

Who's Caring for the Kids?

The Status of the Early Childhood Workforce in Illinois—2008



What We Know and What We Must Do

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Every day, families in virtually every neighborhood in every community in Illinois rely on early childhood programs so they can work, and so their children can receive educational experiences so vital for optimal growth and development. These programs take many forms, ranging from part-day, full-day, and drop-in care to weekly, school-year, and year-round care. They may be publicly funded or privately funded, independently operated or sponsored by a human service agency, hospital, university, or religious organization.

Regardless of program type, philosophy, or setting, the single most important factor impacting a child's experience is the quality of adult-child interactions. Classroom teachers and home providers are at the core of the child's daily experience. The expertise, passion, and commitment they bring to their roles can transform ordinary experiences into memorable moments that enrich a child's life forever.

The early childhood workforce is a vibrant and growing contributor to the Illinois economy. It includes over 56,000 full-time teachers, directors, and support staff who work in over 5,000 licensed and license-exempt community-based programs, approximately 1,700 teachers who work in Preschool for All programs, and nearly 11,000 licensed family child care providers who care for young children in their homes.

Illinois has made dramatic progress since the publication of the 2001 report of **Who's Caring for the Kids?** Notable accomplishments have been made in the development of an integrated and coordinated system of care and education for young children through the establishment of the Illinois Early Learning Council, implementation of Preschool for All, and the roll-out of Quality Counts—QRS. State policymakers have also addressed the professional needs and status of the early childhood workforce through the creation of the Professional Development Advisory Council, the establishment of Gateways to Opportunity, and the development of a system of credentialing for the early childhood workforce. The creation of the Illinois Early Childhood Asset Map has also contributed a key element for planning and coordination of early care and education services.

The trend is toward a unified system of early care and education; our job is to maintain momentum for cross-sector unification—keep pushing it! We need to increase compensation as we increase qualifications or professional development systems will fail.

Anne Mitchell, President
Early Childhood Policy Research

Finding #1: Education Matters

The educational level of lead teachers in community-based programs has substantially increased since 2001.

- Lead teachers with a minimum of a bachelor's degree have increased from 37% to 48% between 2001 and 2008.
- In community-based programs lead teachers have considerably more education than teachers, and teachers have considerably more education than assistant teachers.
- Nearly 20% of lead teachers in community-based programs hold Type 04 early childhood certification in addition to a bachelor's degree.
- More than 75% of lead teachers who do not currently have a Type 04 early childhood certification report they are interested in continuing their education to complete a bachelor's degree and/or attain Type 04 certification.
- Only one-third of lead teachers working with infants and toddlers have a bachelor's degree or higher.
- Less than 50% of family child care providers have earned an associate's degree or higher.

Recommendations:

- ▶ Revise the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services Licensing Standards for Center Staffing by adding *lead teacher* as a separate role category for the teacher with the highest professional qualifications assigned to teach a group of children and who is responsible for daily lesson planning, parent conferences, child assessment, and curriculum planning.
- ▶ Collect data for the biannual Illinois Salary and Staffing Survey of Licensed Child Care Facilities on lead teachers, in addition to teachers and assistant teachers, even in the absence of revisions to the IDCFS Licensing Standards.
- ▶ Phase in over time, the Level 1 ECE Credential as a minimum entry requirement for assistant teachers, the Level 3 ECE Credential as a minimum entry requirement for teachers, and the Level 4 ECE Credential as a minimum entry requirement for lead teachers in licensed child care centers.
- ▶ Phase in over time, the Level 1 ECE Credential as a minimum entry requirement for licensed family child care providers.
- ▶ Phase in over time, the Level 5 ECE Credential and Infant Toddler Credential as a minimum entry requirement for lead teachers working with infants and toddlers in programs funded by Preschool for All.



Finding #2: Compensation Matters

The wide variation in compensation—wages and benefits—across sectors is drawing teachers with degrees and Type 04 early childhood certification from community-based programs to public school programs



- Market forces continue to drive the wages and benefits of early childhood teachers. Those who work for programs that depend on parent fees and/or subsidies make far less than those who work for programs receiving federal and state funds. They are also less likely to receive comparable benefits in terms of paid leave, health insurance, retirement, or opportunities for continued professional development.
- Lead teachers with a bachelor's degree earn 20% more than those without the degree. With certification and a bachelor's degree, lead teachers working in public schools have the potential to earn almost three times more than lead teachers without a bachelor's degree.
- Lead teachers with Type 04 certification employed by community-based programs earn 44% less than comparably certified teachers in public school programs.
- Nearly one-third of prekindergarten teachers in public schools indicate that they left community-based programs, attracted largely by higher salaries and greater benefits.
- The turnover rate for teachers is closely associated with compensation levels. In licensed programs, the two-year turnover rate for teachers is 28% while the rate for the lower-paid assistant teachers is 41%.
- Approximately 38% of lead teachers in community-based programs report working in their current positions for less than two years.

Recommendations:

- Utilize the Gateways to Opportunity career lattice and Quality Counts–QRS to function as levers to increase the wages as well as the education of practitioners in the field. Develop clear linkages between the credentials identified on the Gateways to Opportunity career lattice and Quality Counts–QRS.
- Fully fund Great START through cross-sector support in order to provide wage supplements for all income-eligible practitioners who complete credentials identified on the Gateways to Opportunity career lattice.
- Within each school district, equalize wages and benefits across sectors for lead teachers working in Preschool for All programs to reduce turnover and provide access to comparable early learning opportunities for Illinois children.

Finding #3: Leadership Matters

Director qualifications, including level of education, specialized training in early childhood education, specialized training in program administration, and experience, are directly related to program quality.

