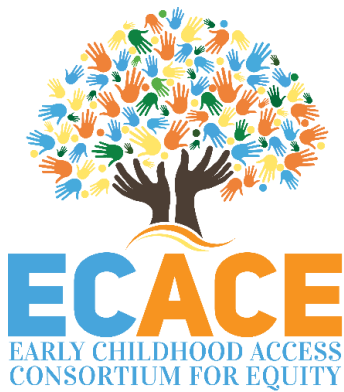August 2023

EARLY CHILDHOOD ACCESS
CONSORTIUM FOR EQUITY
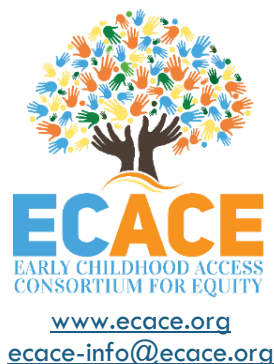FIRST ANNUAL REPORT

Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity

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The Illinois Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity (ECACE or the Consortium) Initiative is a groundbreaking effort by 61 public and private higher education institutions, six state agencies, and other stakeholders to meet the state's workforce needs in early childhood education and care (ECEC) settings through opportunities to complete higher education credentials. The rationale for the ECACE is based on evidence about the importance of well-prepared ECEC professionals in providing high-quality programs for young children and their families; higher education pathways to upskill and retain the incumbent ECEC workforce; and a focus on providing working adults and others historically marginalized supported access to higher education degree and credential programs.

The ECACE is a key strategy in the state's higher education strategic plan, "A Thriving Illinois," and codified in legislation as the ECACE Act. This report highlights work to launch the ECACE and provide services to members of the ECEC workforce to begin or continue higher education degree programs in the period from July 2021 through December 2022. Key areas of work include:

- Long-term "infrastructure" components, such as organization and procedures for the multi-institution Consortium and the cross-sector ECACE Advisory Committee.
- Programs and offerings to support equitable access to higher education, through seamless pathways, flexible formats and modalities, recognition of prior learning, and cross-institutional access to coursework at community colleges; and
- Student support services, including financial assistance (e.g., scholarships and debt relief); mentors and navigators for ECEC professionals, providing guidance and support to and within institutions; and academic and other wraparound supports to ensure persistence and completion.

FUNDING AND BUDGET FOR THE ECACE CONSORTIUM

At the time of the signing of the ECACE Act, Governor Pritzker announced funding to create the Consortium, to support higher education to create seamless pathways designed to serve working adults, and to provide for the upskilling of the ECEC incumbent workforce over three years (academic year 2022–24). The Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) allocated a little over $200 million in federal child care funding to support this initiative. Most of the funding, over $197 million, is distributed to the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE), Illinois Community College Board (ICCB), and Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC) to administer the ECACE.

Table 1: ECACE Initiative Funding and Purpose by Agency

Agency	Amount Budgeted	Purpose
IBHE	$39,599,971	- Convene and support the Consortium and Advisory Committee - "Backbone" the initiative - Provide grants and support to higher education institutions and navigators
ICCB	$37,998,524	- Convene and support the Consortium and Advisory Committee - "Backbone" the initiative - Provide grants and support to higher education institutions and navigators
ISAC	$120,000,000	- Administer the ECACE Scholarship
IDHS	$5,983,266	- Hire and support regional navigators
Total	**$203,581,761**	

ICCB and IBHE provide grant funding, including both a base amount and per-student funding, to all Consortium institutions to address the intention and requirements of the ECACE Act. In addition, IBHE provides Early Childhood Faculty Preparation grants to four universities to prepare diverse students at the graduate level to become faculty for early childhood higher education programs. In addition, over $740,000 in member contributions were reported for July–December of 2022. Reports of significant contributions were not anticipated, considering the amount of funding noted above and the time the information was requested. Institutions provided a significant amount of in-kind support during academic year (AY) 2022, including planning and attending meetings, as contracts were not executed until nearly the end of the State's fiscal year.

ECACE INFRASTRUCTURE

The ECACE Act created two bodies that, with the support of state agencies, provide the infrastructure for the ECACE Initiative, the Consortium, and the ECACE Advisory Committee.

Consortium

Convened by IBHE and ICCB, the Consortium is a collective of 61 institutions, including 40 community colleges, 11 public universities, and 10 private, nonprofit four-year institutions.[1] The idea behind the Consortium is that, together, institutions can collaboratively improve access, persistence, and completion of degrees and credentials of the ECEC workforce. The purpose of the Consortium is to "serve the needs of the incumbent early childhood workforce and the employers of early childhood educators and to advance racial equity while meeting the needs of employers by streamlining, coordinating, and improving the accessibility of degree completion pathways for upskilling and the sustained expansion of educational pipelines at Illinois institutions of higher education."

