



Updated as of Friday, March 11, 2022

## Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity

### Frequently Asked Questions

The Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) and the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) have received many questions about the Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity (ECACE) and the work of this initiative. This document is designed to address those questions. This should be considered a working document, which will be revised as the initiative progresses. This is not intended as a policy manual or general overview of the work.

#### Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity

**1. What is the Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity and how was it created?**

The Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity was created through [IL Public Act 102-0174](#), which charges the IBHE and the ICCB with creating and establishing the ECACE. Per the law, the purpose of the Consortium is “...to serve the needs of the incumbent early childhood workforce and the employers of early childhood educators and to advance racial equity while meeting the needs of employers by streamlining, coordinating, and improving the accessibility of degree completion pathways for upskilling and the sustained expansion of educational pipelines at Illinois institutions of higher education.”

The Consortium was initially proposed through the IBHE strategic planning process. It is an agreement between all public universities and community colleges, as well as any private institutions that choose to participate, to cooperatively improve access to associate’s, bachelor’s, master’s degrees, Illinois Gateways to Opportunity® (Gateways) credentials, and other licensure endorsements. Consortium efforts will prioritize those working in early childhood congregate care settings such as child care, preschool, Head Start, family child care, and other such settings. The work of the consortium will include efforts to upskill the early childhood workforce through scholarships and other supports, work to remove barriers to credential and degree completion, efforts to align and smooth pathways across and among institutions, and work to recognize the prior learning, skills, and abilities of the current workforce to increase enrollment, persistence, and completion of higher education programs.

**2. How is the incumbent early childhood workforce defined?**

The Act defines the incumbent early childhood workforce as “an individual or a group of individuals working or having worked in the early childhood industry, including family child care and center-based care settings, Preschool for All school-based settings, and Head Start, that serves children from birth to age 5 and includes teachers, assistant teachers, directors, family child care providers, and assistants. Individuals who have previously worked in these settings are included, as long as they return to employment in one of these settings.”

**3. Which institutions are members of the Consortium?**

According to the law, “Membership in the Consortium shall include all public universities and community colleges in this State that offer early childhood programs. Membership by private, not-for-profit universities is optional and conditional on the acceptance of the terms adopted by the public members, the related administrative rules, and the provisions of this Act. For-profit institutions of higher education are not eligible for membership in the Consortium. Participating



Updated as of Friday, March 11, 2022

institutions must be accredited by the Higher Learning Commission and entitled to offer Gateways Credentials.”

Current members can be found on the ECACE [website](#).

4. **How is “Prior Learning” being defined in this initiative?** The [Public Act](#) defines this in the following way: "Credit for prior learning" means the evaluation and assessment of a student's life learning through employment, training, and experiences outside an academic environment from which skills that comprise terminal objectives are mastered to an acceptable degree of proficiency for college credit, certification, or advanced standing toward further education or training.

#### *Consortium Goals*

1. **What are the statewide goals for upskilling the early childhood workforce, and are there goals for each of the following – enrollment, persistence, and completion?**

The goal is to have an additional 4933 students enroll and persist and/or complete a credential or degree by September 2024. There are not separate goals for enrollment and completion at this time.

2. **Can students who are in our Elementary Education program who earn an ECE endorsement (and are members of the incumbent workforce) “count” toward our goals?**

If the students are pursuing early childhood as their major and are earning the endorsement in elementary education as a secondary endorsement, this may count towards your goals. However, at this time, post-BA credentials and additional endorsements achieved later do not count.

3. **Why do the Consortium goals focus on Credentials instead of Community College Certificates?**

Gateways to Opportunity® Credentials serve a common set of courses and competencies across institutions. Gateways Credentials are included in both administrative rule and are required by ISBE for licensure. This means Gateways Credentials can be recognized and utilized by other state agencies, entities, and employers to understand the shared competencies of those with the credential. The alignment and commonality of the Gateways Credentials is what has allowed them to be placed in state licensing regulations and used as educational requirements for programs to meet ExceleRate Illinois® Quality Ratings and Standards, and they provide a foundation of equity for students in the state. Many community colleges have worked to ensure that Gateways credentials are embedded in certificate and degree programs.

