

# Early Learning Council Annual Report

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2013–2014



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# Letter from the Co-Chairs

## Driving a Paradigm Shift in Early Learning and Development

During the last year, the Early Learning Council (ELC) led the effort to transform how Illinois plans, develops and manages early learning and development programs. ExceleRate Illinois is the state's new continuous quality improvement system for all early learning providers that examines quality across systems and prioritizes and recognizes ongoing quality improvement. With the ELC's guidance, the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development (OECD) launched ExceleRate Illinois in partnership with early learning leaders and organizations across the state.

For the first time, the state has developed this one system that unifies all providers — licensed child care centers, Preschool for All and Center-based Prevention Initiative Programs, Head Start and Early Head Start Programs, and licensed family/group child care homes. ExceleRate Illinois also recognizes individual program needs and empowers program leaders with the skills that they need to implement continuous quality improvement initiatives. Through ExceleRate Illinois, we have trained the state's more than 50 quality specialists throughout the Child Care Resource and Referral network on research-based, continuous quality improvement strategies. Today, these specialists are ready — and excited to begin.

ExceleRate Illinois marks just one of the many accomplishments of the Early Learning Council, which also includes:

- Launching a grant program for higher education institutions to support partnerships with four- and two-year institutions to redesign their early childhood teacher preparation programs to reflect best practices and allow for smoother articulation and flexible pathways for students.
- Continuing to expand the Gateways to Opportunity Professional Development Registry to include more than 56,000 early childhood educators and increased the number of candidates receiving higher-level Gateways Credentials.
- Providing specific services to particularly at-risk children and their parents through the Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program (MIECHV).

With these strategies, Illinois is poised to achieve Governor Quinn's school readiness and higher education goals. Investments in early learning will continue to yield dividends for the state's economic competitiveness and as importantly, in the health and success of Illinois children and families for generations to come.



Julie Smith  
Co-chair, Early Learning Council  
Deputy Chief of Staff  
Office of Governor Pat Quinn



Harriet Meyer  
Co-chair, Early Learning Council

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# Highlights

As part of the Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge grant application, the Early Learning Council identified and agreed upon three goals on which to focus its work. Those goals and related highlights include:

## **Goal 1: Strengthen the integration of state supports to create a unified framework for all early learning and development programs.**

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Although Illinois is building upon a long history of collaboration among state agencies and their contractors, 2013 marked a “big leap forward” toward creating a unified early childhood system. Accomplishments include:

- Hired the Governor’s Office of Early Childhood Development (OECD) staff, including a QRIS Policy Director, QRIS and Licensing Integration Policy Director, Workforce Development Policy Director, and Data and Outcomes Manager, in addition to the existing Executive Director, Grant Administration Manager, and Project Manager.
- Formed Interagency Project Teams to integrate the implementation of early childhood efforts in areas such as data systems development and data analysis, professional development supports, and home visiting coordination.
- Launched a year-long visioning and strategic planning process to determine the State’s approach to developing community-level early childhood systems.
- Continued pilot implementation of the Kindergarten Individual Development Survey (KIDS) that will provide statewide information about children’s development as they enter and progress through kindergarten.
- Developed high-level system architecture for an integrated early childhood data system that is linked with the State’s Longitudinal Data System.

## **Goal 2: Connect the most-at-risk children with supports and services.**

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Although Illinois has a relatively high level of services for children with high needs, too many of the most vulnerable young children are not being served. Through its State Plan, Illinois is working to identify and remove barriers to participation for these children and their families. Accomplishments include:

- Established seven “Early Childhood Innovation Zones” across the state, where local collaborations identify strategies for increasing the number of highest-need children who are enrolled in high-quality early learning services. Six have completed the first phase of their planning, and all are on track to begin implementation by the summer of 2014. The Innovation Zones are: Aurora; Cicero; Pilsen and Little Village (Chicago); North Lawndale (Chicago); Thornton Township (South Chicago suburbs); Greater East St. Louis, and Williamson County (Marion County).

## **Goal 3: Increase program quality from adequate to good and from good to great.**

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Illinois recognizes that all early childhood programs — even those already meeting high-quality standards — require support and guidance to develop and implement continuous program improvement strategies. Recent research shows requirements for program intensity, rigorous curriculum, and high-quality, teacher-child interaction impacts significantly the developmental trajectory of children with high needs. Illinois is translating that research into strengthened practices in classrooms across the state. Accomplishments include:

- Hired and/or re-trained more than 50 new and existing Quality Specialists in Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies across the state to support programs moving to higher Circles of Quality in ExceleRate Illinois.

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- Held a Preschool Instructional Excellence conference in June 2013 to consolidate lessons learned from a decade of Early Reading First, Investing in Innovation (i3), and other projects focused on strengthening preschool instruction.
  - Developed criteria for Awards of Excellence through ExceleRate Illinois that reflect research-based, best practices for serving children with high needs and their families. Award areas include: Infant-Toddler Care and Education; Preschool Instruction; Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Practice; Family and Community Engagement, and Inclusion of Children with Special Needs.

