

1 AN ACT concerning education.

2 **Be it enacted by the People of the State of Illinois,**
3 **represented in the General Assembly:**

4 Section 1. Short title. This Act may be cited as the Early
5 Childhood Access Consortium for Equity Act.

6 Section 5. Findings. The General Assembly makes all of the
7 following findings:

8 (1) This State faces a shortage of qualified early
9 childhood educators, with high vacancy rates in child care
10 centers, community-based early childhood programs, and
11 school-based classrooms across this State. Like roads and
12 bridges, early education and child care is an essential
13 part of our infrastructure that enables families to work
14 in all other industries. Beyond addressing the current
15 need, growing federal and State commitments to expanding
16 early childhood services, including the recommendations
17 put forth in the Governor's Illinois Commission on
18 Equitable Early Childhood Education and Care Funding
19 report in March 2021, suggest that this State must be
20 prepared to meet the growing demand for a qualified
21 workforce to deliver these services in the coming years.

22 (2) To meet this growing demand and support this
23 critical infrastructure, the Illinois higher education

1 system must support our incumbent early childhood
2 workforce through credential and degree attainment. The
3 workforce is overwhelmingly made up of women and women of
4 color, and many are balancing full-time employment, family
5 needs, and other responsibilities. Often, traditional
6 bachelor's degree programs are not accessible to
7 place-bound, full-time working parents.

8 (3) In this State, there is a history of partnership
9 among early childhood providers, stakeholders, and higher
10 education to identify workforce needs and strategies to
11 help promote access to higher education and degree
12 completion among the workforce. Illinois institutions of
13 higher education have taken steps to demonstrate a
14 commitment to the early childhood field, as well as
15 underserved student populations. Hybrid program models,
16 cohort program models, and scholarships and financial
17 incentives for students help to promote access to many
18 early childhood degree programs in this State.

19 (4) Over the past 2 decades, this State has attempted
20 numerous strategies to develop and support partnerships
21 among institutions of higher education that are focused on
22 this State's early childhood workforce. Through these
23 broader initiatives, as well as many individual local
24 partnerships, community colleges and public and private
25 universities have worked to implement articulation
26 agreements, credit transfer agreements, and program

1 delivery models, although not all partnerships have been
2 maintained. Such initiatives include all of the following:

3 (A) In 2004, this State developed the Associate of
4 Arts in Teaching (AAT) degree model to promote
5 articulation among 2-year and 4-year institutions of
6 higher education. However, with the challenges in
7 credit transfer contributing to the limited viability
8 and success of the degree model, the Illinois
9 Community College Board stopped approving the AAT
10 degree model and has worked across the higher
11 education system to discontinue these programs.

12 (B) In 2013, this State dedicated federal Race to
13 the Top funds to create the Early Childhood Educator
14 Preparation Program Innovation (EPPI) Grant program.
15 Among other goals, the EPPI Grant program aimed to
16 foster the creation or further development of
17 partnerships between 2-year and 4-year preparation
18 programs at institutions of higher education, promote
19 articulation and alignment of the curriculum between
20 2-year and 4-year programs, and support early
21 childhood educator preparation programs in designing a
22 curriculum to incorporate new State standards and
23 program requirements. While the EPPI Grant program led
24 to some effective partnerships that still remain
25 intact today, program evaluations found varying levels
26 of partnership and that, in many cases, successful

1 agreements were contingent upon individual
2 relationships or individual leaders within
3 institutions.

4 (C) Through the Illinois Articulation Initiative
5 (IAI), there are 3 early childhood courses approved
6 for articulation among participating institutions.
7 More than 100 Illinois colleges and universities
8 participate in the IAI, though challenges with
9 inconsistent participation and recognition do exist.

10 (D) Most recently, the creation of
11 competency-based education components for early
12 childhood education will help ensure that higher
13 education and credential programs are designed to
14 prepare early childhood educators to demonstrate the
15 same critical core competencies. The emphasis on core
16 competencies could improve educator preparedness and
17 could ease credit transfer and articulation processes
18 moving forward.