#### *Consortium Work*

1. **What will the work of the Consortium include?**

Much of the work of the consortium is mapped out in legislation. Among other things, the Consortium work includes determining how to offer coursework across the consortium, developing and agreeing upon common and standard methods to provide credit for prior learning, and ensuring the full transferability of the AAS degree into the university consistent with the requirements of the law. Other work may include but is not limited to developing a



Updated as of Friday, March 11, 2022

bank of open educational resources, supporting the work of the navigators and coaches, and supporting a state registry to track competencies.

**2. Will individual institutions have the autonomy and the support to develop their own Prior Learning Assessments (PLA)?**

The Public Act establishing the consortium requires the creation of standard methods to provide credit for prior learning. While institutions may have additional pathways for defining and awarding PLA credit, using a common set of approaches will be instrumental in establishing standard practice in the field.

**3. Where can we see the alignment of competencies with national standards?**

The Gateways competencies, behaviors and skills are intentionally aligned with Illinois Professional Teaching Standards, the INTASC standards, the former NAEYC standards and now the current/new NAEYC competencies. This alignment allows institutions using Gateways assessments to provide program evaluation data to accreditation and oversight agencies such as ISBE and NAEYC as required without duplicative work. The most recent crosswalk of Gateways and NAEYC competencies can be found [here](#).

The Gateways Competencies will be cross walked with the *DRAFT* Professional Educator Competencies, which are almost finalized. When formally recognized as complete by ISBE, that crosswalk will be finalized and released.

**4. Is there any effort to align Illinois' equity work with the extensive NAEYC work on equity? If not, why?**

Illinois faculty, institutions, and state agencies support student/workforce diversity and equitable learning opportunities in alignment with the NAEYC Recommendations for those Facilitating Educator Preparation and Professional Development ([advancingequitypositionstatement.pdf \(naeyc.org\)](#)).

We can see this throughout the work that's been happening in the state for many years; additionally, the focus on equity is the foundation for the Consortium.

*Advisory Committee for the Consortium*

**1. Who are the members of the ECACE Advisory Committee? What is the selection process for membership?**

[IL Public Act 102-0174](#) outlines the membership of the Advisory Group and who appoints each of the members. Members are appointed by a combination of state agencies, the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development (GOECD), and the General Assembly. Members will include state agency representatives, legislators, providers and employers, schools and districts, and non-government organizations, among others.

**2. When will the Advisory Committee be established? When will members be appointed?**

Members have been appointed, and we anticipate the first meeting in early March.



**3. Are providers included on the Advisory?**

Yes. The legislation refers to providers as employers. These members are appointed to the Advisory by GOECD.

*Cross-Institutional Access To Coursework*

**1. What is a home institution?**

Home institution is defined in legislation as the community college or university at which the student has been admitted.

**2. Why is giving students access to courses from other institutions such an important part of the Consortium?**

Many students across our state lack access to the courses they want at a time and place, and in a format that meets their needs. At some institutions, courses are only offered once a year or every two years, or courses may be cancelled due to small numbers of students. Courses may only be taught during the day/week or only in person. These may not be convenient and accessible to the incumbent workforce. Allowing students to access courses taught at another institution (through their home institution) can allow students to stay on track and complete their credential or degree.

**3. Will students be concurrently enrolled in more than one 2- and/or 4- year institution?**

Specific details of the Consortium infrastructure are still being determined. As the ECACE is currently envisioned, students will be admitted to and enrolled in their “home” institution (only) but will be able to access courses at another “teaching” institution without having to be admitted to that institution.

**4. How will it be determined whether the student can take a class outside of the "home" institution?**

Students will work with their academic advisors and/or coaches to determine when this is appropriate.

**5. Will both community college and university students be able to access coursework at other institutions?**

Yes, students will be able to access courses at other institutions, under the guidance of their academic advisors or coaches.