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# Committee Reports

## DATA, RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

Oversees the development of a unified early childhood data system and related projects to support the Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge grant and the ELC. As the system is designed and implemented, the Data, Research and Evaluation Committee (DRE) will continue to work closely with OECD. In the spring, Illinois received supplemental federal funds, allowing the DRE to focus on aligning the data system with the state's Longitudinal Data System initiative.

### Accomplishments

- **QRIS Validation:** Participated in planning the QRIS Validation and Outcomes Study application OECD convened to advise on state priorities and explore research questions for the Study. A vendor will be selected in June to conduct an assessment of how ExceleRate Illinois meaningfully distinguishes program quality and how its Circles of Quality relate to outcomes.
- **National Landscape Analysis:** With REL Midwest, collaborated on a research project on state early childhood data systems. Funded by the Institute of Education Sciences, the project explores how states implement the development of these comprehensive systems. Project components include: a literature review, a 15-state scan and interviews with select state staff about governance and partnership development needed for these systems.
- **Research Agenda:** Progressed on a proposal for a curated research agenda to articulate research needs for policy and practice to inform the state's early learning community and identify the research needs of ELC Committees. The research agenda, approved by the ELC's Executive Committee at its June meeting, includes eight areas of inquiry: program access, impact, quality, characteristics, and funding; early care and education workforce, family supports and service alignment, and cross-system collaboration. The agenda's goal: serve as a resource and help the ELC address broader research and evaluation needs.

### Challenges

- Moved beyond unified data system initiatives and addressed broader research needs as identified in the curated research agenda.

## FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Family and Community Engagement (FCE) Committee's goal is to increase early participation of families with the highest needs in high-quality early learning and care programs. To advance its work, the FCE has three subcommittees: All Families Served; Capital/Infrastructure and Principles & Practices, to identify issues such as transportation access, professional development and quality improvement; and local Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge grant initiatives. Because the Capital/Infrastructure subcommittee completed its mission, the FCE Committee dissolved it; an ad-hoc workgroup of the All Families Served Subcommittee will continue transportation projects.

### All Families Served Subcommittee

- Continued to provide recommendations for meeting the needs of the most vulnerable families by submitting a policy recommendation to the ELC Executive Committee to remove barriers for homeless children to enroll in Head Start and Preschool for All by aligning childcare center licensing requirements with the McKinney-

Vento homeless education law, allowing children who are homeless to enroll in these programs before health and other records are on file.

- Expanded the Subcommittee to include representatives from each of the seven Innovation Zone communities, to update them on policy issues, and provide other members with on-the-ground, real-time information.
- Continued coordination with OECD and DRE to create a conceptual framework — through an early learning lens — for understanding multiple risk factors facing families.
- This Subcommittee defined and identified children and families underrepresented in or underserved by early learning programs because standard program models fail to meet their needs. To reflect the families' perspective that social service systems, not the families or communities are hard-to-reach, FCE members unanimously agreed to change the Subcommittee's name to "All Families Served" (rather than "Hard-to-Reach").

### Capital/Infrastructure Subcommittee

- Monitored, tracked and supported the implementation of the Early Childhood Construction Grants (ECCG) program. Discussed ECCG applicants/awardees with Chicago Public Schools (CPS) to understand areas of demand, project size and how CPS defines "need" in communities.
- Focused on the role of transportation (barriers and opportunities) in a cohesive early childhood system through surveys targeted at families with children in Preschool for All, Head Start and child care (administered in summer 2014). A report will summarize strategies to advocate for a transportation system to support families' access to high-quality early learning programs.

### Principles & Practices Subcommittee

- This Subcommittee framed family and community engagement in ExceleRate Illinois and drafted standards for the Award of Excellence in Family and Community Engagement. In partnership with Erikson Institute and Head Start, the Subcommittee conducted focus groups throughout the state to discover qualities of exceptional programs that engage families and communities. Based on findings of a July 2014 Erikson report, the Subcommittee will make recommendations to OECD, INCCRRA and providers.

## HOME VISITING TASK FORCE

The Home Visiting Task Force (HVTF) provides overall leadership in early childhood systems development by focusing on three goals: expand access to evidence-based home visiting programs for all at-risk children; improve the quality of home visiting services, and increase coordination between these programs at the state and local levels as well as with all other publicly-funded services for mothers and young children. With its two subcommittees, the HVTF is the advisory body for Strong Foundations, the state's federal Evidence Based Home Visiting initiative and the federal Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program (MIECHV) funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. And, the HVTF offers strategic guidance based on program, policy and research on MIECHV grant implementation and has made progress building a comprehensive, statewide system of high quality programs. After an extensive advocacy campaign, the HVTF received a grant extension through March 2015.

### Accomplishments

- Partnered with the DRE to identify a set of home visiting metrics for the state's unified early childhood data system.
- Worked with OECD to create a map highlighting community-level gaps and discrepancies in need vs. access.

- Produced baseline data through MIECHV's data collection system showing positive outcomes in reducing child abuse and neglect, injuries, emergency room visits and prenatal use of tobacco, alcohol and drugs.
- Provided technical assistance to the following counties: Stephenson, McLean and Peoria-Tazewell and the villages of Oak Park and River Forest.
- Worked to align statewide systems for early childhood home visiting to advance an agenda for home visiting, and through the Ounce Institute, trained 150 trainers and technical assistance providers who work in home and center-based programs.
- Collaborated with the Illinois Children's Mental Health Partnership (ICMHP) to offer mental health consultation for programs in the six demonstration communities.

