

Innovative Practices & Collaborations in Early Childhood to Support Post-Secondary Attainment



Agenda

- Welcome & Introductions
- IDEC Overview
Christi Chadwick
- ECACE Overview
Linda Ruhe Marsh
- Community College & Four-Year Partnerships: Seamless Articulation/AAS Transfer
Yadira Ramirez, Illinois State University / Lauri Marmorstone, Harper College
- Innovative ECE Pathways CTE Early Childhood Faculty Preparation Program
Rebecca Pruitt, Lewis University
- Questions

Presenters

Christi Chadwick, Illinois Department of Early Childhood

Linda Ruhe Marsh, Illinois Board of Higher Education / ECACE

Lauri Marmorstone, Harper College

Yadira Ramirez, Illinois State University

Rebecca Pruitt, Lewis University

Who is in the room?





Christi Chadwick
Project Director, Workforce

Christi.Chadwick2@illinois.gov

IDECC Update
Success Network Conference

2.26.26



Why a new agency?

A single agency for Early Childhood will be:



Easier for parents



Simpler for providers



More cohesive and streamlined for the state



Overview | Early Childhood Services can be less burdensome, more efficient and equitable



Children and families experience difficulties with inputting the same info repeatedly, deciphering eligibility requirements, and accessing resources



Providers spend too much time on administration and experience challenges with sustaining multiple state funding streams



State cannot track funding for providers across multiple streams, deliver services equitably and efficiently, and view services a single child accesses or does not access

☆ North Star

Illinois is on a path to be the best state in the country to raise a family with young children

👤 Short-term goal

Ensure seamless transition of services for parents & providers

🎯 Agency redesign priorities



- 1 Align programs and program standards toward kindergarten readiness
- 2 Bring data transparency to deliver equity and efficiency
- 3 Design 0-3 services to support families in the most critical years
- 4 Licensing & regulatory processes support the rich diversity of families and providers that serve them
- 5 Align funding streams at the state level, relieving complexity from local and shifting to the state

Early Education & Care Services will Move, Broader Family & School Support Will Remain at Transferring Agencies

IL Dept. of Human Services

- Child Care
- Migrant & Seasonal Head Start
- Head Start Collaboration Office
- Early Intervention
- Home Visiting
 - State Home Visiting
 - MIECHV
 - Maternal Child Home Visiting

- Better Birth Outcomes
- Family Case Mgmt.
- High Risk Infant Follow Up
- Refugee & Immigrant Services
- SNAP
- WIC
- TANF

IL State Board of Education

- Early Childhood Block Grant
 - Preschool for All (PFA)
 - Preschool for All Expansion
 - Prevention Initiative (PI)

- K-12 Evidence Based Funding
- Special Ed.
- Nutrition
- Title I CACFP / School Lunch
- KIDS Assessment

- Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE)*

IL Dept. of Child & Family Services

Child Care Licensing

- Child Protective Services
- Adoption & Guardianship
- Institution and Group Home Services
- Investigative Services

GOECD

- Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH)

ILDS

- Illinois Longitudinal Data System Reboot

Key

Program Staying

Program Moving

**Program not included in the initial legislative package. Additional discussions with USDOE and state stakeholders are needed to identify the best approach to support children and families moving forward.*

Guiding principles for agency operations & decision making

Focus on aligning services toward children achieving kindergarten readiness

There is no such thing as an "Average" child type or "Average" community

Reduce complexity and burden for families and providers

Align around services and functions, not funding streams and compliance

IDEC should explore all pathways that could lead to greater equity and efficiency in service delivery and fiscal management

IDEC should be a stand alone agency (exit fiscal agency) before program administration to test systems

Recognize & design to minimize harm happening in the system, without causing more harm

Successful transition will involve three elements...