*Institutional Resources*

**1. What types of resources will be made available to colleges and universities?**

Institutions will be provided with funding to hire coaches, to put towards participating students’ financial holds, and to support the work of the consortium. Funding will also be provided to engage in activities such as program redesign and/or curriculum development, the provision of student supports, creating collaborations and partnerships, etc. Some of the funding will be for specific purposes, and some funding can be used to meet the needs and plans of individual institutions. More information about this funding is forthcoming.



Updated as of Friday, March 11, 2022

**2. How long will funding be made available for institutional resources?**

Grants and funding to institutions are supported through one-time federal stimulus funding that is anticipated to end as of June 30, 2024. We do not anticipate additional funding at this time. Institutions should budget accordingly. *Updated 3.10.22*

**3. When will Intergovernmental Agreements and funds be provided to participating institutions of higher education?**

We expect resource guidelines and funds to be available to institutions in early 2022.

**4. What can/should institutions be working towards while waiting for additional rules, guidance, and resources?**

Institutions can begin by working with interested students to complete the FAFSA process, in order to make sure they are ready to take next steps in the ECACE scholarship process. Institutions may begin thinking about how to promote the scholarship with students in their institution or region. We have heard that some institutions are designing cohort models or adjusting schedules to meet the needs of the incumbent workforce. Many institutions have begun communicating with stakeholders such as the registrar's office, the financial aid office, and general education departments to let them know about the coming work.

*Added 3.10.22 (below)*

**5. When will institutions receive their intergovernmental agreements? When will institutions receive funding?**

We anticipate being able to share the intergovernmental agreements soon. We are waiting for the funding to be finalized and intergovernmental agreement to be executed by the Illinois Department of Human Services, from whom funding is being provided, to be able to release information about these funds.

**6. Can the funding be extended?**

June 30, 2024 is the date by which these federal stimulus funds must be obligated. We do not get funds directly from the federal government, but through the Illinois Department of Human Services. These are Child Care Development Block Grant funds appropriated to stabilize child care and support the child care workforce. Unless the federal government decides to extend timelines around federal stimulus dollars (generally), this cannot be extended.

## ECACE Scholarship and Student Supports

**1. Where can I find information about applying for the scholarship?**

The most up-to-date information about the scholarship is posted on the [ISAC website](#). The site will continue to be updated to provide more information about eligibility, applications, and to respond to frequently asked questions. Additionally, ISAC provides updates to institutional Financial Aid Administrators, and they are a great on-campus source of information.



**2. For which programs, credentials, and degrees may students use the ECACE Scholarship?**

In order to be eligible for the scholarship, a person must be working in certain positions in an early childhood congregate care setting, such as a child care center, family childcare, preschool, Head Start, public school preschool, etc. or have recently working in one of these settings.

Eligible positions may include teachers, teacher assistants, teacher aides, directors, preschool classroom-based paraprofessionals, and others. Eligible position codes are listed on the [ISAC website](#).

Students must attend eligible Consortium programs that are Gateways Entitled. Eligible applicants may receive scholarships to work towards Gateways Credentials (ECE, Infant Toddler, and/or Director), an associate degree in early childhood, and a bachelor's degree in early childhood, with an optional Professional Educator License and endorsement. At this time, post-baccalaureate coursework or coursework taken after acquiring an initial bachelor's degree is not covered by the scholarship.

**3. How many scholarships are available?**

At this point, this is difficult to quantify. We know from prior research that the early childhood workforce has a range of credits and may or may not have a degree. With so many variables, it's difficult to say at this point the number of scholarships available. However, up to 5400 scholarships may be available.

**4. Do students need to apply for FAFSA?**

Yes. The ECACE Scholarship is considered a "last dollar" scholarship and will pay for cost of attendance after other grants, such as the PELL and MAP grants, are applied. Students must apply for the FAFSA first in order to be eligible.

**5. Will students who are currently enrolled in higher education programs be eligible for financial supports?**

Yes, those currently enrolled and those interested in enrolling in approved programs will be eligible for the scholarship, as long as they are part of the incumbent early childhood workforce as defined above.

**6. How long must someone have worked in an early childhood program to be eligible?**

There is no defined length of time a person must have worked in an early childhood program to be eligible for the scholarship. A person will be eligible for the scholarship when they begin their employment. They will remain eligible for the scholarship as long as they remain enrolled in the approved college.