### **Health Connections Workgroup**

- Developed recommendations for improving coordination between home visiting programs and health systems.
- Merged with the Systems Integration and Alignment Committee's Health Subcommittee following the ELC's approval of these recommendations.

### **Sustainability Workgroup Subcommittee**

- Secured supplemental funding to expand access through Medicaid via a waiver and a state plan amendment.
- Developed a two-pronged strategy to create a supplemental funding stream for programs through Medicaid for populations enrolled in mandatory managed care and fee-for-service programs.
- Determined home visiting models that may have reimbursable activities under Medicaid.
- Met with representatives from agencies that bill for Medicaid services and run home visiting programs to understand infrastructure needs; discussed importance of including home visiting to Medicaid's continuum of services.
- Investigated the impact of the Affordable Care Act on home visiting program funding and continued to identify supplemental funding.

### **Challenges**

- Federal sequestration cut MIECHV funding by 5.1% but the state absorbed the cut without reducing services; an additional 7.2% funding cut is anticipated.
- Heightened concern of increasing risk factors facing families prompts the need to develop new models to address emerging needs.

## PROGRAM STANDARDS AND QUALITY

The Program Standards and Quality (PSQ) Committee focuses on best practices and implementation of programmatic changes to support comprehensive quality through four priority areas: coordinate the development and implementation of ExceleRate Illinois; support implementation of proposed revisions to Child Day Care Licensing rules and regulations to support quality environments for children; promote a well-educated, well-compensated early learning and development workforce and integrate infant/toddler best practices throughout early childhood systems and improve coordination among state and community infant/toddler programs.

### Accomplishments

- Created three subcommittees to advance systems development work.
- Conducted focus groups to integrate Family Child Care into ExceleRate Illinois.
- Embedded Gateways to Opportunity Registry credentials in ExceleRate Illinois staff qualification requirements.
- Developed (with the Professional Development Advisory Council — PDAC) three credentials.
- Completed and approved accredited crosswalks for National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and National Accreditation Council (NAC) for ExceleRate Illinois.
- Invited all early childhood program faculty at two- and four-year higher education institutions to regional meetings and a Gateways to Opportunity Higher Education Forum to provide opportunities to enhance their knowledge and teaching techniques.

### Subcommittees

- Birth to Three Ad Hoc: Worked to develop, with a technical assistance grant, a Birth to Three Policy agenda (which could be a model for other age groups) and to increase the quality of infant/toddler care in licensed programs.
- Higher Education Learning and Professional Development (HELP): This ad hoc subcommittee informed the development of an application for an Early Childhood Educator Preparation Program Innovation Grant to improve the ongoing professional development of early childhood educators and funded 12 grants; separately, surveyed faculty for input on a resource website to strengthen teacher preparation.
- QRIS Ad Hoc: The Family Childcare ExceleRate Illinois Ad Hoc Committee held two forums and two meetings for childcare providers to support integration into ExceleRate Illinois in 2015.
- Workforce Compensation Ad Hoc: The focus of this newly-formed subcommittee is three-fold: 1) review state and national workforce data and demographics that inform recruitment and retention of a highly qualified workforce; 2) develop ranges for compensation parity aligned with qualifications and 3) identify strategies that can be combined to secure and retain a quality workforce.

### Challenges

Coordinating statewide efforts throughout all early childhood systems is an ongoing challenge. To increase communication, the PSQ Committee incorporated multiple strategic plans and goals from state advising bodies and agencies into its Work Plan, providing a platform to enhance collaborative partnerships.

## SYSTEMS INTEGRATION AND ALIGNMENT

Recommends changes to early childhood systems to improve coordination and integration across early childhood programs to address comprehensive children's health development and school readiness. Since its formation in June 2012, the Systems Integration and Alignment Committee (SIAC) has initiated and convened four subcommittees to advance work under its action plan.

### Braiding, Blending and Sustainable Funding Subcommittee

- Drafted a report summarizing statewide roundtable discussions with early learning providers to strategize on effective ways to braid and blend funding streams to promote quality early learning programming.
- Solicited feedback on the report, which highlights barriers to braiding and blending and recommends funding structures to support quality early childhood programming and encourage community collaborations.

### Community Systems Development (CSD) Subcommittee

- Developed recommendations (approved by the ELC) on community systems development, rationale, guiding principles, characteristics and core functions.
- Worked on indicators and tools for the Dashboard related to statewide community collaborations and systems.
- Surveyed state agencies on their requirements and expectations around community collaborations and system building and helped develop a strategic plan for CSD and engaging stakeholders.
- Drafted preliminary recommendations and produced documents including: survey data of 38 community-based early childhood collaborations; map of Illinois collaborations; assessment report and national research on state-local partnerships.

### Health Subcommittee

This subcommittee develops strategies for integrating health across early childhood systems and addresses gaps in health-related services for early childhood systems in support of children's healthy development and school readiness.