From it's launch in September 2021 through December 31, 2022, Consortium members focused on 1) developing the structure and foundation for Consortium work and collaboration; and 2) addressing time-sensitive issues related to legislation, time-limited funding, and the broader ECACE Initiative. From January through April 2022, the Guiding Principles Working Group of the Consortium outlined the fundamental ideas around which collective institutions' decisions, policies, and procedures would all be made. In April 2022, the Consortium adopted the Guiding Principles with an emphasis on centering student success.

Advisory Committee

The second body created through the Act is the ECACE Advisory Committee (Advisory Committee or Committee), designed to foster statewide dialogue and ensure that the Consortium understands employer perspectives. The Advisory Committee's unique membership brings together cross-sector stakeholders, including early childhood education and care providers, state agencies, and higher education institutions to advocate for and address issues facing the field. Five state agencies – IBHE, ICCB, ISBE, IDHS, and GOECD – jointly convene and co-chair the committee.

In fall 2021, the Steering Committee and a working group cross-agency staff met biweekly to ensure diverse committee membership and to develop the charge, functions, and principles from which the Advisory Committee would operate. Beginning in March 2022, the Advisory Committee held quarterly meetings dedicated to establishing a baseline of broad knowledge for stakeholders across sectors, ensuring that members were aware of the Consortium's early progress and goals, gathering feedback on key work of the Consortium, providing guidance on emerging barriers and opportunities, and developing strategies for "spreading the word" about ECACE.

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[1] All public universities and community colleges with Gateways Entitled early childhood programs are members by statute. Private, nonprofit institutions with early childhood programs are encouraged to become members.

In the Initiative's first year, ECACE institutions completed significant work to develop or adjust programs to increase access to coursework for workforce members by ensuring the availability of courses when, where, and how students need them. All Consortium institutions offer at least some online courses as part of their program modalities, and many report that a blend of online asynchronous and synchronous programs have proven to be popular. In addition to variations in course modality, some colleges and universities have modified the length of their courses to allow for students to focus on content in small chunks with increased intensity.

To increase access to community college courses, every community college was required to submit a plan for developing, expanding, or enhancing the ILCCO ([Illinois Community Colleges Online](#)) platform on their campus. First piloted in 2001, ILCCO is a statewide system allowing community college students to access online courses at other institutions when courses are unavailable online at their home institution. As of April 2023, 79 ECACE program courses were listed, up from 50 as of July 1, 2022.

AAS Transfer

In addition to increasing access to courses, four-year Consortium colleges and universities have redesigned their programs to ensure seamless transfer of students with an Associate of Applied Science (AAS) Degree and to recognize students' prior learning and competencies. The ECACE Act creates a pathway for individuals with a historically terminal degree to seamlessly advance to a baccalaureate degree program. Consortium universities are required to transfer the AAS degree in its entirety without course loss, and transferring students are admitted as juniors and cannot be required to take more credits than a student who began at the institution as a freshman. This legislation is an innovative approach to guaranteeing credit mobility for AAS transfer students.

Consortium institutions are working to overcome systemic barriers to transferring the AAS degree. Early childhood major coursework transferred to Consortium four-year institutions is equated to coursework in the bachelor's degree program or is accepted as electives. All programs leading to the PEL have accepted coursework focused on child development, child and family relations, and some pre-kindergarten methods as equivalent to their own. A few institutions have revised their curriculum to focus on the Gateways Level 5 competencies, with the assumption that the AAS transfer students would be entering with the Gateways ECE Levels 2–4 completed. These kinds of program innovations are essential to creating the infrastructure for serving incumbent worker transfer students in the future.

Higher Education Credit for the Child Development Associate (CDA)

In June 2022, less than a year after the establishment of ECACE, the Consortium unanimously adopted a framework for institutions to provide at least six hours of higher education credit without contingencies to those who have an active "Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential".[2] Other framework components include best practice models and recommendations for ICCB and ISBE to ensure clear pathways and processes for awarding credit. By adopting this framework, the Consortium created a formal process for recognizing and honoring the knowledge, skills, and abilities that working adults may have when entering higher education. Prior to this decision, very few institutions provided college credit for the CDA, particularly without doing further assessment of the candidate. At the time of the report, all Consortium institutions have a process in place to award credit for the CDA, with credit ranging between 7 and 11 hours. Additionally, the ICCB amended administrative rules (effective February 2023) to ensure credit for prior learning can be awarded at the time of application or admission. ISBE also provided guidance to institutions about processes to make program changes and how to support students on [individualized pathways](#), such as those with credit for prior learning and on areas of [licensure flexibility](#).

