



Minutes

Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity Meeting

October 27, 2023

Submitted for: Action

Summary: Minutes of the October 27, 2023, Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity held at Northern Illinois University, Altgeld Hall.

Action Requested: ECACE approve the minutes of the October 27, 2023, Consortium meeting.

EARLY CHILDHOOD ACCESS CONSORTIUM FOR EQUITY

Consortium Meeting

Agenda

October 27, 2023

10:00 am

Northern Illinois University

A meeting of the Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity was called to order at 10:00am at Northern Illinois University, Altgeld Hall on October 27, 2023.

The following institutions and their representatives were present:

Institution	Voting Member	Institution	Voting Member
Black Hawk College	Amy Maxeiner	Malcom X College	Absent
Blackburn College	Cindy Rice	McHenry County College	Dawn Katz
Chicago State University	Lavada Taylor	Moraine Valley Community College	Pam Haney
College of DuPage	Jean Zaar	Morton College	Michael Rose
College of Lake County	Diane Schael	National Louis University	Lisa Downey
Danville Area Community College	Penny McConnell	Northeastern Illinois University	Tom Phillion
DePaul University	Marie Donovan	Northern Illinois University	Laurie Elish-Piper
Eastern Illinois University	Laretta Henderson	Oakton Community College	Anca Dobocan (delegate)
Elgin Community College	Peggy Heinrich	Olive Harvey College	Mario Wright (delegate)
Governors State University	Shannon Dermer	Olivet Nazarene University	Lance Kilpatrick
Greenville University	Laura Schaub	Parkland College	Amy Kilgus Chamley (delegate)

Harold Washington College	Theresa Carlton	Prairie State College	Absent
Harper College	Kathleen Nikolai	Rend Lake College	Kim Wilkerson
Heartland College	Johnna Darragh-Ernst	Richard Daley College	Patricia Aumann
Highland Community College	Rachel Stewart (delegate)	Richland College	Jessica Pickel
Illinois Central College	Allison Schweickert (delegate)	Rock Valley College	Amanda Smith
Illinois Eastern Community College	Robert Conn	Rockford University	Kimberlee Wagner
Illinois State University	Linda Ruhe Marsh	Roosevelt University	Jin-ah Kim
Illinois Valley Community College	Tammy Landgraf	Sauk Valley Community College	Jon Mandrell
John A. Logan College	Melanie Pecord	South Suburban College	Anna Helwig
John Wood Community College	April Darringer	Southern Illinois University Carbondale	Julie Tate (delegate)
Joliet Junior College	Melissa Szymczak	Southern Illinois University Edwardsville	Natasha Flowers
Judson University	Absent	Southwestern Illinois College	Carolyn Beal
Kankakee Community College	Paul Carlson	St. Augustine College	Shekeita Webb
Kaskaskia College	Traci Masau	Triton College	Susan Campos
Kennedy King College	Patricia Armstrong	Truman College	Kate Connor
Kishwaukee College	Judson Curry	University of Illinois Chicago	Jennifer Olson
Lake Land College	Tanille Ulm	University of Illinois Urbana Champaign	Anne Pradzinski

Lewis & Clark Community College	Randy Gallaher	Waubonsee Community College	Sharon Garcia
Lewis University	Rebecca Pruitt	Western Illinois University	Lindsay Meeker
Lincoln Land Community College	Kalith Smith		

Conveners: Others present include the following from the convening agencies:

Illinois Board of Higher Education: Ginger Ostro, Jennifer Hernandez, Marsha Hawley, Vicki Phillips, Toni Potenza, Shuvam Das

Illinois Community College Board: Marcus Brown, Adrienne Pickett, Amanda Lemanski, Nyssa Westermeyer