- > People
- > Process
- > Technology

...and each element is bucketed into one of three transition categories



Redesign, reform, and modernize

Enhance outdated processes or systems to align to future needs, introducing new solutions where necessary for best-in-class results



Lift, shift, & integrate

Seamlessly move existing processes, systems, & people into new environment to align with its vision & minimize disruption



Temporarily retain with transferring agencies

Delay transition for selected functions, keeping them with the current agency until resources or dependencies are satisfied

**A strong,
well-prepared and
supported early
childhood workforce
is critical to achieving
this vision**



Supported, valued, and
well-prepared workforce

Increased stability of
services and providers

More equitable access to
quality care and services for
children and families



ILLINOIS
DEPARTMENT OF
EARLY
CHILDHOOD

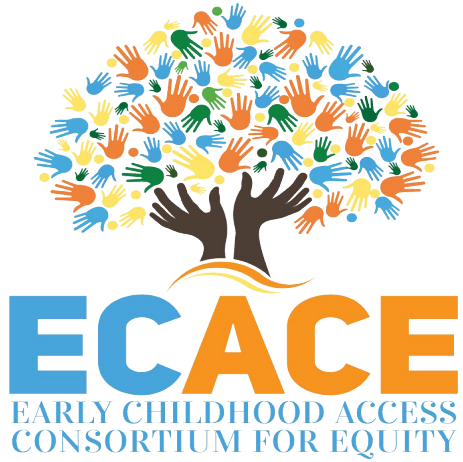
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www.idec.illinois.gov





Linda Ruhe Marsh, Ed.D.
Senior Associate Director
of Early Childhood Programs

Marsh@ibhe.org

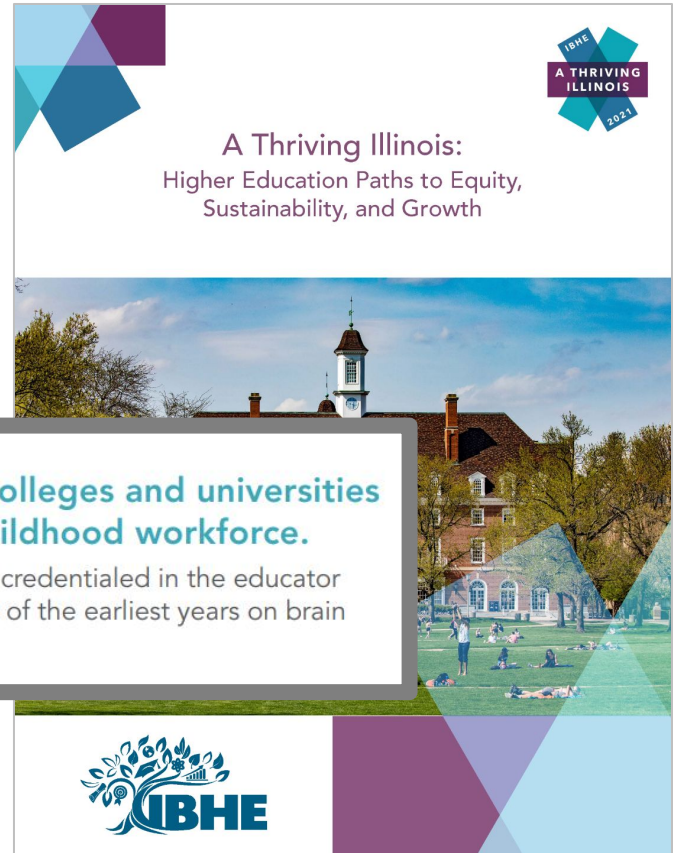
The 2021 Illinois Higher Education Strategic Plan

The plan includes strategies to close equity gaps, support working adults, and advance the education and credentialing of the early childhood workforce.

