

Advocate Recommendations for Use of Short-term Federal Funds to Advance the ECE Workforce

Discussion Draft

Federal relief funds represent an important opportunity to build the representative, well-compensated, and well-qualified early care and learning workforce Illinois needs. The Illinois early care and learning advocate community has developed the below recommendations for maximizing the impact of this opportunity to both provide the immediate relief and supports Illinois early care and learning professionals need and deserve, and jumpstart efforts to advance long-term strategies to resolve the early childhood workforce crisis and put Illinois on a path to becoming the best state in the nation for raising a family.

The recommended strategies are organized around three objectives that are critical to meeting our goal of a representative, well-compensated and well-qualified workforce: (1) increase compensation; (2) increase degree and credential attainment; and (3) build or enhance cross-system infrastructure supports. The recommendations are further organized to differentiate between actions that should be taken immediately to bring much needed relief to the early care and learning workforce, and the longer-term strategies that should be implemented within the next one to three years.

Our state's investments must align to our highest priorities. As it pertains to workforce, **our top priority must be supporting the incumbent early childhood workforce**. Additional priorities must include intentional focus on investments that welcome and support more people of color to enter or advance within the field, including those who are best qualified to serve our state's growing bilingual population. Priority must also be given to the infant-toddler workforce, who often earn less and hold fewer degrees and credentials than those working with preschool-age children. Lastly, we must collect sufficient data and information to understand the impact of these investments, determine how the state might seek to replicate or scale these efforts in the future, and to address any barriers or unintended consequences.

Strategies to increase compensation

Immediately

- Provide one-time stipends to front-line staff working in child care and other community-based early childhood programs. Consider requiring professionals to update their Gateways profile in order to access the stipend and frame stipend as an "essential worker retention bonus." There is a similar effort underway in GA we could review.
- Invest significant funds to increase awards, expand access to Great START and review and amend program rules to remove barriers to ensure widespread access.
- Create and implement a scale of temporary incentive bonuses for staff who complete credentials or degrees. Sustain this investment by linking it to future work to codify a desired wage scale that reflects that attainment as well.
- Continue increases to CCAP rates, with guidance to dedicate additional funds toward staff compensation.

Start now to build to longer-term solution

- Build capacity to dramatically scale up use of contracts in the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) to direct funds toward compensation.
- Expand ExceleRate pilots to additional providers this year, including Chicago providers.

Strategies to increase credential and degree attainment

Immediately

- Provide grants directly to individual staff for *full* debt relief so they can obtain transcripts, enroll in additional coursework, etc.
- Continue to waive fees for individual staff to obtain credentials and for renewals.
- Invest significant funds to expand access to the Gateways scholarship program and review and amend program rules to remove barriers and ensure widespread access across the system.
- Provide generous stipends to individual providers that support them in attaining a credential or degree—funds can be used to pay for books, class materials, travel expenses, child care, etc.
- Provide funds to child care owners and operators to pay for substitutes so full-time staff can pursue credential and degrees during work time.
- Mine existing workforce datasets to identify and target supports to candidates who are closest to obtaining a credential or degree.
 - Utilize regional data to identify the greatest local staffing need and prioritize candidates who will meet that need.
 - Employ opportunities to increase racial, ethnic and linguistic diversity in the field.
- Greatly expand access to professional development advisors/intrusive advising for activities leading to the next credential and/or degree like
 - Transcript reviews
 - Navigation of higher education options and financial supports, i.e., Institutions of Higher Education (IHE) financial aid application and/or FAFSA
 - “Warm handoffs” to IHEs
 - Ongoing support to candidates as they move through their coursework, whether through the PDA system or through grants to IHEs
- Develop a credit-bearing Child Development Associate (CDA) program.

Start now to build to longer-term solution

- Create additional cohort programs based on data-informed, targeted areas of need for credential/degree completion; include financial support to cohort candidates.
- Leverage current authority that allows for paid student teaching and internships by creating a state fund to provide paid student teaching and internship opportunities across the system. The fund should be available to individual candidates (including but not limited to those pursuing a Professional Educators License), employers/early childhood programs and/or IHEs.
- Invest in strategies to enhance innovation in higher education, including:
 - Provide start-up grants to IHEs to launch Bachelor of Applied Science (BAS) programs in community colleges.
 - Continue to support the build out of competency-based education
 - Add capacity in IHE early childhood departments to provide additional supports to students both on academic and other barriers to completion.
 - In coordination with state-administered supports, ensure IHEs can provide a range of financial supports to individual staff to fully cover costs, including tuition, books, child care, required testing, travel, etc.

Build or enhance cross-system infrastructure and supports

Immediately

- Provide trauma and recovery supports that are accessible and available to providers across the system.
- Expand access to Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Consultants (I/ECMHC), either through hiring additional I/ECMHCs through Caregiver Connections to work across the system or provide additional funds to providers to hire consultants.

Start now to build to longer-term solution

- Invest in a robust, cross-system early childhood workforce data infrastructure that will be regularly accessible to a range of regional and local entities.
- Invest in efforts to build a pipeline of I/ECMH consultants to accelerate availability of qualified professionals to support the field.
- Increase supports to I/ECMHCs, including expanding access to reflective learning groups for consultants, especially independent consultants, and providing paid internship or mentorship opportunities.

Recommendations put forth by Advance Illinois, Illinois Action for Children, the Latino Policy Forum and Start Early, Teach Plus and include content discussed broadly by workforce stakeholders