—that enable us to assess the quality of interactions between early childhood educators and children. There is a difference, however, between using these tools to measure teacher quality for purposes of teacher and program improvement versus purposes of program funding and program ratings in state quality rating and improvement systems. Currently, in many early childhood programs throughout Illinois and the nation, tools originally designed for professional development purposes—such as CLASS<sup>®</sup> and ECERS—are often used for high-stakes purposes such as accountability, program funding and program ratings, rather than to support the professional development of individual teachers.<sup>46</sup>



The use of student-outcome data in teacher evaluations is another concern. In the Illinois K-12 system, student growth measures on standardized tests must, by statute, account for a substantial proportion of a teacher’s annual review.<sup>47</sup> Yet, as stated previously, we know that it is extremely difficult to obtain reliable and valid assessments of early learning. Additionally, there is scant scientific evidence to support the effectiveness of using standardized assessments of student growth to evaluate teacher performance.<sup>48</sup> The National Academy of Medicine report specifically warns against the use of student-growth data for early childhood teacher evaluations. The Academy recommends the development of a new paradigm for early childhood teacher evaluation that is based on data drawn from multiple sources, using multiple



methods of measurement, which measures not only how teachers work with children, but how they work with families and professional colleagues.

## **Where we need to go—and how to get there**

Our existing early childhood workforce data collection systems—and the intergovernmental agreements to share data through the Illinois Longitudinal Data System (ILDS)—provide a foundation that we can build on to create a more comprehensive, accurate and useful knowledge base. The thoughtful design of data-collection systems and data-sharing agreements will, over time, enable researchers and policymakers to answer many important questions about the early childhood workforce and give us greater insights into the individuals entrusted with the early care and development of Illinois' youngest children.

Demographic, educational and professional development data plays an essential role in enhancing our understanding of early childhood workforce characteristics and the impact of these characteristics on early learning. For instance, data can help us determine whether the most vulnerable children have access to the most qualified members of the early childhood education workforce, whether and how individuals advance their careers by obtaining additional degrees and credentials, why people leave the field and the characteristics of those who stay in the field versus those who leave.

We have stated throughout this report that the early childhood educators who interact with children

are the most important indicators of program quality. Thus, we must also use classroom observation tools to provide robust assessments of these interactions. The data gathered from these observations should be used to improve the quality of early childhood programming by providing more targeted professional development opportunities for individual educators.

Comprehensive and accurate Illinois early childhood workforce data, compiled from multiple systems and settings, will also enable researchers and policymakers to identify workforce trends and determine whether policy changes are having the intended impact or, conversely, any unintended consequences. These analyses must be informed by the “people on the ground”—the early childhood practitioners who have direct contact with young children and their families and are most likely to be affected by changes in workforce policies.

To build a more comprehensive and accurate knowledge base—and use that information to better inform our workforce policies and practices—we must make a commitment to advancing research in the field of early childhood education. Additionally, we must also make this research more available to policymakers and practitioners. To achieve these goals, we recommend adhering to sound scientific research principles and the science of early childhood development; collecting and aggregating comprehensive data about the early childhood workforce; and creating a collaborative of policymakers, researchers and practitioners to guide and disseminate this research.

# Knowledge-Base Recommendations



## RECOMMENDATION

**Adhere to sound scientific research principles and the science of early childhood development to ensure the appropriate use of data and assessments, with particular attention to the use of child-assessment data for the purposes of accountability and teacher evaluation.**

To achieve this goal, we must balance the need for accountability with strict adherence to scientific principles for the appropriate assessment of young children and their teachers, as well as the use of assessment data for high-stakes decision making.



Illinois early childhood stakeholders should conduct a review of policies and practices related to the assessment of children, teachers and classrooms and revise policies across all early childhood programs and funding streams to ensure adherence to the National Education Goals Panel (NEGP) principles for the assessment of young children.<sup>49</sup> These principles, which still hold true today, were referenced in the National Academy of Medicine report, *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation*.

In high-stakes situations such as teacher evaluations, funding decisions and program quality ratings and/or recognition, policymakers must incorporate the following steps from the Standards

for Educational and Psychological Testing<sup>50</sup> into the decision-making process for assessment policies and practices:

- 1) Clearly identify the intents of each research, practice and policy use
- 2) Weigh the full body of reliability and validity evidence against each use
- 3) Build in continuous and local validation of each measurement tool for its selected use
- 4) Allow for the refinement of measures over place and time

To ensure the incorporation of these steps, we recommend the development of a collaborative of researchers, policymakers and stakeholders to guide high-stakes decision making (see Recommendation 3 on page 66).