- Identified health areas of concern for the early childhood system and discussed the roles of early childhood professionals on a variety of topics including obesity prevention, oral health, cognitive and social/emotional development; parental mental health, chronic diseases, insurance access and other issues, which were then matrixed to include recommended roles and identify service gaps.
- Continued to improve linkages between primary health providers and the early childhood system through a reference guide for primary care providers.
- Submitted revised recommendations to the ELC Ad Hoc Committee on Primary and Secondary Child Health Quality Indicators to include in the Illinois Early Childhood Dashboard and identified three work groups: Hearing and Vision, Obesity Prevention, and Oral Health.

### Special Education Subcommittee

- Completed the Governor's Award of Excellence for the Inclusion of Children with Special Needs for ExceleRate Illinois and piloted it with three early learning programs.
- Developed an inventory of trainings and professional development opportunities on inclusion that align with this Award, along with strategies for building capacity for continuous quality improvement regarding inclusion.

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- Created a resource list that provides ways for children to access a developmental screen when programs are unable to provide it and drafted a Memorandum of Understanding template to support identification, evaluation and provision of special education and early intervention services for 0–5 year olds.

### **Challenges**

- Timely access to data is a common and significant barrier to community-based collaborations throughout the state. Through the CSD strategic planning process, the CSD Subcommittee identified specific data points for collaborations to implement such as finding and engaging families in specific, high risk categories and developing data-driven goals and measuring progress towards shared outcomes.
- The three early learning programs piloting this Governor's Award of Excellence for the Inclusion of Children with Special Needs experienced scheduling issues because of the Head Start federal review along with general daily pressures.

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# Appendix

## About the Early Learning Council

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The Early Learning Council, a public-private partnership created by Public Act 93-380, strengthens, coordinates and expands programs and services for children, birth to five, throughout Illinois. With a membership including senior state officials and non-government stakeholders appointed by the Governor, the Early Learning Council builds on current programs to ensure a comprehensive, statewide early learning system (preschool, child care, Head Start, health care and support programs for parents) to improve the lives of Illinois children and families.

### Mission

The early childhood framework is based on the vision of every child entering kindergarten safe, healthy, ready to succeed and eager to learn. We celebrate diversity and partnering with community stakeholders who value a bright future for all young children in Illinois. We are committed to universal access for all children birth to age eight, to high quality programs and services, prioritizing children with high needs, and families that are hard to reach. When Illinois' vision is realized, we will see all young children's needs being met, including early childhood education, physical and mental health, and family support.

### Vision

At the highest level, a well-coordinated, accessible, easy to navigate early childhood system will include the components listed below. All of these components need to have specific progress benchmarks and outcomes for 2015.

### Early Childhood Learning System Components

- Ongoing preventive health care — including well-child care, screenings, immunizations, and periodic developmental screening to determine if children may be exhibiting developmental delays that warrant intervention services.
- High-quality early education programs and services for children from birth to eight with continuous improvement under ExceleRate Illinois, and with
- Standards, instruction, assessment, and supports aligned as students/families transition from infant toddler programs to other programs along the early childhood continuum.
- A well-educated, trained and compensated workforce.
- Diverse, integrated, maximized funding streams and delivery systems set at sustainable levels.
- Earlier (before preschool) and increased participation of children and families with high needs, including those who are, English Language Learners, homeless or have disabilities.
- Engaged parents with access to many information channels to help parents identify high-quality providers and know how to support their children's learning at home.
- Community-level systems coordination and development.
- Public awareness of and policymakers' understanding and support of the benefits of high-quality early childhood programs and the Early Learning Council.
- Data integration and availability to inform policies, practices, instruction, services, and evaluation.
- Evaluation and assessment to provide information on improved program quality and improved child outcomes.
- Ongoing monitoring of the ELC's vision and plan.

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## **Guiding Principles**

We are committed to:

- serving the hardest to reach children and families first and providing them access to the highest quality services.
- ensuring that resources are sufficiently allocated to provide high-quality services for every age from birth to five.
- having all children enter school healthy and ready to learn.
- a holistic approach to family and children's needs.
- ensuring that family engagement and partnership is integrated and embedded in all early childhood programs and services.
- striving for an early childhood system that is transparent, easily navigated and accessed by the families it is intended to serve.
- ensuring that all children have well-educated and well compensated teachers.
- ensuring that the learning and care continuum from birth to third grade is aligned, allows for smooth and effective transitions, and reflects best practices.

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## Data, Research, and Evaluation Committee Research Agenda Proposal

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### Introduction

The Data, Research, and Evaluation (DRE) Committee is charged with supporting the specific data, research, and evaluation needs by acting as a resource for existing and current research in the field. Specifically, the DRE Committee collaborates with other ELC committees to assist with current projects and is a resource for existing and current research in the field. The DRE Committee is also charged with providing recommendations to define and address the larger scope of research and evaluation needs for publicly-funded early childhood programs and services throughout Illinois. This proposal is to create an ELC research agenda, curated by the DRE Committee, which would inform research and policy development efforts in Illinois.