5 Establish a consortium of community colleges and universities to better serve the incumbent early childhood workforce.

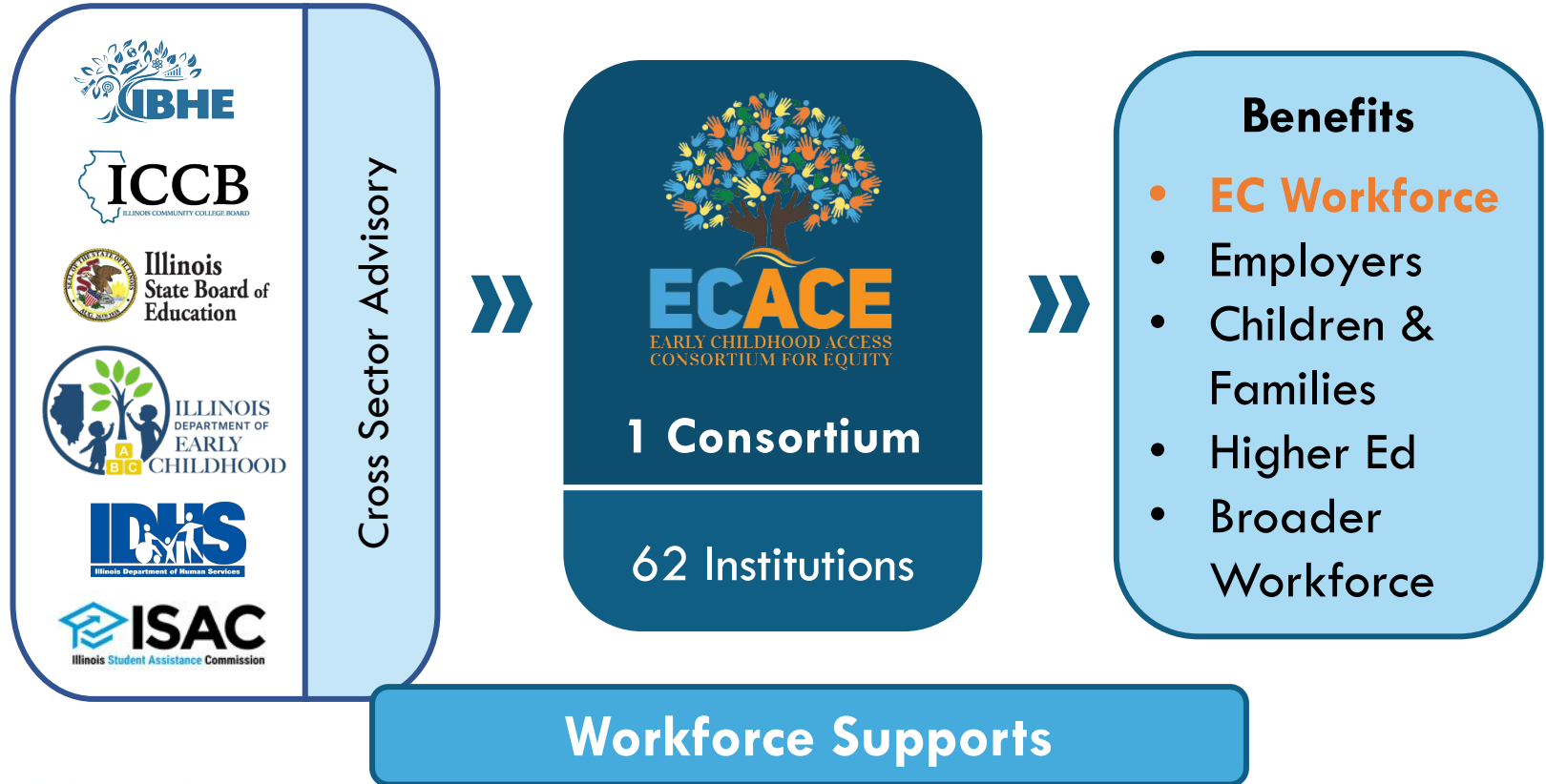
Often the educators of our youngest children are the least credentialed in the educator workforce, despite the research that shows the importance of the earliest years on brain development.

ECACE was codified in legislation, and Governor Pritzker awarded \$200m in federal funding in July 2021 to support the upstart of ECACE.



We Can Do More Together

**#1 Guiding Principle:
Center Student Success**



Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity (ECACE)

- **Statewide Higher Education Consortium**

Brings together community colleges, public universities, and private institutions to *streamline, coordinate, and improve* degree and credential pathways for the incumbent early childhood workforce (per the ECACE Act).