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[2] The Act tasked the Consortium to "*decide how to assign college credit for the incumbent workers who have a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential and for future workers obtaining a CDA*". The CDA is a national credential that recognizes foundational competencies acquired through work experience and training and demonstrated through an assessment, observation, and portfolio.

Historically, the ECEC incumbent workforce has faced economic, geographical, or structural barriers to accessing, persisting toward, and completing degrees and credentials. ECACE provides financial and academic supports to ensure students are successful.

ECACE Scholarship Program

In partnership with IBHE and ICCB, ISAC launched the ECACE Scholarship Program in late November 2021. The ECACE Scholarship addresses the often prohibitive cost of attending higher education, which spans beyond tuition and fees and includes expenses such as books and supplies, housing, transportation, and more. During AY22 and AY23, the ECACE Scholarship covered up to the full cost of attendance (COA) after other scholarships and grants were applied for members of the incumbent ECEC workforce seeking an early childhood undergraduate degree or credential at Consortium institutions.[3] The first year of the scholarship is considered a "soft launch," as the application opened in November 2021, and ISAC began awarding (retroactive) scholarships in March 2022. Due to timing, in fall 2021 and spring 2022, primarily students then currently enrolled were able to take advantage of the scholarship.

First-Year Scholarship Outcomes (AY 2022)

For AY 2022 (fall 2021–summer 2022), the program's first year, over $5.7 million in ECACE Scholarship funds were distributed to over 400 members of the incumbent workforce, 92% of whom were women. During this soft launch year, 40% of scholarship recipients were attending private, nonprofit institutions, 31% attending community colleges, and 29% attending public universities.

Over 46% of AY 2022 scholarship recipients are persons of color. Of all scholarship recipients, 22% identified as Black or African American, 18% Hispanic/Latino/Latina, 2% Asian, and 4% more than one race/ethnicity. Forty-three percent of AY 2022 scholarship recipients were White. Figures 1 and 2 provide a comparison to workforce members in licensed child care centers in calendar year 2020. Recipient data looks relatively similar, with lower rates by white workforce members.

Figure 1: Race and Ethnicity of ECACE Scholarship Recipients in AY 2022
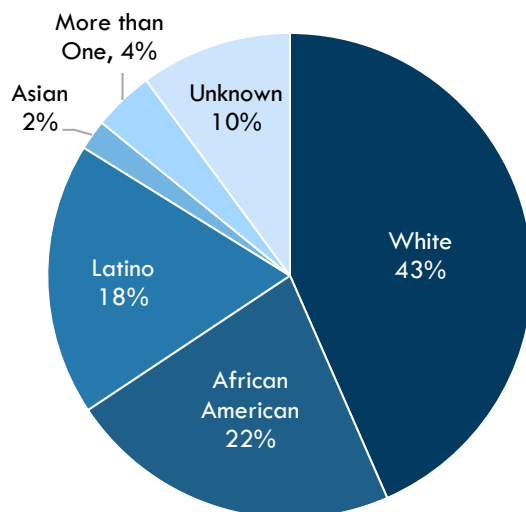
Source: ISAC, 2022

Figure 2: Race and Ethnicity of Licensed ECEC Center Staff, 2020
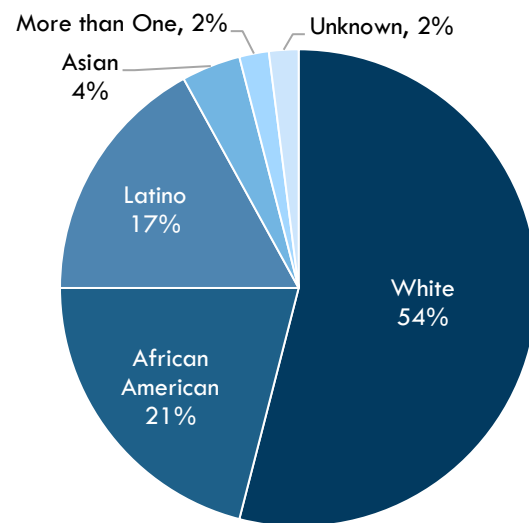
Source: Whitehead, J. (2021). Illinois' Early Childhood Workforce 2020 Report. Bloomington, IL: INCCRRA.