This proposed research agenda seeks to articulate research needs for policy and practice that will inform the early childhood community. It is based on the 10 Key Policy Questions the Committee developed in 2011 and additional feedback collected at the Committee's May 8 meeting. The agenda proposes the consideration of research in eight key areas of inquiry:

1. Program Access
2. Program Impact
3. Program Quality
4. Program Characteristics
5. Program Funding
6. Early Care and Education Workforce
7. Family Supports and Service Alignment
8. Cross-System Collaboration

The research agenda is envisioned as a comprehensive inventory of research questions from which specific research areas or questions will be prioritized over time. While many of the research questions included in the proposed research agenda are descriptive, it is anticipated that all of these research questions will be pursued with the ultimate goal of determining how they relate to outcomes for children. Different kinds of research methodologies will be needed to address different questions on this list, but many of these research questions will be easier to answer with a unified early childhood data system — and indeed, this list will hopefully help inform the development of that system in the next few years.

The DRE Committee is seeking feedback from the ELC Executive Committee on the proposed research agenda. The Committee would like input on whether the creation and ongoing maintenance of a research agenda would add value to the ELC and the early learning community, as well as feedback on specific areas of inquiry to be included. Should the Executive Committee support this work, the DRE Committee would collaborate with other ELC Committees to further develop the draft research agenda, which then would be approved by the DRE Committee and brought back to the ELC Executive Committee for consideration.

Our goal is that the research agenda could be posted on the DRE Committee's website, where it could help inform researchers in prioritizing projects. Also, it could be a resource to government and philanthropic entities at the state and local levels that support research. If a research agenda is posted on the Committee website, where possible it would include links to sources and contacts to assist researchers in accessing data and other information relevant to particular research questions.

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## Areas of Inquiry

### 1. Program Access

Our state should develop a comprehensive picture of who is accessing early care and education programs to inform policy and practice choices aimed at ensuring that high-quality care and education is available to all young children in need.

*Recommended research questions:*

- What are the demographics of young children and families in the state? What are the demographics of children and their families in early learning programs?
- Do at-risk children have access to programs?
- What happens to at-risk children who do not access programs?
- What is the attendance pattern for each child?
- Which types of programs are located in which geographic areas? What are our major gaps?
- What gaps in services exist for early learning programs? (across age, geographical region, demographic profile, and programs)
- Which children are enrolled in multiple programs?
- What percentage of children in early learning programs are part of the priority populations identified by the Family and Community Engagement Committee?
- What percentage of children in early learning programs live with a relative other than their birth parents?
- What percentage of children have moved within the last six months? How frequently do they move?
- How do successful programs recruit participants?

### 2. Program Impact

High-quality early learning programs are proven to narrow the achievement gap and reduce future spending on remedial education services, child welfare and crime. Research shows that at-risk children who attend quality, early care and education programs are more likely to graduate high school, attend college, and contribute more to the economy. Our state should better understand if our programs have this same impact on the young children they serve.

*Recommended research questions:*

- What results have been obtained for children on validated instruments measuring cognitive and non-cognitive development?
- What impact do early learning programs have on social-emotional development?
- What indicators are being used to measure children's developmental progress? And what are the trends?
- Do assessment trends over time indicate a closing of the achievement gap?
- How do children enrolled in early learning programs do in K–12? (test scores, attendance, drop-out rates)
- Do children receive special education services in the public school system? Do children from high-quality early learning programs have a reduced need for special education?
- Are children enrolled in early learning programs less likely to end up in the juvenile justice system? In the child welfare system? In the mental health system?
- What are the cost savings associated with early learning programs?

- How many hours a day of service do children receive? What is the impact of changes in program dosage?
- How do program goals vary by program type and/or funding source? How do program providers accessing multiple streams reconcile those different goals?

### 3. Program Quality

As Illinois moves forward with quality improvement efforts such as ExceleRate Illinois, we should gather data on how these efforts are being implemented and what challenges and barriers exist for programs as they work toward a higher level of quality.

*Recommended research questions:*

- What metrics are used to measure program quality?
- Which unit of analysis is most predictive of child outcomes?
- Are an increasing number of programs meeting established quality standards?
- Is the number of accredited programs increasing?
- What is the trend over time regarding the number of programs that are externally evaluated?
- How many programs administer self-assessments?
- What technical assistance is provided to programs?

### 4. Program Characteristics

A fuller understanding of the characteristics of early care and education programs is essential to ensuring that programs and services are tailored to serving the youngest and most vulnerable children in the right setting at a sufficient dosage to make a difference.

*Recommended research questions:*

- What curricula do programs use?
- What are the costs associated with each program?
- What are the funding sources for each program?
- What are the qualifications for program staff and providers (see below)?
- In what setting is the program delivered?
- What is the staff to child ratio?
- How do programs engage parents and caregivers?

### 5. Program Funding

The availability and stability of funding can have a profound effect on service provision and outcomes. More information on how funding impacts early childhood providers and the children they serve is critical to creating the policies and infrastructure needed to support a robust and effective early childhood system.

*Recommended research questions:*

- What are the trends in funding over time?
- What impact does program funding source have on program quality?
- What has been the impact of funding choices that have been made at the federal, state, and local level?

- How are programs combining funds to provide service and what impact does that have?
- How does the stability of funding influence programs?
- What are the incremental costs of additional program dosage?
- What is the impact of using contracts rather than vouchers on program quality?