- Directors with a bachelor's degree or higher are more likely to have centers that are NAEYC-accredited.
- Directors with a bachelor's degree or higher are more likely to support the professional development of their teaching staff and help them attain college credit.
- Directors who have successfully acquired Preschool for All funds have higher levels of education and administrative experience than other directors. In fact, one-fourth of center directors receiving PFA funds hold an Illinois Director Credential.
- The qualifications of directors appear to be declining. In 2001, 72% of full-time directors reported having a bachelor's degree or higher compared to only 66% in 2008.
- Directors with higher levels of education and specialized training are near retirement age and only a few report planning for leadership succession.

Recommendations:

- Provide directors with the specialized training in early childhood program administration needed to lead high-quality programs with the capacity to participate in Preschool for All and Quality Counts-QRS.
- Provide directors who are considering retirement with training and technical assistance in succession planning.
- Identify emerging leaders in the field and provide them with leadership training and mentoring to develop the skills needed to assume administrative roles.
- Phase in over time, the IDC Level I as a minimum entry requirement for directors of licensed centers and the IDC Level II as a minimum requirement for administrators of community-based programs with Preschool for All funding.
- Require the IDC Level I for the director of a three-star center participating in Quality Counts-QRS and the IDC Level II for the director of a four-star center participating in Quality Counts-QRS.



Finding #4: Diversity Matters

Early childhood teachers are not representative of or prepared to teach the changing population of children in Illinois.



- Seventy percent of lead teachers in center-based programs and 88% of prekindergarten teachers in public schools are Caucasian. Only 57% of Illinois children five and under are Caucasian.
- Family child care providers are more diverse, better reflecting Illinois families; 40% are people of color.
- Most early childhood teachers speak only English, yet more than one-third of children in Illinois speak a home language other than English.
- Approximately 20% of Illinois households with children under age 18 have at least one immigrant parent.
- Only 1% of lead teachers and center directors are male.
- Over 50,000 children in Illinois, ages five and under, have been identified as having disabilities or developmental delays. Some of these children are enrolled in early care and education programs with teachers or providers who have little knowledge of special education services.

Recommendations:

- ▶ Expand statewide initiatives aimed at increasing the cultural and linguistic diversity and competence of those who work in early care and education settings. Identify, recruit, hire, and educate more teachers who speak Spanish and other languages prevalent among immigrants in Illinois.
- ▶ Provide incentives for teachers to increase specific skills and competence in high-need areas of the field, such as instructional strategies to support children who are English language learners.
- ▶ Encourage colleges and universities to provide the coursework necessary for a certificate in bilingual education with early childhood education.
- ▶ Promote the importance of male role models in early education in marketing and public relations materials aimed at attracting new teachers.
- ▶ Offer more professional development opportunities for practitioners who currently care for children with developmental delays or disabilities.

Finding #5: The Professional Development System Matters

Illinois has an emerging and sophisticated system of professional development and a career lattice tied to credentials and college degrees but not necessarily linked to the requirements for working in state-funded early care and education programs.

- Currently, there is no connection between the credentials identified on the Gateways to Opportunity career lattice and the differing roles, job opportunities, and levels of compensation available to early childhood practitioners.
- Despite the emergence of distance education and online learning, most early childhood education degree programs remain entrenched in traditional formats and daytime scheduling of classes, making courses inaccessible for many practitioners. Only two colleges in Illinois offer an early childhood degree program through an online format.
- Currently, the majority of lead teachers (60%) are unfamiliar with Gateways to Opportunity. While 75% of non-certified lead teachers in community-based programs are interested in attaining Type 04 early childhood certification, 40% do not know what they need to do to accomplish this goal.

Recommendations:

- ▶ Embed the Gateways to Opportunity professional development system and career lattice into state government by recognizing the ECE Credential, Illinois Director Credential, and Infant Toddler Credential in IDCFS Licensing Standards
- ▶ Require the appropriate level of the ECE Credential, Illinois Director Credential, and Infant Toddler Credential in rule making for all publicly funded early care and education programs.
- ▶ Increase marketing and outreach efforts to ensure that practitioners are aware of the career lattice and credentials identified on the Gateways to Opportunity Web site.
- ▶ Increase cross-sector support for scholarships for early childhood practitioners seeking credentials identified on the career lattice, including but not limited to, Type 04 early childhood certification.
- ▶ Provide tutoring and other supports needed by early childhood practitioners to pass the Illinois Basic Skills Test.
- ▶ Provide incentives for institutions of higher education to develop more flexible program models, using online delivery and intensive weekend formats as well as credit for prior experience.



A Call to Action

Illinois has emerged as a national leader in the design and implementation of its professional development system. It leads the nation in funding prekindergarten for 3-year-olds and has invested substantially in expanding prekindergarten to serve more 4-year-olds. In order to maintain the tremendous gains evidenced since 2001, it will require the continued engagement of multiple stakeholders and constituents. The findings and recommendations of *Who's Caring for the Kids* provide a clear path to elevate the early childhood workforce and the developmental outcomes for Illinois' young children. A united effort by practitioners, teacher educators, and policymakers can make it happen.



Who's Caring for the Kids? The Status of the Early Childhood Workforce—2008 is a joint project of the McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership at National-Louis University and the Early Childhood and Parenting Collaborative at the University of Illinois. The report combines statistical data from the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (INCCRRA), and several other state and national reports. In addition to these established data sources, three new statewide surveys were distributed in spring 2008 to gather current information regarding staffing, compensation, turnover, professional development opportunities, and the career aspirations of practitioners. The report also incorporates interview data from state and national leaders who shared their perspectives on key issues impacting the

early childhood workforce, state and national trends in professional development, and emerging roles in the field of early care and education.

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