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[3] Students at participating private, not-for-profit institutions may receive a scholarship amount no more than the cost of the most expensive early childhood education program at an Illinois public university.

Seventy-five percent of scholarship students have an expected family contribution (EFC) of under $10,000, indicating that the scholarship is reaching students with the greatest financial need. ECACE Scholarship recipients are older than traditional college students, with approximately 45% of ECACE Scholarship students older than 30.[4]

Second Year Scholarship Data: AY 2022-2023, through end of December 2022

As of December 31, 2022, there were already more applications and scholarships than in all of AY 2022. At that time, there were 1,026 scholarship recipients, an increase of 149% over the first year of the program. A total of $7,068,593 was awarded, about $1.3 million more than AY 2022. To expand the scope of the scholarship and reach more students, eligibility will be expanded in AY 2024. Additional information will be provided in upcoming reports.

Debt Relief

During the higher education strategic planning process which led to the ECACE, institutions and advocates recommended providing funding to students with outstanding debt to eliminate barriers to accessing higher education. All Consortium institutions were provided with grant funding to address debt for prospective students. Between July 1, 2022, and December 31, 2022 – the first term in which institutions had funding – 13 institutions reported providing debt relief to 87 students. State agencies and institutions have been working to determine why, in the first term, more students did not take advantage of these funds and potential ways to address any barriers.

ACADEMIC AND HOLISTIC SUPPORTS

Consortium institutions provide academic and holistic supports, or wraparound services, to ensure that workforce members can acquire needed skills to persist and complete credentials and degrees. This includes at least one person serving as a mentor at each Consortium institution.[5] As of December 31, 2022, there were 105 individuals serving as mentors or in related positions at Consortium institutions. A mentor provides intentional contact with students to ensure that they stay on track and receive timely, consistent support from enrollment to graduation. When reflecting on what meaningful changes ECACE has made at their institution, one representative of an institution noted that mentors have been "the biggest bright spot."

Institutions are providing a variety of other academic and holistic supports, often organized and supported by mentors. To ensure that students succeed in their coursework, institutions provide materials such as laptops, wi-fi hot spots, books, and academic tutoring. Some institutions provide test preparation and funding to support students to pass the Early Childhood Content Test, required for an Illinois Professional Educator License (PEL) and Early Childhood Education Endorsement. Schools with entirely online courses often supplement their programs with professional development activities and synchronous online opportunities for tutoring, discussion groups, and professional development sessions. These events help students stay engaged while in a virtual environment. Many others offer opportunities to help workforce members build "soft skills" needed to be successful in higher education, including studying, time management, mental health awareness, motivation, and financial literacy.

HIGHER EDUCATION NAVIGATORS

ECACE Higher Education Navigators occupy an important community-facing role designed to recruit and connect incumbent ECEC workforce members to Consortium institutions. More than 30 navigators are employed within regionally based Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (CCR&Rs) across the state. Like many areas of the ECACE initiative, a cross-agency working group developed and continues to guide the navigators' work.

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[4] Fifteen percent of undergraduate students were over 25 years of age, and 5% were over 35 years of age. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Spring 2020, Fall Enrollment component. See Digest of Education Statistics 2021, table 303.50. Fall 2019 data. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/csb/postsecondary-students

[5] For the purposes of this report, we are using the term mentors. However, some institutions refer to those in these support roles as coaches, success coaches, or other titles.

In fall 2021, the Navigator Working Group planned for this new position; from January to March most navigators were hired; and from March to December 2022, navigators were provided over 20 hours of professional development.

Navigators' responsibilities include 1) engaging in outreach to workforce members and others and 2) providing personalized technical assistance. Navigators engage with and are responsive to the needs of employers; one example is through hosting frequent information sessions at child care centers at convenient times, such as when employers could find classroom coverage or during scheduled staff meetings.

From June through December 2022, navigators received and responded to over 2,000 (2,058) interest forms completed by workforce members and nearly 50,000 (49,732) emails. During this time, they also hosted 732 information sessions, including on-site presentations to staff at child care centers, virtual webinars, tables and booths at college and career fairs, presentations at local advisory committees, and more across the state.[6] Navigators also held 497 meetings with higher education institutions to develop relationships and gather informational and promotional materials for the ECEC workforce. Personalized technical assistance to workforce members was provided through 1,643 virtual (745) and in-person (898) meetings. Technical assistance included support for things like applying to an institution, completing the FAFSA and ECACE Scholarship applications, and connecting with institutional resources, including mentors. One institution reported that the use of navigators to reach out to the incumbent workforce has made a big impact in supporting individuals in moving forward in their education.