**7. What is the duration of the scholarship?**

Scholarships are awarded on an annual basis, and students must reapply each year. We anticipate those maintaining adequate academic progress will be awarded the following year.

However, please note that – at present – this scholarship is funded only through June 2024. At this time, we do not anticipate additional funding beyond that time, as scholarships are currently supported through one-time, non-renewable federal stimulus funding. We urge



Updated as of Friday, March 11, 2022

institutions to work with students on academic plans that lead to a degree or credential if at all possible by this time. *Updated 3.10.22*

**8. Are part-time staff eligible for the scholarship?**

Yes. Part-time staff are eligible. There is no requirement that students work full-time in order to be eligible.

**9. When will a marketing campaign be launched to let the workforce know about the scholarships?**

Information is currently on the ISAC website and is being disseminated through various listservs. However, over the next six months, the state will be developing a broader marketing campaign. This work has not yet begun.

*Updated 3.10.22* A marketing campaign is still part of the plan; the timing is to be determined, with updates shared as they are available.

**10. Are eligible students guaranteed scholarships?**

Unfortunately, there is limited funding for scholarships. While we anticipate eligible students will receive funding, this cannot be guaranteed year to year. Scholarships are awarded on an annual basis, and students must reapply each year. We anticipate those maintaining adequate academic progress will be awarded the following year.

**11. Can students receive scholarships for any higher education institution that offers an early childhood program?**

No. Students may only receive scholarships for those institutions that are members of the Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity, accredited by the Higher Learning Commission, and maintain Gateways entitlement. See above for more information about Consortium membership. Members of the ECACE Consortium and their representatives can be found [here](#).

*Updated 3.10.22*

**12. Is this scholarship related to the Gateways to Opportunity© Scholarship? Can students receive both scholarships?**

This is a separate and distinct scholarship from the Gateways to Opportunity© Scholarship. The workforce/students are encouraged to apply for both scholarships. The financial aid office at individual institutions will determine how to distribute funds if a student is eligible for both this and the Gateways scholarship.

**13. Are the Student Supports (e.g., scholarships, navigators, and mentors) under the consortium “short-term”? How are these funded?**

At this time, the students supports, including scholarships, navigators, and mentors, are “short-term” resources through June 2024 supported by federal child care stimulus funding. *Updated 3.10.22*

**14. Is there a work commitment upon completion of the degree or credential?**



Updated as of Friday, March 11, 2022

Recipients of the scholarship are expected to continue or return to teaching or direct services in the early childhood care and education field in Illinois after they complete their program of study.

**15. What costs will be covered for students?**

Scholarships will provide funding for the ‘cost of attendance’, as defined by the federal Higher Education Act and used to determine allocations for some federal grants, such as PELL. Each institution determines the Cost of Attendance (COA) for their students, according to federal guidelines. COA may include things like tuition, fees, books, transportation, room and board, etc.

Here are some helpful links on Cost of Attendance: [Updated 3.10.22](#)

<https://studentaid.gov/help-center/answers/article/what-does-cost-of-attendance-mean>

<https://fsapartners.ed.gov/knowledge-center/fsa-handbook/2020-2021/vol3/ch2-cost-attendance-budget>

*\*\*Note - for those attending private institutions, funding will be capped at the cost of attendance for the most expensive early childhood program at a public university. Private institutions may supplement this funding with institutional grants and scholarships if they so choose.*

**16. What agency/organization will distribute scholarship funds? Where will they be distributed?**

The Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC) will determine eligibility and distribute scholarship funding to individual institutions.

**17. How many graduate level scholarships are envisioned for this initiative, and how will these be distributed?**

At this time, we anticipate funding 50 scholarships at the graduate level for those intending to advance into higher leadership positions and eventually become early childhood faculty at an Illinois college or university. We anticipate working with a small number of institutions to implement pathways designed for cohorts with these career goals. Funding will likely be provided via a competitive process.