I. Welcome, Housekeeping, and Opening Remarks
<p>The Consortium meeting opened at 10:00 AM with welcoming remarks by Ginger Ostro. She thanked all the institutional representatives and guests for attending, and Northern Illinois University for hosting the meeting. Ostro introduced Dr. Laurie Elish-Piper, Interim Executive Vice President and Provost at NIU. Elish-Piper welcomed the Consortium members to NIU and shared video clips of four NIU ECACE scholarship recipients who described the impact of the scholarship and ECACE programs on their educational experience.</p> <p>Following Elish-Piper’s comments, Consortium members were asked to share what they were excited about learning at today’s meeting. Members described the inspiration and good ideas they got from each other, and also indicated that they hoped to learn more about the sustainability of the ECACE work.</p>
II. Minutes: Review and Approve
<p>The minutes of the April 24, 2023 meeting were unanimously approved without corrections. Marie Donovan moved to approve, and Jin-ah Kim seconded.</p>
III. Opening Remarks Cont’d.
<p>Marcus Brown said that the Consortium had created a body that provides equal voices and shared leadership to its two- and four-year institutional members. He acknowledged that challenges still exist. He reviewed the Consortium guiding principles, describing them as the foundation for decisions, processes, policies and how we operate collectively.</p> <p>Brown summarized the highlights of the ECACE work to date. He noted the good work done by individual institutions and described them as bright spots of innovation in curriculum and programming</p>

for adult working students, that kept student success at the center and provided support to students when, where and how they needed it. He gave examples of changes in the modality of course delivery that are responsive to the needs of the working adult student population, of program redesign to create smoother transfer pathways and to award credit for prior learning, and of efforts to build learning communities. He discussed the different and complementary roles of the Navigator and Mentor; the Navigator as important to opening the door to higher education and the Mentor as providing support for student success and “guiding on the side.” He also discussed the relationships that underlay the Consortium: the cross-section of state agencies working together; the 61 two- and four-year institutions that comprise the Consortium; and the early childhood workforce, childcare and preschool programs, families and young children that were impacted by ECACE.

Institutional representatives and guests were asked to discuss the following three questions at their tables or break-out rooms:

1. How have the collective ECACE components impacted students and institutions?
2. What is the benefit of having leadership meet across institutions in a Consortium?
3. Internally and externally, what new partnerships or relationships have you developed or strengthened due to ECACE?

One college shared their work linking to early childhood centers and their workers, crediting the navigators for creating the relationship and encouraging faculty to build on that relationship. The result was workers/students who had achieved Gateways ECE Level 2 by the end of the summer. Another college described their work with parent volunteers who had completed GED classes and were now, with the support of parent program mentors, on a pathway to earning an ECE degree.

IV. Four-Year Program Design Community of Practice and Future Communities of Practice

Toni Potenza described the work of the Program Redesign Community of Practice that was initiated by the faculty of the four-year programs in the Consortium. She said that all the four-year programs were transferring the complete AAS degree and enrolling working students, and to that end had redesigned their programs. However, many programs recognized that they could be doing more to make students’ learning pathways more individualized. At faculty request, a community of practice focused on strategies for program redesign was launched in May.

A retreat in June was followed by interest group sessions in four areas: competency-based education, credit for prior learning, course modularization and variable credits, offered in July and August. The interest groups were facilitated by faculty and met on a biweekly basis via Zoom. Guest speakers also spoke with the Community of Practice – Emily Fox from ISBE spoke to the group on ISBE’s policies and processes with redesigned/alternative programming and Ryan Specht-Boardman, a consultant with the Competency-Based Network, discussed faculty roles in redesigned programs. Potenza reviewed the results of a survey on redesign processes and progress, completed by the four-year programs. The survey indicated that almost all programs were incorporating credit for prior learning, and many were modularizing courses.

Potenza introduced two faculty members who had been actively engaged in the Community of Practice and were now incorporating some of the strategies in redesigning their programs. Dr. Lindsay Maldonado is an assistant professor and ECACE principal investigator at Northeastern Illinois University and Dr. Katy Hisrich is an associate professor and Early Childhood Program Chair at Governors State University. They discussed their redesign work in a panel facilitated by Marsha Hawley.

Katy Hisrich opened the discussion in response to Marsha Hawley’s question, “What are you hoping the program changes will make at your university?” Hisrich noted that changes have occurred in response to the needs of students, based on information gathered from student surveys and information received

from students. Some of those changes included going from hybrid to online courses, and now modularizing courses and offering them for variable credit to be able to more fully award credit for prior learning. Hisrich described the process as not just a redesign, but actual rewiring of the program. She said it was a lot of work and time but worth it.

Lindsay Maldonado noted that students say they want flexibility and hybrid opportunities in their education, meaning asynchronous/remote plus in person meetings. She said that they were also working on course modularization and were using the Gateways competencies to help inform the courses needed by students. Maldonado described her “aha!” moment as recognizing the various and innovative ways to teach and reach students instead of always doing what has always been done with in person classes in the evenings.