## 6. Early Care and Education Workforce

The early childhood workforce plays an essential role in successful early care and education programs by creating the environment in which children learn and thrive. A comprehensive understanding of this population, including strengths and challenges, is necessary to inform policy decisions and investments that will create and support a skilled and stable early care and education workforce.

*Recommended research questions:*

- What are the qualifications for program staff and directors?
- What education, preparation, and training have program staff and directors received?
- What credentials do program staff and directors have?
- What are the demographics of program staff and directors, and do they reflect the families they serve?
- What languages do program staff and directors speak?
- Are program staff and directors trained to deal with cultural differences?
- At what rate and for what reason does turnover occur? Which programs experience the most/least turnover?
- What are the characteristics of those staff who remain? Of those who leave the field?
- What salaries and benefits does the program provide?
- What technical assistance is provided for workforce development?

## 7. Family Supports and Service Alignment

The early identification and management of all developmental and health needs of children and families, including social-emotional and mental health needs, is instrumental to good outcomes. More data on the resources and services that are provided to young children and families outside of early learning programs, as well as a fuller understanding as to how data is used to align, prioritize and mobilize resources, is fundamental to ensuring that our state's early care and education programs address the needs of the most at-risk children and their families.

*Recommended research questions:*

- What percentage of birth mothers received pre-natal and/or interconception care?
- What percentage of children have medical homes?
- What medical and dental services has the child received?
- Where are services provided? Are services connected to an early education and care program?
- What developmental screenings has the child received? What were the outcomes?
- Which children have been enrolled in early intervention programs?
- How are needs of children being identified in programs? When needs are identified, what follow-up occurs to ensure those needs are met? Are caregivers provided with information about what services are available to address needs?

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- Have children been referred for medical and social services needs? Did they receive the services? How much time elapsed between referral and receipt of services? Which agencies provided the services?
  - What are the costs associated with providing additional services?
  - How do programs ensure services are provided after making a referral?

## **8. Cross-System Collaboration**

At-risk families often face a variety of challenges and must navigate a complex system to find the supports they need. Many factors are critical to the healthy development of young children beyond early care and education programs and effective collaboration at the local and state levels is critical to reducing barriers faced by families as they seek access to services. The elements of successful cross-system collaboration may vary from community-to-community, and research into what works and what does not is vital to shaping successful collaboration efforts.

*Recommended research questions:*

- Are MOUs effective to create successful collaborations?
- How do we measure collaboration and what makes collaborations more or less effective?
- What are the impacts of successful collaborations?

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## Higher Education Grants for Early Childhood Teacher Preparation

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### Funding

\$500,000 Early Learning Challenge Funds

### Purpose

Grants to four-year teacher preparation programs to improve the preparation and ongoing professional development of early childhood educators through innovative partnerships with two-year institutions, while focusing on key areas for enhancement, such as early math, infant/toddler development or flexible pathways to degree attainment.

### Entities Who Worked Together to Develop the Grant

Coordinating Body: Illinois Board of Higher Education

Other Entities Involved: Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development, Illinois Community College Board, Illinois State Board of Education, IRC:EC/The Center, Higher Education Learning and Professional Development (HELP) Work Group

### Possible Award

Up to \$50,000

### Grant Requirements

- Must be a partnership between a two- and four-year institution
- Must outline ways articulation will be addressed
- Must plan to re-design the early childhood program to address key issues
  - Key issues might include:
    - Articulation
    - Redesign to align with Gateways Credentials, accreditation, or new teacher preparation standards
    - Activities to foster attainment of early childhood credentials
    - Focus on key area of need, such as early math, diverse learners, or infant/toddler development

### Applicants

- 21 institutions applied from all over the state
- A variety of state agencies and state non-profit organizations provided reviewers

### Awards

- The grant period: February through December 2014
- Grants to 11 partnerships that scored highest by reviewers (summaries of each grant can be found on the Early Learning Council website)

- Awards ranged from approximately \$40,000–\$50,000
  - All 11 will focus on articulation and alignment to new ISBE standards for teacher preparation
  - Six will focus on student advising and support to ensure seamless transfer from two- to four-year programs
  - Seven will focus on cultural and linguistic diversity
  - Six will focus on assessments of teacher candidate competencies
  - Six will focus on aligning programs to prepare students to be successful on the new edTPA assessment of teacher candidates

### Future Work

- IBHE and IRC will work closely with the awardees to capture and disseminate information about best practices
- A second round of grants will be bid and awarded in early 2015; second round of grants will be designed to replicate best practices of Round 1 and/or to implement emerging innovative practices

### Awardees

Below are the four-year institutions awarded grants, with their partners:

#### **Chicago State University** (Chicago-Area Early Childhood Redesign Consortium — CAECRC)

- South Suburban College

#### **DePaul University** (CAECRC)

- Morton College
- Prairie State College

#### **Eastern Illinois University**

- Danville Area Community College
- Parkland College

#### **Governors State University**

- Prairie State College
- South Suburban College

#### **Illinois State University**

- Heartland Community College
- Illinois Central College
- Illinois Valley Community College