**18. Will individuals who already have a bachelor's degree in early childhood and are working in the field be eligible for a scholarship to pursue a Professional Educator License or subsequent endorsement?**

No, not as the scholarship is currently contemplated. The priority is for those seeking Gateways Credentials Level 2 – 5 (including associate’s and bachelor’s degrees). Students are welcome to apply for other scholarships, including Gateways Scholarships, to support individuals with a BA who would like to earn a PEL.

**19. How will funding be available to students to address financial holds on their accounts?**

Funding will be provided to each institution to support students with financial holds on their accounts.





Added as of 3/10/22

**20. When will the ECACE Scholarship application and funding be available for fall 2022?**

The Application for SY 2022- 2023 will be available in May 2022. Students will receive information about prequalification in the summer of 2022. At this time, we cannot be definitive about an exact date. ISAC is focused intensely on ensuring applications for this year remain open so that students can attend programs in the Summer of 2022.

**21. Are kindergarten teacher assistants and aides eligible for the scholarship?**

Yes. As long as they meet all the other eligibility criteria. They should list Assistant Teacher as their eligibility code.

**22. Are Early Interventionists who work teaching and supporting young children in home settings and have a Gateways code "23" eligible for the scholarship? If not, can this decision be reconsidered?**

We recognize that there are many people and roles providing services to young children and families. Unfortunately, those in early intervention and home visiting roles are not eligible, due to both the intention of the legislation and the source of the federal funding.

**23. Please provide a list of eligible position codes for the scholarship.**

These are located on the ISAC [Website](#).

**24. Can students use scholarships at both a community college and a 4-year institution if they are dually enrolled?**

Yes, they may. Institutions will need to work on arrangements that outline which institution will receive funding and disperse to the other institution. (Financial aid administrators on your institutional teams will be familiar with this process.) Students attending multiple institutions should be made aware of any institutional process to inform the college that they will be attending more than one institution. Colleges should maintain all financial aid policy/agreements and be prepared to submit copies to IBHE of said agreements as needed.

**25. When will institutions be notified about students who have applied for the scholarship for FY22?**

After the priority date of March 1, ISAC began working on prequalification of students, and we hope to be able to provide this information soon. This is dependent on the execution of an intergovernmental agreement between IDHS and ISAC.

**26. When will funding for graduate scholarships be available?**

We have no information to share about the dates for this at this time. We anticipate that these funds will be released via a competitive process to institutions to work with cohorts of those in the incumbent workforce who aspire to become higher education early childhood faculty.



### *Navigators and Coaches*

**1. Will students be required to work through the navigators or can students work directly with their desired college or university?**

There is no requirement that students work with a navigator. Navigators are connectors and a way to help students easily find programs to meet their needs and assist with the initial enrollment process. Institutions are encouraged to also recruit students and provide supports needed to enroll.

**2. Where will navigators be located?** Navigators will be located at the 16 regionally based Child Care Resource and Referral agencies (CCRRs) across the state.

**3. What is the estimated timeline for navigators to begin working?**

We anticipate they will be hired and trained in early calendar year 2022.

**4. Will there be guidance on the roles of or example job descriptions for the institutionally based coaches?** Yes. The coaches are envisioned as a “guide on the side” once students get to the door of the institution and as an internal person to help them navigate the system, find the courses and supports they need to be successful and to ensure students stay on track, persist, and complete. The job may look somewhat different by institution. State Agencies and/or Consortium have (and have sent) a description of possible roles for these coaches/mentors.

*Added 3.10.22 (below)*

**5. Please share the names and email addresses of the navigators.**

The CCRRs are in the process of hiring the navigators. Those hired will be completing an initial orientation within the next two weeks. Additionally, we are working on setting up opportunities to make connections between the 63 institutions and the appropriate navigators.

### *AAS Transfer*

**1. Are universities required to transfer in the full AAS degree in early childhood? Can universities require additional coursework?**

[Public Act 102-0174](#) requires universities to grant junior level status in an early childhood education program to any student who graduated from an Illinois community college with an Associate of Applied Science degree in early childhood education if the student meets the requirements of the AAS degree program, is transferring from a program entitled to offer the Gateways ECE Credential Level 4 and earns a minimum grade point average of a 2.0 on a 4.0 scale.