- **Aligned & Transferable Pathways**

Improves articulation, transfer, and program alignment so early childhood educators can move more easily from certificates → AAS → bachelor's degrees.

- **Credit for Prior Learning & Flexible Access**

Expands recognition of prior learning and work experience and increases access to courses and programs designed for working adults.

- **Student Access, Persistence & Completion Supports**

Institutions implement advising, navigation, and other wraparound supports required under the Act to reduce barriers and improve completion.

- **ECACE Scholarship (via ISAC)**

Provides financial aid to incumbent early childhood educators to reduce cost barriers to enrollment and degree completion (now supported through state appropriations after federal funds ended).

- **Institutional Innovation & Program Redesign**

Institutions redesign programs, policies, and delivery models to better serve working early childhood professionals and address workforce shortages.

Sustainability

Original Federal Funding Phase

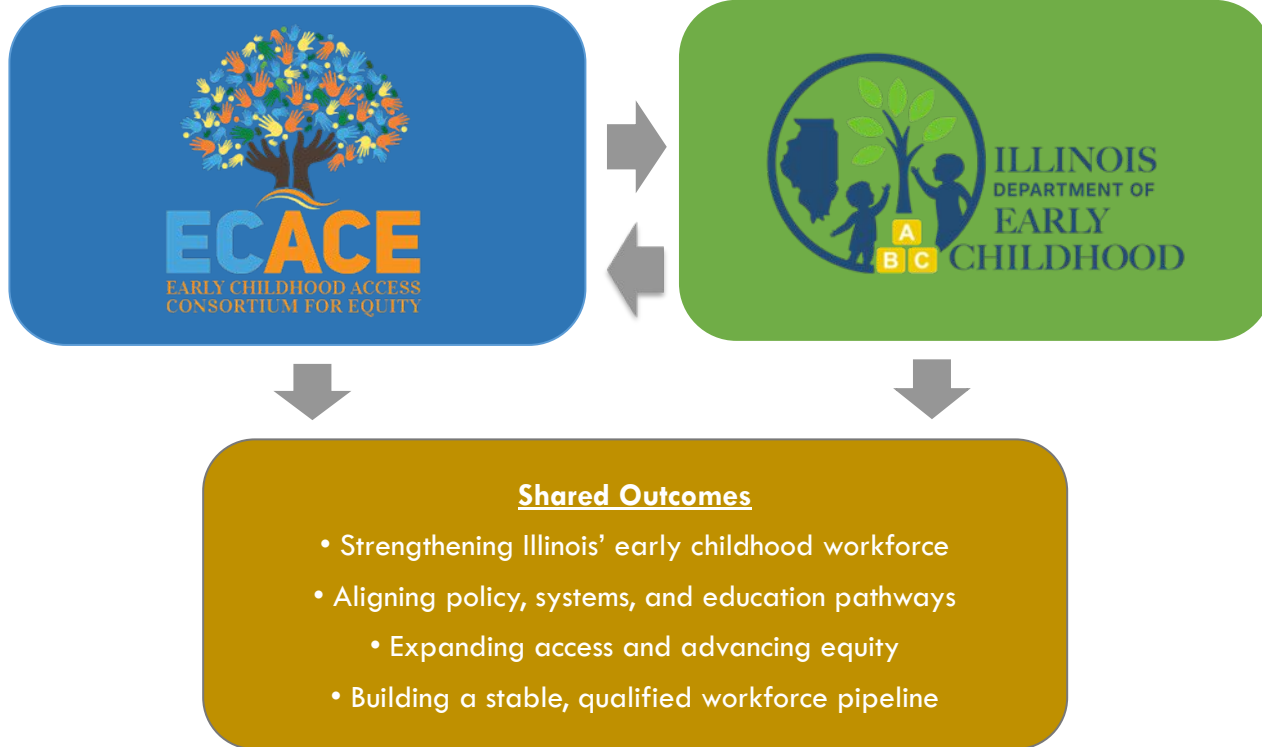
- When ECACE was first launched in 2021, the scholarship and related student supports (navigators, mentors, etc.) were funded through **one-time federal child care stimulus dollars** (from COVID-relief funding).
- Federal funding ended in June of 2024