Not unexpected in a 'start up' initiative, it took time for navigators — all in newly created positions — to become proficient in their role. The role of the navigator is quite complex, requiring knowledge and skills ranging from completing the FAFSA to understanding the culture and context of child care providers and workforce members. In the early work of the Consortium, some navigators struggled to balance meeting the demands of engaging the ECEC workforce and building relationships with higher education institutions. Though part of the navigator's role is pairing the workforce with higher education, their role is not to recruit for any particular institution, which has caused some tension in the Consortium. Training and monthly professional learning groups have focused on multiple strategies to build relationships with individual institutions to highlight the unique opportunity and supports that each offers students.

OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT BY INSTITUTIONS

Between July and December 2022, ECACE institutions reported just under 500 events to recruit students and connections with over 1,000 employers.[7] These outreach efforts included social media and email campaigns, direct mail marketing, recruitment fairs, and other creative efforts. Most institutions hosted open houses and in-person and virtual sessions with area child care centers and community organizations. Institutions also presented and hosted resource tables at early childhood conferences like the Illinois Association for the Education of Young Children (ILAEYC) and the Region V Head Start Conference to recruit and share information. Collectively, the public Consortium member universities held a virtual early childhood fair. Additional efforts by institutions include meeting with local directors and school superintendents, attending local early childhood collaboration meetings, and participating in interviews with local media to market the ECACE Scholarship and institutional programs.

More than 7,800 participants joined Consortium outreach events in the first two quarters of AY 2022. Incumbent worker participation has been strong at college open houses and fairs and seems to increase when there are opportunities for support in completing the FAFSA and ECACE Scholarship applications.

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[6] Navigators began providing monthly reports to IDHS in AY23. Social media outreach, while not captured for this report, was another outreach strategy used by navigators.
[7] Data was not collected prior to July 2022 and was not collected for all institutions.

Engaging and Being Responsive to Employers

Institutions have worked to form relations and partnerships with employers this year. Visiting community-based programs has proven to be a successful way for Consortium institutions to build relationships with not only potential students but the broader early childhood program as well. Additionally, connections with employers have created opportunities to have participants complete student teaching at their place of work. As of December 31, 2022, 67% of four-year institutions reported they allow students to complete some or all the student teaching requirements this way. Many institutions have advisory boards on which employers sit to provide guidance on program implementation.[8] Some institutions have assisted employers in filling their open positions, which benefits both employers and students who need work experience to qualify for the ECACE Scholarship.

Enrollment, Retention, and Completion of Students

This first ECACE report focuses on the change in enrollment of incumbent members of the ECEC workforce at ECACE member institutions in early childhood programs from the baseline year of 2020 to the first year in which the ECACE Consortium was established, which was 2022. To report on incumbent workforce member enrollment, IBHE and ICCB implemented an innovative cross-agency data matching project, which included data from three state agencies – IBHE, ICCB, and ISAC – and the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (INCCRRA).

It should be noted that fall and spring enrollment in AY 2022 was not yet impacted by the ECACE Scholarship, which was first made available in spring 2022. In addition, what was being measured and reported occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic resulted in lower undergraduate enrollments and drastically altered program delivery models. The pandemic heightened issues for many students, ranging from fiscal to technological to emotional, and impacted enrollment statewide. The ECEC workforce, comprised largely of women – many of whom are women of color, continued to work during the pandemic to support parents who needed to work. The full impact of this on higher education enrollment patterns cannot be determined.

Enrollment in higher education programs by members of the incumbent workforce increased from the baseline year by 17.9%. This represented nearly 500 additional enrolled students. The vast majority of incumbents continued to be enrolled in bachelor's degree and applied associate (AAS) programs.

Figure 3: *Overall Enrollment of Incumbent Members of the ECEC Workforce for All ECACE Member Institutions*