A public university may not require students who meet these requirements to repeat courses taken and completed successfully at the community college and applied toward the associate degree, and all courses completed successfully in the AAS degree program must count toward baccalaureate degree completion. Students entering with an AAS may not be required to take a total number credits greater than those students first starting in a baccalaureate degree program.



Updated as of Friday, March 11, 2022

Additional coursework may be required if a student is seeking to add one or more endorsements to the student's Illinois Professional Educator License.

**2. May universities require students who transfer with an AAS in early childhood to take additional general education courses?**

Universities may not require a *total number of credit hours* greater than that which a student who began their studies at the institution would have to complete. However, students may still be required to complete certain general education and early childhood courses.

The intention of this is that students with the AAS and Gateways Level 4 credential will have met some of the competencies and requirements needed to fulfill the bachelor's degree pursued by students who began their work in the program, and that these courses and/or content need not be repeated. Students should be taking coursework that provides content still needed to reach the bachelor's degree in early childhood and Gateways Level 5.

**3. How will advisors at 2- and 4- years institutions be made aware of requirements to transfer the AAS degree in early childhood?**

This will be communicated in a variety of ways. Institutions must agree to this as members of the consortium, and consortium representatives will be charged with ensuring their institution is aware of the requirements. Additionally, this will be included as part of the training of both the navigators and coaches working on behalf of the consortium.

**4. Is the rule requiring the full transfer of the AAS in early childhood "permanent" or does it expire in three years, with the federal funding?**

The transfer of the AAS in early childhood is now in [Illinois State Law](#), and there is no expiration date or sunset listed in the law. So, unless the law is repealed by the Illinois General Assembly, the law is in effect.

**5. Are institutions required to accept coursework in which students earn a "D"?**

A grade of a "D" may be accepted toward graduation requirements. However, if the course in which the student received the "D" is specifically required for licensure or for Gateways Credentials, the student would need to retake the course.

**6. Do courses beyond those required for the AAS degree count towards the maximum number of credit hours requirement?**

Only coursework required for the AAS degree must count towards the maximum number of credit hours. However, if the coursework will fulfill additional university requirements, they should be considered for transfer.

**7. Are dual credit courses taken in high school and accepted at community colleges required to be part of the coursework accepted by 4-year institutions?**

If coursework is accepted at the community college towards the AAS degree, then it must be accepted by 4-year institutions as part of the AAS degree transfer.

## Professional Educator License Questions

**1. Do cooperating teachers and/or student teaching supervisors need to have a degree or credential?**

At present, if a student is seeking a Professional Educator License (PEL) through the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), cooperating teachers during student teaching must hold a bachelor's degree and a PEL. ISBE has proposed rule changes to 23 Illinois Administrative Code, Part 25 that would allow cooperating teachers in community-based programs to alternatively hold a Gateways Level 5 credential, which requires a bachelor's degree and demonstrated early childhood competencies. If approved, these proposed changes would go into effect in mid-to-late 2022.

**2. Are students able to complete their student teaching in their place of employment?**

Yes. If the cooperating teacher meets ISBE and the site meets college or university requirements, a member of the incumbent workforce may be able to complete student teaching in their place of employment. To receive an Early Childhood Education endorsement, individuals must student teach in a setting with children in the range of birth through grade 2. However, it is also important for candidates to have an array of field experiences in multiple settings to learn about child development and learning across the age spectrum. Therefore, over the course of the program, students must have opportunities to complete field work in *at least* two of the three early childhood age groupings of birth through age 3, age 3 through 5 years, and age 5 through 8 years per Illinois Administrative Code Section 25.96 (c). Please note that multiple student teaching experiences are not required, just one student teaching experience and less intensive field experiences with at least one other early childhood age groups.

**3. May student teachers be compensated for their work?**

Yes. Per Illinois Administrative Code, Section 25.620 (f), student teachers may be compensated for their services.

**4. What work is happening regarding the early childhood content test?**

A question-by-question response analysis of the early childhood content test is underway. Possible actions include question removal and/or bias panel to revise questions that may be deemed problematic.