Both Hisrich and Maldonado said that the biggest barrier was time to address all that can be done to improve the program at all levels. They agreed that the grant and the Community of Practice has been very helpful because it has supported consultation from other viewpoints.

There were questions from audience members:

1. How did you negotiate with your administration in doing all this work? Any tips for working within the university?

Hisrich credited her supportive dean and that her dean is excited and sees the benefits of redesigning the program. Maldonado advised to just ask for what you think is needed for the students—to make it about students, be patient and wait for things to happen.

2. How has ISBE been involved in your work?

Both Maldonado and Hisrich indicated that ISBE hadn't been involved at this point. Potenza noted that ISBE has been involved in the conversation since the beginning and there is a sense of support from them.

3. Do you foresee these changes will continue beyond the ECACE funding? and how?

Both Hisrich and Maldonado indicated that was a concern. Maldonado added that there was a commitment to change by the university that could support the work going forward.

Following the panel discussion, Jennifer Hernandez introduced the next break-out discussions on the Communities of Practice that would be needed in the future. She asked the Consortium to address the following questions:

1. Topic: What topics are priority for a community of practice to tackle?
2. Participants: Who needs to be at the table for those communities of practice?
3. Resources and Support: What kind of information or resources are needed to make this community of practice successful?
 - a. What do you need from state agencies?
 - b. What can you provide to each other?
4. Frequency: How frequently would this community of practice meet?
5. Lead/Support/Participate: Would you volunteer to lead or participate in this community?

Institutional representatives discussed the questions at tables; guests went to break-out rooms.

In the share-out, the following potential themes for a community of practice were identified:

- Training for observations and sharing personnel between institutions to do the observations to reduce travel time. Adding training of observers and calibration of the observations.
- Sustainability of the ECACE work post funding was a big concern for everyone.
- Time is the other concern for everyone.
- Progress towards Consortium and Smart Start goals.

V. ECACE Updates

Marsha Hawley described the objectives of the communication plan being developed with Flowers Communication Group. The communications plan is focused on making the public and stakeholders aware of ECACE's successes and to encourage financial and other support of ECACE's work. Hawley also described the Consortium Knowledge Base, which is both a repository for information about ECACE and a site for Consortium members to communicate with each other.

Marcus Brown closed the morning session by introducing and thanking the staff from IBHE and ICCB who put the agenda together. He also thanked the UIS team who managed the logistics of the meeting. Brown explained that Christi Chadwick was unable to attend. He introduced Adrienne Pickett who is the new Senior Director for Early Childhood Education and Teacher Education Pathways at ICCB.

Brown reminded attendees of the place for public comment. He also announced that there would be a tour of the NIU Child Development Center later in the day.

VI. Lunch and Elevating the Work of Mentors

Lunch offered information and networking opportunities for attendees. Following lunch attendees were invited to select smaller groups for table discussions on the role of ECACE mentors/coaches. Resources were provided for each group with questions to consider about the topic and the opportunity to provide feedback to IBHE and ICCB.

VII. Smart Start Illinois, Program Enrollment Data, and the EC Workforce Pipeline

The afternoon session opened with discussions of Smart Start Illinois and its implications for the early childhood workforce pipeline and ECACE institutions' enrollment. Marcus Brown noted that each institution has ambitious but attainable goals to build the population of teachers. Smart Start is an initiative from the Governor's Office with the goal of making Illinois one of the best places to raise children. It is focused on expanding childcare availability, particularly in childcare deserts where there are insufficient numbers of publicly funded slots to serve 80% of the eligible 3- and 4-year-olds.

Carisa Davis from ISBE provided a video update on Smart Start implementation. She said that the goal is to expand access by funding 5000 additional Preschool for All seats and 700 Preschool for All expansion seats and add 500 Home Visiting slots. They are prioritizing programs in childcare deserts. They are working with Birth to 5 Councils to provide support, and let programs know about available funds. She gave an overview of FY 24 applications to date.

Davis pointed out the need for staffing for Preschool For All and other sites. She indicated that there would be a need for an additional 250 lead teachers and 250 paraprofessionals to staff these classrooms. There would also be a need for teachers for prevention initiative classrooms and home

visiting. She noted that the Gateways Level 5 eligibility for lead teacher had been extended for another 5 years.