After Federal Funding Ended

- Despite the original federal stimulus funds ending, the **scholarship program continued** through **state appropriations** and budgeted scholarship dollars administered by the **Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC)**.
- In the **2025-26 academic year (FY 2026)**, the ECACE Scholarship had an Illinois appropriation of **\$5 million** and continued to award scholarships (renewals and new awards) with a maximum annual amount of up to **\$7,500** per student.

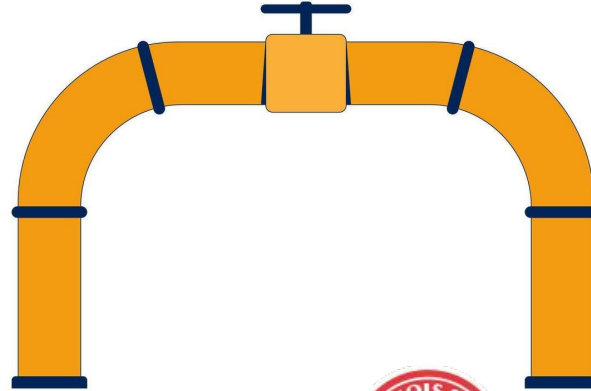
ECACE and IDEC

Two systems, one goal: a stronger, more equitable early childhood workforce for Illinois



Community College and Four-year partnerships: Seamless Articulation/AAS Transfer

Yadira Ramirez (ISU) Lauri Marmorstone (Harper)



Harper College



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
Illinois State University

Early Childhood Education Online Workforce Program

Innovative Program Design

Associate's of Applied Science Seamless Articulation

In compliance with the IL Public Act 102-0174, the AAS degree articulates fully. **No additional general education courses are required.**

Credit for Prior Learning

Students in our program **receive 15 credit hours for prior learning** due to their previous credentials and experience in the workforce

Online Courses Redesign

ECE faculty re-designed courses into carefully designed online 8 week courses. **Students access coursework asynchronously and meet synchronously once a week in the evening on zoom.**

Flexible Student Teaching Options

Students are able to complete a portion of their **student teaching experiences in their Pre-K place of employment.**

An internship option is available for non-licensure seeking students.

Program Highlights

**Guaranteed 2
Year Plan of
Study**

**Flexible
Student
Experiences**



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
Illinois State University



ILLINOIS EDUCATION AND CAREER
SUCCESS NETWORK

Early Childhood Education Online Workforce Program

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION
ONLINE WORKFORCE PROGRAM

INFORMATION SESSION

This virtual info session consists of a 20 minute presentation followed by Q&A. Participants will receive a zoom link via email upon registering. Register by scanning the QR code below.

✓ B.S. in Early Childhood Education

✓ 100% Online Program

✓ 2 Year Accelerated Program



RSVP FOR
A SESSION TODAY:

bit.ly/3HBf2up



118 students have received
their bachelor's
degree in our program

"I feel like I am accomplishing my goals and I'm proud of myself. It's been a long time that I've felt that way."

"I love being a part of this program, meeting new people, learning about new ideas, and knowing that I'm earning my BA to become a teacher soon which has been my dream since I was in 2nd grade!"



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
Illinois State University



ILLINOIS EDUCATION AND CAREER
SUCCESS NETWORK

Transparency in Transferring

- ★ ECACE has framed its work on breaking down barriers to success
- ★ Seamless transition from 2 to 4-year institutions needs to be considered as a top priority for our students
- ★ Transparency in transfer options is necessary
- ★ Students don't intuitively know their options and there is anxiety in this process
- ★ Meet with students early on to identify academic goals and work with transfer institutions
- ★ Host transfer institutions on campus throughout the year
- ★ Build relationships with transfer representatives
- ★ Supportive, personalized advising is critical for student success
- ★ Open, consistent communication between transfer institutions is key throughout the process
- ★ ISU has been the preferred option of our transfer students with over 75% of our students choosing their ECE Workforce Program