 **Research use is not a simple process** whereby research ‘facts’ are passed from researchers to practitioners and then applied in a linear decision-making process. 

— VIVIAN TSENG  
Senior Vice President of Programs  
at the William T. Grant Foundation

## RECOMMENDATION



**Ensure that data systems across all early childhood education programs are accurately and consistently collecting data over time. Establish a method for linking this data to provide a comprehensive portrait of the early childhood workforce. This data will enable researchers and policymakers to conduct longitudinal analyses and inform policy decisions designed to grow and strengthen the workforce.**

To achieve this goal, a stakeholder group (including researchers and practitioners) should identify key variables and specify how these variables should be collected. At a minimum, these variables should include race, ethnicity, gender, age, educational attainment, experience in the field, retention and compensation. Data on professional development and training programs is also important, and should include information on program type (e.g., college-credit-bearing or training) and program delivery model (e.g., online, embedded coaching, workshops), as well as funding sources, financial aid and financial incentives such as monetary rewards for educational attainment. Data collection and storage methods must also be designed to allow for linking and sharing across state agencies, which will enable researchers to examine workforce patterns and trends over time. This research, in turn, will enable



policymakers to make informed, evidence-based decisions to strengthen our workforce.

Data-sharing agreements across agencies represent a necessary step for data-driven decision making. But they are not enough. Agencies must also review their own data systems and identify the changes and additions that must be made to collect the appropriate data and then standardize the data so that it can be linked. A high-level, cross-agency group comprised of data-system designers, as well as end users, should be established to determine how this multisystem data should be linked, how it should be used, the justification for the collection of specific data elements and the length of time that Illinois retains the information. Illinois also must create and maintain transparent policies that ensure the security of the data and the privacy and confidentiality of personally identifiable information. These policies should address issues such as who has access to the data—especially personally identifiable data.<sup>51</sup>



## RECOMMENDATION

**Create a structured collaborative of researchers, policymakers, key stakeholders and, especially, practitioners to identify research questions, design studies to answer these questions and develop mechanisms to coordinate the dissemination of the information in the early childhood workforce knowledge base.**

To achieve this goal, we must shift away from the linear progression of research to policy or research to practice and move toward a more integrated, dynamic approach that includes the voices of early childhood practitioners and focuses on the real problems of practice. Rather than operating in silos, researchers, policymakers and practitioners must work together to design studies and use study results to inform policies that will address these problems.

Each of these three stakeholder groups plays an essential role in this collaborative process. Early childhood practitioners in the collaborative, especially those who teach young children, must make other collaborative members aware of the operational realities of working in early childhood programs and the impact of policies on these programs. The researchers in the group must guide the collaborative in the development and use of

appropriate study designs, tools and mechanisms to address the problems of practice and the impact of policy decisions on the early childhood workforce. For example, researchers will need to keep the other members of the collaborative grounded in the science of early childhood development and guard against the use of tools for purposes other than their intended design. Policymakers—including legislators and state agency administrators—should seek input from collaborative members to leverage their expertise and knowledge when creating legislation, rules and regulations about the early childhood workforce. Policymakers should also rely on researchers and practitioners to interpret research findings and collected data. Ultimately, all members of the collaborative will be responsible for communicating their research findings and recommendations to the broader community to inform early childhood workforce practices, support advocacy efforts and drive policy discussions and decisions.

“Advancing the capacity of the early childhood care and education workforce is not limited by a lack of knowledge or effective tools, but by a **lack of design thinking and political will.**”

— ROBERT C. PIANTA  
Dean of the Curry School of Education, Novartis US Foundation  
Professor of Education, Professor of Psychology and Founding  
Director of the Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and  
Learning at the University of Virginia



## Conclusion

Our Illinois Knowledge-Base Recommendations—which are aligned with the National Academy of Medicine report recommendations—are designed to advance our understanding of the early childhood workforce and facilitate evidence-based policymaking. These recommendations will ultimately help policymakers gain a greater understanding of the impact of investments in education and training, which will enable them to make more informed and strategic decisions about workforce policies and resource allocation.

A well-developed knowledge base that provides complete and accurate Illinois early childhood workforce data will be critical to the successful implementation of the

recommendations outlined in the Qualifications and Pathways sections of this report. This knowledge base will not only enable us to assess the progress of workforce qualification attainment goals, but give us the information we need to identify and mitigate any unintended consequences of policy change.