#### **National Louis University**

- Triton College

#### **Roosevelt University** (CAECRC)

- City Colleges of Chicago—Harold Washington College
- Harper College

#### **St. Ambrose University**

- Black Hawk College

#### **St. Xavier University** (CAECRC)

- City Colleges of Chicago—Daley College
- Moraine Valley Community College

#### **University of Illinois—Chicago**

- City Colleges of Chicago—Harold Washington College
- City Colleges of Chicago—Malcolm X College
- City Colleges of Chicago—Truman College

#### **Western Illinois University**

- Black Hawk College
- Carl Sandburg College
- Illinois Central College
- Illinois Valley Community College
- John Wood Community College
- Sauk Valley Community College
- Spoon River College

## 2014 Early Childhood Educator (ECE) Preparation Program Innovation Grant Recipients Proposal Summaries

Below are the awardees of the 2014 ECE Teacher Preparation Program Innovation Grants, with their partner institutions and a summary of their proposed work. Grants were awarded in February 2014 and will end in December 2014.

### Purpose

The purpose of the grants to four-year teacher preparation programs is to improve the preparation and ongoing professional development of early childhood educators through innovative partnerships with two-year institutions, while focusing on key areas for enhancement, such as early math, infant/toddler development, English language learners, and flexible pathways to degree attainment.

### Entities Who Worked Together to Develop the Grant

Coordinating Body: Illinois Board of Higher Education

Other Entities Involved: Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development, Illinois Community College Board, Illinois State Board of Education, IRC:EC/The Center, Higher Education Learning and Professional Development (HELP) Work Group

| <i>Four-Year Partner</i> | <i>Two-Year Partner(s)</i>   | <i>Grant Award</i> |
|--------------------------|--|--------------------|
| Chicago State University | City Colleges of Chicago–Olive-Harvey College<br>South Suburban College    | \$45,000           |
| DePaul University        | Morton College<br>Prairie State College                                    | \$45,000           |
| Roosevelt University     | City Colleges of Chicago–Harold Washington College<br>Harper College       | \$45,000           |
| St. Xavier University    | City Colleges of Chicago–Daley College<br>Moraine Valley Community College | \$45,000           |

The Chicago-Area Early Childhood Redesign Consortium (CAECRC) is a regional partnership including Chicago State University, DePaul University, Roosevelt University, and St. Xavier University and eight community colleges. To address the need for a more diverse early childhood education teaching force and to remove barriers to transfer among institutions and programs, CAECRC has proposed a regional, collaborative approach. Together, all partner institutions will: 1) redesign ECE programs to align with relevant professional and early learning standards, including the Gateways Standards for ECE and Infant-Toddler credentials; 2) design key assignments and field experiences to address areas such as English language learning, working with children with special needs, and caring for infants and toddlers, and; 3) create standards-based assessments aligned with the edTPA assessment required for ISBE licensure. Consortia members will study the systems and supports for recruiting, advising, and supporting ECE majors in their respective institutions and, as partnership program changes are instituted, provide ongoing training for transfer specialists and other academic advisors. Consortium members will institute formal partnership agreements and related meetings and communications to ensure continuity of work after the grant period.

| <i>Four-Year Partner</i>    | <i>Two-Year Partner(s)</i>                          | <i>Grant Award</i> |
|-----------------------------|---|--------------------|
| Eastern Illinois University | Danville Area Community College<br>Parkland College | \$39,500           |

Faculty from partner institutions will focus on the redesign of ECE programs to align with relevant professional and early learning standards. Emphasis will be placed on the development of flexible pathways for ECE majors to complete a four-year degree through exploration of various delivery models including online coursework, coursework delivered to cohorts on community college campuses, and evening/weekend scheduling. In addition, grant partners will work collaboratively with representatives from area school districts, preschools, and community childcare centers to discuss opportunities to enhance ECE field experiences. As program initiatives are launched, a website with information and resources for early childhood educators will be developed.

| <i>Four-Year Partner</i>   | <i>Two-Year Partner(s)</i>                      | <i>Grant Award</i> |
|----------------------------|---|--------------------|
| Governors State University | Prairie State College<br>South Suburban College | \$47,000           |

Governors State University and the partner institutions have existing articulation agreements which will be updated to reflect new requirements in early childhood educator preparation. Through the grant period, faculty from all partner institutions will complete a gap analysis of existing early childhood education (ECE) courses as these relate to new Illinois standards for teacher and student learning. Faculty, along with invited partners and alumni from area school districts, preschools, and childcare centers, will participate in an alignment retreat in Spring 2014. Through this retreat and other meetings, faculty will revise a series of aligned syllabi which will create seamless transfer of coursework into a BA in Early Childhood Education with two tracks, one leading to ISBE licensure and a non-licensure route. Faculty will also discuss course activities and standards-aligned assessments with the goal of creating measures of candidate proficiency specific to the Illinois Professional Teaching Standards that are sequenced across lower and upper division courses and, the results of which, will be communicated among the partners.

| <i>Four-Year Partner</i>  | <i>Two-Year Partner(s)</i>   | <i>Grant Award</i> |
|---------------------------|--|--------------------|
| Illinois State University | Heartland Community College<br>Illinois Central College<br>Illinois Valley Community College | \$48,000           |