19 These programs and partnerships continue to benefit
20 many early childhood education students across this State,
21 but, overall, these efforts have not produced adequate
22 early childhood degrees to meet the demands in the field.
23 These types of initiatives are highly contingent upon
24 relationships and partnerships between specific
25 institutions and are often impacted if an institution
26 experiences turnover or program changes. Furthermore,

1 these partnerships often do not address the geographic,
2 structural, and economic barriers the incumbent workforce
3 often faces in accessing bachelor's degree programs while
4 working full-time in the field. These ongoing challenges
5 are not new and have been noted in the development of these
6 previous efforts.

7 (5) As noted in the provisions of Public Act 101-654,
8 the General Assembly recognizes the critical role of the
9 early childhood workforce and, in response to challenges,
10 including staffing shortages and barriers to higher
11 education, calls upon the Board of Higher Education to
12 better meet the needs of the early childhood workforce.

13 (6) The General Assembly encourages this State to
14 consider dedicating federal funds for pandemic relief and
15 economic recovery efforts to ensure a successful launch of
16 the Consortium and the opportunities it creates to meet
17 the needs of the early childhood incumbent workforce,
18 including student financial support. This State, the
19 incumbent workforce, and the children in care will benefit
20 as workers enroll, persist, and complete credential and
21 degree programs.

22 Section 10. Definitions. In this Act:

23 "Community college" means a public community college that
24 is included in the definition of "Community Colleges" under
25 Section 1-2 of the Public Community College Act.

1 "Consortium" means the Early Childhood Access Consortium
2 for Equity.

3 "Credit for prior learning" means the evaluation and
4 assessment of a student's life learning through employment,
5 training, and experiences outside an academic environment from
6 which skills that comprise terminal objectives are mastered to
7 an acceptable degree of proficiency for college credit,
8 certification, or advanced standing toward further education
9 or training.

10 "Home institution" means the community college or
11 university at which the student has been admitted.

12 "Incumbent workforce" means an individual or a group of
13 individuals working or having worked in the early childhood
14 industry, including family child care and center-based care
15 settings, Preschool for All school-based settings, and Head
16 Start, that serves children from birth to age 5 and includes
17 teachers, assistant teachers, directors, family child care
18 providers, and assistants.

19 "Member institutions" means the institutions of higher
20 education participating in the Consortium.

21 "Public university" means the University of Illinois,
22 Southern Illinois University, Chicago State University,
23 Eastern Illinois University, Governors State University,
24 Illinois State University, Northeastern Illinois University,
25 Northern Illinois University, Western Illinois University, or
26 any other public university or college, other than a community

1 college, now or hereafter established or authorized by the
2 General Assembly.

3 Section 15. Creation of Consortium; purpose;
4 administrative support.

5 (a) The Board of Higher Education and the Illinois
6 Community College Board shall create and establish the Early
7 Childhood Access Consortium for Equity.

8 (b) The purpose of the Consortium is to serve the needs of
9 the incumbent early childhood workforce and the employers of
10 early childhood educators and to advance racial equity while
11 meeting the needs of employers by streamlining, coordinating,
12 and improving the accessibility of degree completion pathways
13 for upskilling and the sustained expansion of educational
14 pipelines at Illinois institutions of higher education.

15 (c) The Board of Higher Education and the Illinois
16 Community College Board shall convene the member institutions
17 by July 1, 2021 or within 60 days after the effective date of
18 this amendatory Act of the 102nd General Assembly. The Board
19 of Higher Education and the Illinois Community College Board
20 shall provide administrative support for the start up and
21 operation of the Consortium until a permanent governance
22 structure is developed and implemented. The Board of Higher
23 Education and the Illinois Community College Board shall work
24 with member institutions to establish geographic regional
25 hubs, including public universities and the proximate

1 community colleges responsible for serving each regional hub.

2 Section 20. Membership; functions.

3 (a) Membership in the Consortium shall include all public
4 universities and community colleges in this State that offer
5 early childhood programs. Membership by private,
6 not-for-profit universities is optional and conditional on the
7 acceptance of the terms adopted by the public members, the
8 related administrative rules, and the provisions of this Act.
9 For-profit institutions of higher education are not eligible
10 for membership in the Consortium. Participating institutions
11 must be accredited by the Higher Learning Commission and
12 entitled to offer Gateways Credentials.