The science of early childhood development is robust and definitive. We know what children need to learn and thrive in their early years, we know that adults are central to that process and we know that the adults who work with children must have the competencies necessary to support healthy learning and development. Now we must continue to expand our knowledge base to include information that supports the development and implementation of workforce policies and programs.

## Inadequate Compensation: The Elephant in the Room

The National Academy of Medicine’s report, *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation*, outlined a vision for a unified, high-quality workforce equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to help young children achieve their full potential. Although exhaustive in scope, the report did not address the issue of **inadequate funding**, which is explored in detail in the Academy’s subsequent publication, *Transforming the Financing of Early Care and Education* (2018).

It is an undeniable fact that the issue of inadequate funding and its impact on compensation must be addressed before we can realize the National of Academy of Medicine’s vision and the recommendations for the state of Illinois outlined in this report.

Addressing the issue of compensation is also essential to improving outcomes for young children. Nearly 30 years ago, in 1989, the National Child Care Staffing Study (NCCSS) revealed that teacher compensation is the most important predictor of the quality of care that children receive.<sup>52</sup> This is still true today. Adequate compensation leads to increased teacher retention, which gives children the continuity of care that they need for healthy development and learning. Higher wages are also linked to teacher well-being—and increased feelings of self-worth and efficacy—which leads to teaching behaviors that directly contribute to positive outcomes for children.<sup>53</sup>

Inadequate compensation in the field of early childhood education can be traced back to specific historical sociocultural beliefs, values and traditions. One of these sociocultural influences is the assumption that early child care and education is the responsibility of the family—primarily mothers.<sup>54</sup> Consequently, the early childhood workforce is overwhelmingly female. According to INCCRRA’s 2017 report on the early childhood workforce, 98 percent of the teachers working in licensed child care centers are female. Research has shown that work traditionally carried out by women—especially women of color—is routinely devalued, both in terms of respect and compensation.<sup>55</sup> Another assumption is that early childhood educators are performing work that requires minimal skills. While we now

have irrefutable evidence that early childhood educators need a highly specialized set of skills to support young learners, compensation still reflects the outdated assumption that early care and education is a low-skill occupation.

These assumptions have had a devastating financial impact on today’s early childhood workforce. Forty-six percent of American child care workers rely on one or more public support programs to survive—at an average cost to taxpayers of approximately \$2.4 billion per year.<sup>56</sup> It seems that the only individuals in our country with lower status than young children are the adults entrusted with their care and education.

Despite the rising tide of evidence showing that early childhood educators do need specialized skills and knowledge to support early learners, many early childhood programs still lack the funding needed to compensate qualified candidates.

The problem is further compounded by disparities in compensation—another unintended consequence of fragmented systems in the field of early childhood care and education. Compensation is largely determined by the settings in which teachers work, as well as the funding source.

Generally, Illinois preschool teachers funded through Head Start or the Preschool for All programs in school districts have compensation packages—often negotiated through collective bargaining—that include uniform pay scales linked to educational attainment and years of experience, as well as comprehensive benefits such as health care, paid leave and retirement plans.

But the majority of our workforce members are not employed by school districts. Instead, they work in private

“ Because those who provide this service are primarily women, many of color ... **the work is devalued** and therefore compensated poorly. ”

— MARCY WHITEBOOK  
Co-director, Center for the Study of Child Care Employment  
at the University of California, Berkeley

or community-based non-for-profit centers—where the majority of the funding comes from a combination of tuition payments from parents and the child care assistance program (CCAP). These funding sources do not adequately support the true cost of quality programming, which includes equitable compensation for highly qualified teachers.

To achieve our goal of equitable compensation for the early childhood workforce, we must increase awareness of the value of this work and revise the funding structures that support early learning programs. High-quality early childhood programming is a necessity both for our economy—as quality child care enables parents to work—and for the healthy development and learning of young children.

Positions in child care are here to stay, as these jobs cannot be automated or outsourced. Thus, the way we think about funding for this vital service must undergo a paradigm shift. Funding structures for early childhood programming should no longer be tied to a family's ability to pay. Instead, early child care and education should be recognized as a

public service that is essential to the common good—in much the same way that other services such as elementary and secondary education, streets and highways, clean drinking water and sanitation are—and funded accordingly.