Illinois State University (ISU) and Heartland Community College have an articulation agreement in place that supports the direct transfer of five courses in ECE. Building on this work, the partner institutions will continue to redesign and align curriculum in light of new Illinois standards for teacher and student learning. The curriculum redesign process will include options for candidates to acquire the English as a Second Language endorsement and a special education letter of approval courses. Illinois State University will also seek Gateways Level 5 recognition for its redesigned program. In addition, a bridge program — the Early Childhood Professional Preparation Partnership (ECP3) — will be developed. ECP3 will allow candidates currently working in early childhood settings to complete an ISU degree and licensure requirements through coursework delivered on evenings and weekends on the Heartland campus. Participants in ECP3 will be provided access to TAP and ACT preparation classes and related supports for candidates to pass these entrance exam requirements. Grant deliverables include the expansion of articulation agreements and related activities with Illinois Valley Community College and Illinois Central College.

| <i>Four-Year Partner</i>  | <i>Two-Year Partner(s)</i> | <i>Grant Award</i> |
|---------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------|
| National Louis University | Triton College             | \$48,000           |

National Louis University (NLU) in partnership with Triton College (TC) will create “Pathways for Excellence in Early Childhood Education” to support Triton College students in completing a BA in Early Childhood Education with an English as a Second Language endorsement. Qualified candidates also may be eligible for the Bilingual Education endorsement. Grant activities include: 1) supporting prospective ECE candidates to pass the ACT-plus writing exam through intensive support on the Triton College campus; 2) a 2014 “Pathways to Success in Early Childhood Education” Summer Institute hosted jointly by NLU and TC faculty to launch candidates in the BA program; 3) plans to offer the junior and senior year coursework on the Triton College campus, jointly taught by TC and NLU faculty, and; 4) ongoing co-planning and co-teaching initiatives between NLU and TC faculty.

| <i>Four-Year Partner</i> | <i>Two-Year Partner(s)</i> | <i>Grant Award</i> |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------|
| St. Ambrose University   | Black Hawk College         | \$47,000           |

St. Ambrose University and Black Hawk College will focus their efforts on improving preservice and early childhood educators’ abilities to support the early math learning of preschool children from disadvantaged environments. Grant activities include developing supports to improve a cooperating teacher’s ability to provide high-quality field site/practicum placements and creating micro-teach learning modules to improve ECE students’ abilities to plan, implement, and reflect on math lessons they implement in their practicum sites. Faculty from the partner institutions will jointly plan and carry out the following grant deliverables: 1) a series of professional development opportunities for EC educators at designated partnership sites, addressing early math learning, math methods instruction, and strategies for effectively mentoring novice educators; 2) creation of resource libraries on early math learning for ongoing use by cooperating teachers at ECE partner sites; 3) development of a series of exemplar videos and micro-teach lesson materials to support preservice ECE students’ learning about early math instruction and adaptations for dual language learners and children with special needs, and; 4) alignment of math field experiences across programs.

| <i>Four-Year Partner</i>       | <i>Two-Year Partner(s)</i>  | <i>Grant Award</i> |
|--------------------------------|---|--------------------|
| University of Illinois–Chicago | City Colleges of Chicago–Harold Washington College<br>City Colleges of Chicago–Malcolm X College<br>City Colleges of Chicago–Truman College | \$45,500           |

The University of Illinois–Chicago launched a new BA in Human Development and Learning (HDL) that will allow students opportunities to specialize, through program electives, in ECE. Grant activities include the development of articulation agreements between all partner institutions, facilitating seamless transfer of students. A comprehensive, pathways approach is envisioned, wherein candidates can enter the program at multiple points beginning with introductory coursework at a community college. Multiple exit points with related credentials also will be established including Gateways Infant/Toddler, Gateways Level 5, a BA in HDL, and the M.Ed. Grant partners will work collaboratively to identify and organize existing student information and support networks. Various forms of student supports will be leveraged in conjunction with the planned academic programs, and information will be disseminated jointly by partner institutions.

| <i>Four-Year Partner</i>    | <i>Two-Year Partner(s)</i>  | <i>Grant Award</i> |
|-----------------------------|---|--------------------|
| Western Illinois University | Black Hawk College<br>Carl Sandburg College<br>Illinois Central College<br>Illinois Valley Community College<br>John Wood Community College<br>Sauk Valley Community College<br>Spoon River College | \$45,000           |

Partners in this grant initiative have all agreed to seek and secure the appropriate Gateways Entitlements — i.e., Gateways Levels 2, 3, and 4 at the Associate's level and Gateways Level 5 at the Bachelor's level. Articulation agreements will be developed and implemented among all partner institutions with an emphasis on curriculum alignment efforts to create "stackable" and portable courses. Faculty at partner institutions will share, discuss, and jointly revise course syllabi. Methods for collecting and sharing commonly agreed upon assessment data pertaining to candidate performance also will be addressed. Grant activities include the development of regular meetings and communications to facilitate alignment and articulation agreements. Partners will continue these meetings after the grant period ends to ensure ongoing review and improvement of the articulation systems.

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