13 (b) The members of the Consortium shall operate jointly
14 and in cooperation through regional hubs to provide
15 streamlined paths for students to attain associate degrees,
16 bachelor's degrees, master's degrees, certificates, and
17 Gateways Credentials and other licensure endorsements in early
18 childhood education. The priority shall be to focus on the
19 incumbent workforce, which includes working adults who require
20 programs of study that offer flexibility in the times courses
21 are offered, location, and format. The Consortium shall
22 cooperate in all of the following:

23 (1) Providing course offerings within each regional
24 hub in online, hybrid, and in-person formats that are
25 available to any student enrolled in a member institution

1 in that hub for occasions in which a particular course is
2 not available at the student's home institution. In this
3 paragraph (1), "not available" may mean the course is not
4 offered during a term, at a time, or in a format that works
5 best for the student. Courses taken at any member
6 institution shall be accepted toward the student's degree
7 at any other member institution. Course offerings across
8 regional hubs may also be provided by an agreement between
9 Consortium members. All course registration shall take
10 place in consultation with a student's academic advisor.

11 (2) Shared responsibilities through the Consortium and
12 within and across regional hubs to expand access for
13 students.

14 (3) Transfers in accordance with Section 130-10 of the
15 Transitions in Education Act.

16 (4) The development of standardized methods for
17 awarding credit for prior learning.

18 (5) The support necessary for student access,
19 persistence, and completion shall be provided by the home
20 institution, unless otherwise provided by agreement
21 between Consortium members.

22 (6) Admissions, financial arrangements, registration,
23 and advising services shall be functions of the home
24 institution but shall be honored across the Consortium.

25 (7) Member institutions working with their regional
26 pre-kindergarten through 12th grade and early childhood

1 employer partners to determine demand throughout the
2 region.

3 (8) Data-sharing agreements.

4 (9) An agreement that students enrolled in associate
5 degree programs are encouraged to complete the associate
6 degree program prior to transferring to a bachelor's
7 degree program.

8 (10) Development of other shared agreements and terms
9 necessary to implement the Consortium and its
10 responsibilities.

11 By January 31, 2022, the Consortium shall decide how to
12 assign college credit for the incumbent workers who have a
13 Child Development Associate (CDA) credential and for future
14 workers obtaining a CDA.

15 (c) The Consortium may facilitate or implement the
16 following if deemed beneficial and feasible:

17 (1) the creation of an open education resource
18 library;

19 (2) support and training for program coaches and
20 cross-institutional navigators; and

21 (3) support for the development, implementation, and
22 participation in a statewide registry system through the
23 Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral
24 Agencies (INCCRRA) to provide tracking and data
25 capabilities for students across the system as they attain
26 competency through coursework.

1 Section 25. Advisory committee; membership.

2 (a) The Board of Higher Education, the Illinois Community
3 College Board, the State Board of Education, the Department of
4 Human Services, and the Governor's Office of Early Childhood
5 Development shall jointly convene a Consortium advisory
6 committee to provide guidance on the operation of the
7 Consortium.

8 (b) Membership on the advisory committee shall be
9 comprised of employers and experts appointed by the Board of
10 Higher Education, the Illinois Community College Board, the
11 Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development, and the
12 State Board of Education. Membership shall also include all of
13 the following members:

14 (1) An employer from a community-based child care
15 provider, appointed by the Governor's Office of Early
16 Childhood Development.

17 (2) An employer from a for-profit child care provider,
18 appointed by the Governor's Office of Early Childhood
19 Development.

20 (3) An employer from a nonprofit child care provider,
21 appointed by the Governor's Office of Early Childhood
22 Development.

23 (4) A provider of family child care, appointed by the
24 Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development.

25 (5) An employer located in southern Illinois,

1 appointed by the Governor's Office of Early Childhood
2 Development.

3 (6) An employer located in central Illinois, appointed
4 by the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development.

5 (7) At least one member who represents an urban school
6 district, appointed by the State Board of Education.

7 (8) At least one member who represents a suburban
8 school district, appointed by the State Board of
9 Education.

10 (9) At least one member who represents a rural school
11 district, appointed by the State Board of Education.

12 (10) At least one member who represents a school
13 district in a city with a population of 500,000 or more,
14 appointed by the State Board of Education.

15 (11) Two early childhood advocates with statewide
16 expertise in early childhood workforce issues, appointed
17 by the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development.

18 (12) The Chairperson or Vice-Chairperson and the
19 Minority Spokesperson or a designee of the Senate
20 Committee on Higher Education.