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[8] https://icsps.illinoisstate.edu/images/CTE/Advisory-Committee-Guidebook-Updated.pdf
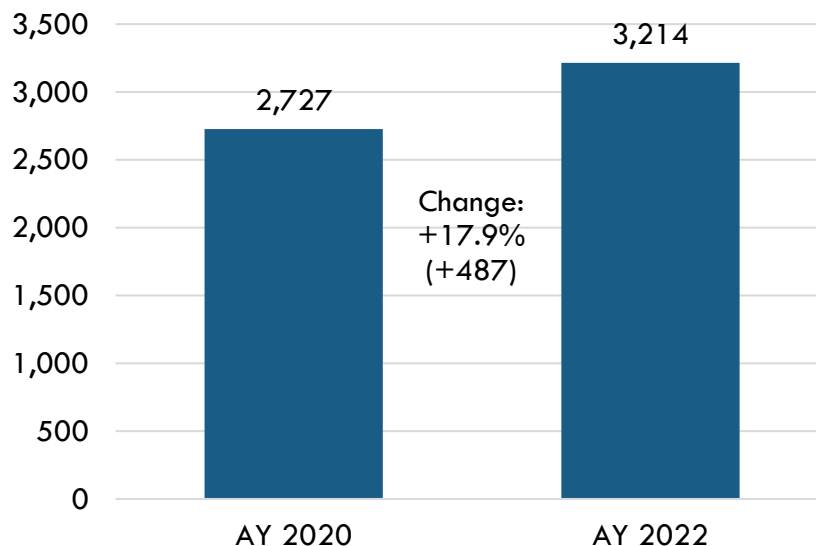
Additional key findings include the following:

- Most of the incumbent enrollment growth occurred among freshmen and juniors, and there were slightly fewer incumbent seniors enrolled across ECACE member institutions.
- The number and proportion of enrolled incumbent members of the ECEC workforce are both expected to increase in AY 2023.
- More low-income incumbent members of the ECEC workforce were enrolled in the first year of the Consortium than in AY 2020, but they represented a slightly smaller proportion of all enrolled incumbents.
- In terms of age, all the enrollment growth occurred with younger members of the incumbent ECEC workforce. Because of this, the distribution shifted substantially and went from being comprised of two-thirds of adult learners aged 25 and older (67.2%) during the baseline year to only 57.2% the first year of the Consortium.
- White (+27.8%), Latino (+16.7%), and African American (+9.4%) incumbent enrollments all grew from the baseline year with some variation in growth across groups, resulting in a slight change in the race/ethnicity distribution.
- In both the baseline year and the first year of the Consortium, nearly all the enrolled incumbent members of the early childhood workforce were Illinois residents (nearly 99% in both years).
- Similarly, nearly all enrolled incumbent members of the ECEC workforce were female (roughly 98% in both years).

During AY 2023, IBHE and ICCB developed new procedures for continuing to track the enrollment, retention, and completion of members of the incumbent workforce at Consortium institutions. Future reports will highlight multi-year trends and will include information on retention, persistence, and completion. This information was not included in the first report, as the time horizon for measuring retention, persistence, and completion after the Consortium was established was limited, and most of the core work of the Consortium, including the scholarship distribution, occurred in the spring of AY 2022. In addition, future iterations of the report will include information on the background of enrolled incumbent workforce members, including their employer type and number of years worked.

Conclusion

The Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity is a multifaceted initiative, bringing together state agencies, public and private higher education institutions, and other partners to create and align systems and programs to meet the state's workforce needs in early childhood education and care settings. The full report provides a comprehensive picture of the initial year of work through From July 2021 – December 2022 to recruit, retain, and support members of the incumbent workforce in their pursuit of higher education credentials. Plans for future reporting on initiative impact are also described in the Summary and Looking Ahead Section. A timeline for the work and data highlights on the following pages provide additional summaries and may help with navigating the report. For more information on the Consortium, please visit www.ecace.org.

	July 2021	Aug 2021	Sept 2021	Oct 2021	Nov 2021	Dec 2021	Jan 2022	Feb 2022	Mar 2022	April 2022	May 2022	June 2022	July 2022	Aug 2022	Sept 2022	Oct 2022	Nov 2022	Dec 2022

ECACE Creation and Launch
- Gov. Pritzker Signs the ECACE Act, Announces $200M for the Consortium
- Cross-Agency Planning & Collaboration: Steering Committee and Working Groups

ECACE Funding and Budgets
- ECACE Institutional Funding & Agreements
- Member Contributions
- EC Faculty Preparation Grants Awarded

Scholarships
- Develop, Build Scholarship & Processes
- AY 2022 Scholarship
- AY 2023 Scholarship
- Application Launch
- First Awards Made

Consortium
- Consortium Launch & Work
- Initial Mtg. of Public Inst.
- First Convening of All Partners
- Guiding Principles Adopted
- Credit for CDA Working Group & Framework Adoption

Advisory Committee
- Appointing Members & Developing Charge
- Launch & Quarterly Meetings

Higher Education Programs
- Goals Developed & Submitted
- Planning Programs for Working Adults
- Implement Programs Re/Designed to Support Working Adults
- Planning AAS Transfer Pathways
- Four Year Institutions Launch AAS Transfer Pathways
- Course Sharing through ILCCO
- ILCCO Training & Technical Assistance Work