According to the National Academy's follow-up report, entitled *Transforming the Financing of Early Care and Education* (2018), this reinvention “must begin with an analysis of the full cost of quality early childhood programs that considers the substantial cost to society of not providing adequate care and education for our youngest children. As a state, we need to steward our public dollars responsibly and devote resources now to supporting quality programming for young children, rather than continuing to pay later when it is more expensive and more difficult.”<sup>57</sup>

You will find specific recommendations for making early childhood education more affordable for families and for financing the development of a highly qualified early childhood workforce in the National Academy of Medicine's 2018 report, *Transforming the Financing of Early Care and Education*.







*Building a Better Workforce*  
**The Next Big Leap**

At the beginning of this report, we outlined the substantial investments in Illinois early childhood programming—from systems building and coordination to workforce development—that have laid the groundwork in our state for transformative change. Yet **there is still much work to be done if we are to achieve our goal** of providing high-quality early childhood programming that enables young learners from every community to achieve their full potential.



For years, we have tinkered around the edges of program design and workforce practices while engaging in a near-constant push for the funding needed to align our early learning systems with the latest research on early childhood development and to take the state’s early childhood programming to the next level. These efforts have yielded incremental gains—from increases in funding to the development and implementation of policies designed to strengthen program quality. Through systems-building efforts, we have also developed a patchwork of strategies designed to strengthen specific sectors of the early childhood workforce, as well as numerous state-level initiatives and stakeholder groups committed to forging

connections across silos.

The recommendations in this report, as a whole, represent a paradigm shift in our approach to early childhood education and, in some cases, a departure from “business as usual.” We must shift our focus from compliance to capacity building—and build a workforce capable of carrying out the complex, sophisticated and nuanced work needed to help children from birth to age five achieve their full developmental potential. Research consistently shows that capacity building is one of the most effective drivers of the systemwide reform that will be needed to transform early learning programming in Illinois.<sup>58</sup>

The importance of this work can no longer be

ignored. Our recommendations for transforming the early childhood education workforce have implications beyond academic achievement, high school and college graduation rates or career success. They are also vital to our economy. Without affordable child care, many working families cannot maintain stable employment. In Illinois, 70 percent of children under the age of six (approximately 600,000 young children) live in families with all parents in the labor force.<sup>59</sup> These children must all have access to high-quality early care and education.

Moving forward, we must summon the political will to tackle two overarching problems: fragmentation and underfunding. This report contains several recommendations that address the fragmentation of the workforce. To achieve the goals set forth in these recommendations, we must charge an administrative entity with the authority to eliminate the silos in our early childhood workforce. This will require existing governing and administrative entities to cede some of their autonomy and control. The two discrete systems of the past—early education programs and child care programs, with their separate functions and funding sources—must be integrated into a unified

system with a shared mission: to support the healthy development and learning of all children from birth to age five throughout the state of Illinois. While the woeful underfunding of early childhood programs was only briefly addressed in the compensation section of this report, increased funding must also be a priority as we work together to transform the early childhood workforce in Illinois. We will not solve the problem of inadequate compensation—which leads to high staff turnover and missed opportunities for optimal early childhood development and learning—until we adequately fund early childhood programs.

As we noted earlier in this report, the science of child development and early learning confirms the critical importance of the first five years of life, when the architecture of the brain is taking shape. During this period, children “learn how to learn.” Research shows that healthy learning and development takes place in the context of warm, supportive, responsive and dependable child-adult interactions. Because these interactions have a lasting impact on children’s ability to learn—and their later success in school and in life—we must make the most of this critical window of opportunity by investing in the development of a stable, competent and equitably compensated early childhood workforce.

The two discrete systems of the past—early education programs and child care programs, with their separate functions and funding sources—**must be integrated into a unified system with a shared mission:** to support the healthy development and learning of all children from birth to age five throughout the state of Illinois.

“ Evidence shows that when children are enrolled in centers **where there is lower turnover and where providers earn higher wages**, they spend more time engaged in positive interactions and developmentally appropriate activities with peers and teachers, which contributes to healthy development and school readiness. ”

— *High-Quality Early Learning Settings Depend on a High-Quality Workforce: Low Compensation Undermines Quality* (U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services, 2016)





# Transforming the Early Childhood Workforce: A Call to Action for the State of Illinois

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ROBERT R.  
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**For more information** about *Transforming the Early Childhood Workforce: A Call to Action for the State of Illinois*, please contact Catherine Main at [cmain@uic.edu](mailto:cmain@uic.edu) or Karen Yarbrough at [karen@kyarbrough.net](mailto:karen@kyarbrough.net).