21 (13) The Chairperson or Vice-Chairperson and the
22 Minority Spokesperson or a designee of the House Committee
23 on Higher Education.

24 (14) One member representing the Illinois Community
25 College Board, who shall serve as co-chairperson,
26 appointed by the Illinois Community College Board.

1 (15) One member representing the Board of Higher
2 Education, who shall serve as co-chairperson, appointed by
3 the Board of Higher Education.

4 (16) One member representing the Illinois Student
5 Assistance Commission, appointed by the Board of Higher
6 Education.

7 (17) One member representing the State Board of
8 Education, who shall serve as co-chairperson, appointed by
9 the State Board of Education.

10 (18) One member representing the Governor's Office of
11 Early Childhood Development, who shall serve as
12 co-chairperson, appointed by the Governor's Office of
13 Early Childhood Development.

14 (19) One member representing the Department of Human
15 Services, who shall serve as co-chairperson, appointed by
16 the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development.

17 (20) One member representing INCCRRA, appointed by the
18 Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development.

19 (21) One member representing the Department of
20 Children and Family Services, appointed by the Governor's
21 Office of Early Childhood Development.

22 (22) One member representing an organization that
23 advocates on behalf of community college trustees,
24 appointed by the Illinois Community College Board.

25 (23) One member of a union representing child care and
26 early childhood providers, appointed by the Governor's

1 Office of Early Childhood Development.

2 (24) Two members of unions representing higher
3 education faculty, appointed by the Board of Higher
4 Education.

5 (25) A representative from the College of Education of
6 an urban public university, appointed by the Board of
7 Higher Education.

8 (26) A representative from the College of Education of
9 a suburban public university, appointed by the Board of
10 Higher Education.

11 (27) A representative from the College of Education of
12 a rural public university, appointed by the Board of
13 Higher Education.

14 (28) A representative from the College of Education of
15 a private university, appointed by the Board of Higher
16 Education.

17 (29) A representative of an urban community college,
18 appointed by the Illinois Community College Board.

19 (30) A representative of a suburban community college,
20 appointed by the Illinois Community College Board.

21 (31) A representative of rural community college,
22 appointed by the Illinois Community College Board.

23 (c) The advisory committee shall meet quarterly. The
24 committee meetings shall be open to the public in accordance
25 with the provisions of the Open Meetings Act.

1 Section 30. Reporting. The Consortium shall report to the
2 General Assembly, to the Senate and House Committees with
3 oversight over higher education, to the Governor, and to the
4 advisory committee on the progress made by the Consortium. A
5 report must include, but is not limited to, all of the
6 following information:

7 (1) Student enrollment numbers for the fall and spring
8 terms or semesters, retention rates, persistence in
9 relevant associate, baccalaureate, and credential
10 programs, including demographic data that is disaggregated
11 by race, ethnicity, and federal Pell Grant status,
12 reported twice per year. Completion numbers and rates,
13 employer type, and years worked shall be reported
14 annually.

15 (2) Tuition rates charged and net prices paid,
16 reported both as including and excluding student loans, by
17 enrolled members of the incumbent workforce, reported
18 annually.

19 (3) Outreach plans to recruit and enroll incumbent
20 workforce members, reported twice per year.

21 (4) Participation of the incumbent workforce in
22 outreach programs, which may include participation in an
23 informational session, social media engagement, or other
24 activities, reported twice per year.

25 (5) Student academic and holistic support plans to
26 help the enrolled incumbent workforce persist in their

1 education, reported annually.

2 (6) Evidence of engagement and responsiveness to the
3 needs of employer partners, reported annually.

4 (7) The Consortium budget including the use of federal
5 funds, reported annually.

6 (8) Member contributions, including financial,
7 physical, or in-kind contributions, provided to the
8 Consortium, reported annually.

9 Section 35. Goals and metrics.

10 (a) By July 1, 2021 or within 60 days after the effective
11 date of this amendatory Act of the 102nd General Assembly, the
12 Board of Higher Education's Strategic Plan Educator Workforce
13 subgroup on the early childhood workforce must set goals for
14 the Consortium for the enrollment, persistence, and completion
15 of members of the incumbent workforce in associate,
16 bachelor's, and master's degree programs, Gateways Credentials
17 in Level 2, 3, or 4, and Professional Educator Licensure by
18 September 30, 2024. The goals set for the Consortium must be
19 data informed and include targets for annual enrollment and
20 persistence.