Student Wrap Around Supports
- Mentors: Temporarily Assigned
- Mentors: Hired & Supporting Students
- Academic & Other Supports Implemented

Institutional Outreach
- Outreach & Engagement
- Outreach & Participation & Engaging Employers (data collected)

Navigators
- Hiring, Training, Outreach Began
- Outreach & Technical Assistance (Data Captured)

Enrollment
- Student Enrollment Data Collected
- Student Outreach Data Collected

See Appendix C on p. 65 for a long image description

CONSORTIUM MEMBERS

61 colleges and universities comprise the Consortium, including 40 community colleges, 11 public universities, and 10 private, nonprofit four-year institutions, convened by ICCB and IBHE. The #1 Guiding Principle for the Consortium is "Center Student Success".

COLLABORATING STATE AGENCIES

6 state agencies are collaborating to support the ECACE Initiative and increase access to degrees and credentials for child care workforce members – IBHE, ICCB, ISAC, IDHS, ISBE, and GOECD.

FUNDING

Governor Pritzker allocated **$200M** to support the launch of the ECACE Initiative and to support the early childhood incumbent workforce to upskill.

GOAL

The Consortium set a goal to **support nearly 5,000 members (4,933) of the incumbent workforce** to enroll in higher education and to persist or complete by September 2024.

ENROLLMENT INCREASES

Enrollment increased by 17.9% – nearly 500 additional students – from AY2020 to AY2022, prior to the full launch of the Consortium. Enrollment grew for White (+27.8%), Latino (+16.7%), and African American (+9.4%) members of the incumbent workforce.

ECACE SCHOLARSHIP

In the first (soft launch) year of the ECACE Scholarship, **$5.7M in scholarships** were awarded to **412 students.** By December 31, 2022 – midway through year two – an additional **$7M** had been awarded to over **1,000 students.**

STUDENT SUPPORT

Over **100 mentors and 30 navigators** support ECEC students to enroll, persist, and complete credentials and degrees.

OUTREACH

During the fall 2022, navigators from 16 CCR&Rs sent **49,732 emails** for outreach/technical assistance, responded to **2,058 interest forms**, conducted **732 information sessions**, and held **1,643 meetings** with workforce members. Institutions also hosted nearly **500 events**, attended by over **7,800 participants**.

STUDENT TEACHING AT EMPLOYMENT SITE

67% of four-year institutions allow students to complete some or all of their student teaching in their place of employment.

CREDIT FOR CDA PROFESSIONAL CREDENTIAL

All **61 institutions voted yes** to provide 6 semester hours of credit for the CDA, an early childhood credential that does not require higher education coursework.

TRANSFER PATHWAYS FOR AAS STUDENTS

100% of four-year Consortium institutions have developed pathways to a bachelor's degree for students with an AAS in early childhood – formerly a terminal pathway.

The Illinois Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity (ECACE) Initiative is a groundbreaking effort by 61 public and private higher education institutions, six state agencies, and others to collaborate to meet the state's workforce needs in early childhood education and care (ECEC) settings. A year and a half has passed since the signing of Public Act 102-0174, Illinois legislation creating ECACE, and much has been accomplished. This report highlights work to launch ECACE from July 2021 through December 2022, in keeping with the requirements outlined in the Act.

The ECACE Initiative is centered on ensuring the success and progression of working adults through academic programs and training that increase their skills and postsecondary credential attainment while providing a seamless transition from one institution to the next. The ECACE Initiative is administered by the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) and the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) in partnership with multiple state agencies, including the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development (GOECD), the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), and the Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC). Each of the collaborative partners has a stake and role in ensuring a strong ECEC workforce to support children and families in Illinois.

The ECACE Initiative comprises various components, many of which are referenced in this report, and includes the following.

- **Long-term "infrastructure" components,** such as:
  - o **The Consortium** body itself, which is composed of community colleges and universities and convened by ICCB and IBHE. The Consortium is charged with serving the needs of the incumbent early childhood education and care workforce and employers, advancing equity, and providing streamlined pathways to credentials and degrees; and
  - o The **ECACE Advisory Committee,** a cross-sector committee that provides guidance on Consortium operations.

- **Programmatic pathways and offerings** to support equitable access to higher education, such as:
  - o **Seamless pathways,** as all Consortium members have committed to providing streamlined pathways and transfer opportunities to associate and bachelor's degree attainment;
  - o **Flexible formats and modalities,** including offering courses and programs in formats and at times and locations that meet the needs of working adults;
  - o **Recognizing prior learning,** knowing the incumbent workforce may come to higher education programs with significant skills and abilities attained through work-based learning; and
  - o **Cross-institutional access to coursework** if a local higher education partner cannot provide the course when and how the student needs it.