Brown posed the question: How can the Consortium meet the workforce needs to support ISBE staffing goals, especially in preschool deserts. He reiterated that the plan is to increase PFA slots by 5000 each year; there would be a need for 250 teachers and 250 paraprofessionals each year for the next 5 years. He showed data on enrollment trends for the two- and four-year programs from Fall 2019 to Fall 2022. Overall enrollment is up 22% in that time period. About half of the population is the incumbent workforce and has increased term to term. There was a drop in community college enrollments due to the pandemic, but that has rebounded. The four-year programs also show an increase, but not as sharp.

Demographic data on enrollments in that time period show that White enrollments increased 16%, Latino enrollments, 30.1%, African American enrollments, 31.7% and other, 11.5%.

Scholarship awards in AY 22-23 totaled close to \$30,000,000 to over 2100 students. In AY 23-24, scholarship applications are already up 17% over last year; there have been 4600 applications, 3800 prequalified and \$20,000,000 paid to date. The demographics of scholarship awardees was also presented, by race, age, family income, gender. 76% of the students are MAP eligible.

There were questions and comments from the institutional representatives. They asked for updates on funding for ECACE in the future. Brown explained that the state was still working on that and there were no specifics on what might be available.

Attendees next participated in table and breakout room discussions focused on how Consortium members can address preschool deserts, and by extension, higher education deserts if there were no Consortium institutions to prepare teaching personnel in the area.

They were asked to consider how the data presented matched their programs, and the implications for meeting Smart Start goals. Finally, they were asked to consider what needed to happen this year and what support would be needed in the future to meet Smart Start goals.

In the share-out that followed, a number of recommendations and ideas were submitted:

- There is a need to not just credential teachers but encouraging programs to be started (small businesses).
 - There could be programs that combine early childhood knowledge with business skills.
 - Partnerships between higher education and CCR&Rs to start home childcare and other childcare centers.
- Higher education would need to foster students' commitment to going to work in preschool deserts, helping students to see the benefits of working in one of those communities.
- Gaps in support services that are important to students might be addressed by engaging community partners who can help with funding students.
- Having scholarships and mentors has contributed to enrollment, persistence and completion.

VIII. Two-Year Institution Highlight

Amy Chamley, Professor of Early Childhood at Parkland College, described how the AAS program at Parkland was reestablished and has grown in enrollment since the start of ECACE. She said that in 2019 Parkland decided to end the AAS program. There were fewer than 10 students in any class and the only full-time faculty member had retired.

With ECACE, the program was reestablished in Summer 2022. It now enrolls 106 students, 95 in the AAS program. There is a full-time faculty member and several adjuncts staffing it.

Chamley discussed many program innovations that were the result of ECACE funding. She described the relationships that navigators have with 90 childcare centers, and their attendance at local high school open houses.

She described program changes, including:

- Courses are delivered in the evening, hybrid, online and flex, in 13-week schedules. They meet one night a week. Classes are recorded for remote students.
- The math requirement has been dropped and math has been embedded in the Early Childhood classes. They have arranged with their four-year partners to have math offered at the 4-year institutions.
- They have purchased textbooks and laptops for the students to borrow.

Chamley said that support for ESL students, increased engagement with high schools and messaging about the importance of the ECE professions are all planned for the future. She emphasized the importance of her partnership with ECACE navigators.

IX. Institution Successes, Innovations, and Work

Brown invited the attendees to turn and talk at their tables about what successes or innovations have been happening at their institutions. The following innovations/successes were shared:

- The College of DuPage reported that ten apprentices have been placed in a Head Start program with a mentor. There are stipends for the mentors and apprentices. The apprentices are earning certificates.
- Heartland Community College reported that it is now a totally competency-based program
- Kaskaskia College described a short certificate program in Early Childhood small business that prepares students to run a licensed childcare home.
- Chicago State University reported that its enrollment had increased by 500%: 24 students to 120 students.

It was noted that these stories should be shared with legislators and others.

X. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

XI. Next Steps and Adjourn

Adrienne Pickett was asked to give some final words before adjourning. She summarized the high point of the day as being in a room filled with people in higher education that are committed to equity, to adult student learners, children and that want to partner across the state and with other institutions. The meeting adjourned.