21 (b) Data from the Gateways Registry, March 2020, indicates
22 that there are 7,670 individuals with an associate degree who
23 would benefit from progressing to a baccalaureate degree and
24 20,467 individuals with a high school diploma or some college
25 who would benefit from progressing to an associate degree. If

1 the goals cannot be set in accordance with subsection (a), the
2 goal for the Consortium shall be that by September 30, 2024,
3 20% of the individuals described in this subsection (b) who do
4 not have a degree will have enrolled and be persisting toward
5 or have attained a Gateways Credential in Level 2, 3, or 4 or
6 an associate degree and, of the individuals who have an
7 associate degree, will be enrolled and persisting toward or
8 have attained a baccalaureate degree or will be persisting
9 toward or have attained a Professional Educator License.

10 (c) Student financial aid, including incentives and
11 stipends, data-sharing, and professional statewide engagement
12 and marketing campaign and recruitment efforts are critical to
13 the Consortium's ability to quickly attract and enroll
14 students into these programs. Navigators, mentors, and
15 advisors are critical for persistence and completion. If
16 federal funds are not appropriated for these purposes and the
17 other purposes of this Section, the Board of Higher Education,
18 the Illinois Community College Board, the State Board of
19 Education, the Department of Human Services, and the
20 Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development, in
21 consultation with the advisory committee, shall adjust the
22 initial target metrics appropriately by adopting challenging
23 goals that may be attainable with less public investment.

24 (d) The Board of Higher Education, the Illinois Community
25 College Board, the State Board of Education, the Department of
26 Human Services, and the Governor's Office of Early Childhood

1 Development, in consultation with the advisory committee,
2 shall determine new metrics and goals for the Consortium as
3 they relate to the remaining and future early childhood
4 workforce, to be instituted after the close of the 2024-2025
5 academic year and going forward. Metrics must take into
6 consideration that the pipeline depends on sustained,
7 increased student enrollment and completion rates at the
8 associate degree level if this State aims to continue with
9 sustained, increased student enrollment and completion at the
10 bachelor's degree level.

11 Section 40. Affordability. The institutions participating
12 in the Consortium and the advisory committee shall work to
13 ensure that students have the most affordable options for
14 advancing through and attaining their degree or credentials.

15 Section 90. Rules. The Board of Higher Education and the
16 Illinois Community College Board may adopt any rules necessary
17 to administer and implement this Act.

18 Section 500. The Transitions in Education Act is amended
19 by adding Section 130-10 as follows:

20 (110 ILCS 180/130-10 new)

21 Sec. 130-10. Gateway Credentials; associate degree.

22 (a) A community college student who earns the Department

1 of Human Services's Gateways ECE Credential Level 4 as part of
2 an Associate of Applied Science (AAS) degree in early
3 childhood education that is consistent with the degree
4 requirements established by the Illinois Community College
5 Board and the Board of Higher Education, as appropriate, is
6 deemed eligible for transfer into an early childhood education
7 baccalaureate program at a public university if the student
8 meets all of the requirements of the AAS degree program, is
9 transferring from a program entitled to offer the Gateways ECE
10 Credential Level 4, and earns a minimum grade point average of
11 a 2.0 on a 4.0 scale.

12 (b) Recognizing that the AAS degree and other associate
13 degrees provide important pathways into the early childhood
14 education profession and notwithstanding any other provision
15 of law to the contrary, a public university shall grant junior
16 level status in an early childhood education program to any
17 community college student who has graduated from an Illinois
18 community college with an Associate of Applied Science degree
19 in early childhood education. A public university may not
20 require students transferring pursuant to this Section to
21 repeat courses taken and completed successfully at the
22 community college and applied toward the associate degree
23 granted pursuant to subsection (a) of this Section. All
24 courses completed successfully in the AAS degree program must
25 count toward baccalaureate degree completion. Students
26 entering with an AAS may not be required to take a total number

1 of credits greater than those students first starting in a
2 baccalaureate degree program. This includes any courses in
3 which credit for prior learning was used to determine course
4 equivalency and credit was awarded by the evaluating
5 institution. Additional coursework may be required if a
6 student is seeking to add one or more endorsements to the
7 student's Illinois Professional Educator License.

8 Section 999. Effective date. This Act takes effect upon
9 becoming law.