Yadira Ramirez
Recruitment Coordinator & Academic Advisor

School of Teaching & Learning
College of Education, Illinois State University

yqramir@ilst.edu



Lauri Marmorstone
Early Childhood Support Specialist

Early Childhood Education Department
Harper College

lmarmors@harpercollege.edu



Innovative ECE Pathways

CTE Early Childhood Faculty Preparation Program

Rebecca Pruitt, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Education

Director of Early Childhood Education Programs

Lewis University Early Childhood Education

St. Augustine College at Lewis University

- AAS in Early Childhood Education
 - Full program in Spanish or English
 - Online, blended synchronous
- AA in Liberal Arts: Child Development
 - Build for transferability into any BA
- BA in Early Childhood Education
 - Spanish classes
 - Early Childhood Education
 - English as a Second Language
 - Bilingual

Lewis University Romeoville

- BA in Early Childhood Education
 - All IL AAS degrees fully transfer
 - Full program online, accelerated, blended synchronous
 - Full program on-campus in EC Learning Lab
 - 3 endorsements: ECED, ECSE, ESL (+bilingual)
- MA in Early Childhood Education
 - 3 endorsements: ECED, ECSE, ESL (+bilingual)
- Non-Degree Options
 - ECSE Letter of Approval
 - ECED Subsequent Endorsement
 - ESL Endorsement
 - Bilingual Endorsement
 - Post-Baccalaureate PEL

CTE in ECE PROJECT GOALS

Obtain required credentials for dual-credit in ECE.

Align classrooms/curriculum with DAP.

- 12 participants completed the Early Childhood Education subsequent endorsement
- 6 participants completed an MA in Early Childhood Education
- Book study and PD: [Lisa Murphy on Play](#)
- Individual, on-site (HS campus + college campus) mentoring by ECE community college & Lewis faculty
- Grant funds purchased new furniture and materials for conversion to DAP classroom practices



A day with Lisa Murphy on Play

Full-day workshop on campus with Lisa Murphy to discuss and plan new curriculum and environments based on her book



General Guidance

To promote their optimal **learning and growth**, classroom spaces and curriculum designed for preschoolers must facilitate opportunities to:

- Create
- Move
- Sing
- Discuss
- Observe
- Read
- Play

From [Lisa Murphy on Play](#) (2016)



General Guidance cont.

To promote optimal **social-emotional and behavioral** outcomes, classroom spaces designed for preschoolers must:

- Use scaled down, neutral color schemes
- Incorporate natural, open-ended materials
- Minimize crowding/density of people
- Offer choice regarding which area to play in and materials for play
- Contain 2.5 play slots for every child using the space
- Utilize a daily schedule that is predictable but not rigid, and minimizes transitions



Example Participant guidance:

Method used by teacher was to divide the high schoolers into 3 groups:

Planners plan lessons in a separate room

Teachers: 15 students work in the preschool room with 15 preschoolers by pulling materials onto carpet to work on planned lessons

Observers observe children from a booth



Recommendations summary: Dividing the HS students into these 3 groups can enable the class to meet your goals as an early childhood teacher educator. However, to level up the learning experience for both preschoolers and high schoolers and align for dual-credit, the following is recommended:

1. Convert classroom into an interest center design during months preschoolers are present.
2. Incorporate natural colors and materials.
3. Adjust curriculum to utilize play-based lesson plans that align with IELDS and ISBE requirements. Replace non-DAP resources with DAP resources.
4. Modify HS group rotations- reduce the number of high schoolers in the classroom with preschoolers to 5. The other 10 would need to continue working in their classroom space.
5. Review P1 textbook for alignment with ECED 21000.

Results

- Credentials obtained; new dual-credit partnerships established.
- Classrooms set up with new materials; creating interest centers designed to facilitate play among both high schoolers and preschoolers.
- Aligned for dual-credit with community college partners and Lewis University.