- **Student supports,** including financial support (e.g., scholarships and debt relief); mentors and Higher Education Navigators to serve as a guide and support to and within institutions; and academic and other wraparound supports to ensure persistence and completion.

Together, these comprise the Illinois ECACE initiative.

Figure 4: ECACE Consortium Components
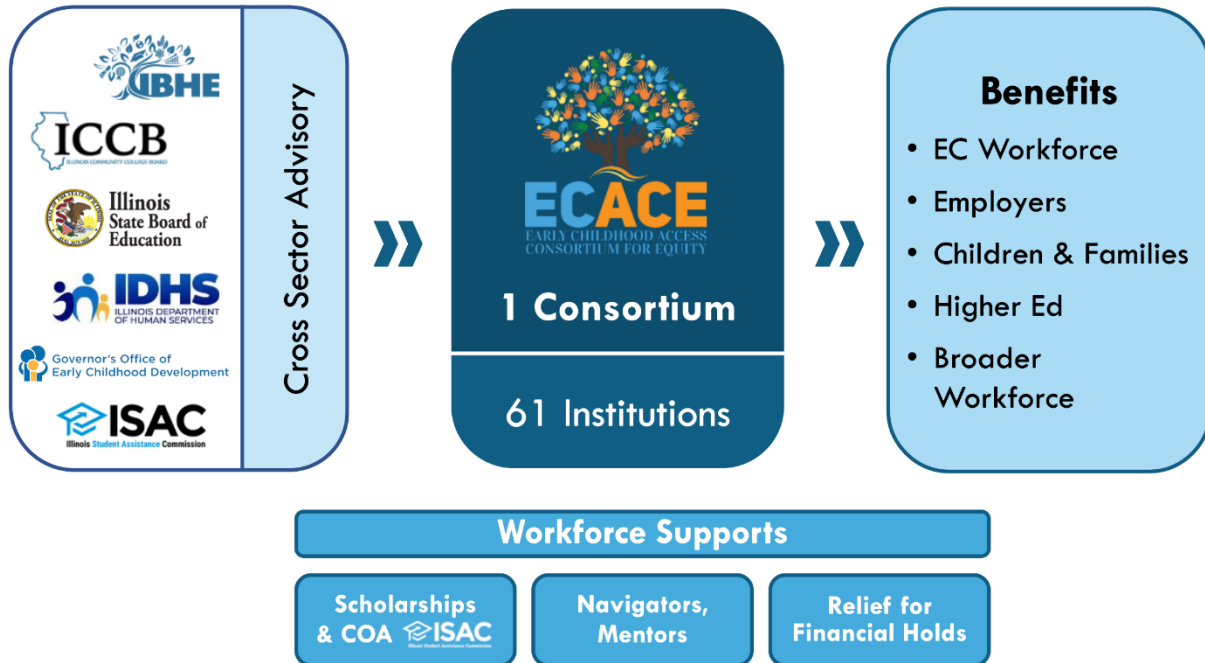
ILLINOIS ECACE BACKGROUND

The ECACE Initiative was envisioned as part of the 2020–2021 higher education strategic planning process, as stakeholders across Illinois discussed how the state's higher education ecosystem could better align to close equity gaps, improve the affordability and sustainability of higher education, and grow talent to drive economic growth and community life. Specifically, the Education Workforce Subgroup on the Early Childhood Workforce (also known as the Design Working Group), made up of community colleges and universities, advocates, state agencies, and industry advocates and experts, collectively outlined a framework to support the early childhood education and care (ECEC) workforce. The resulting higher education strategic plan – "A Thriving Illinois" – specifically identified a strategy to "establish a consortium of community colleges and universities to better serve the incumbent early childhood workforce."

The rationale for this strategy is grounded in evidence about the need for well-prepared ECEC professionals to support Illinois' young children and their families and the opportunity to retain and upskill the incumbent workforce – those who are currently working (or have worked) with children birth to age five in settings such as child care, preschool, and family child care. Additionally, the initiative was established to provide those historically marginalized from higher education access to degrees and credentials. The ECEC workforce is primarily women, many of whom are women of color, often balancing full-time employment, family needs, and other responsibilities. Historically, many members of the ECEC workforce have faced economic, geographic, and structural obstacles that have prevented them from accessing and completing postsecondary credentials. Working adults face obstacles that may not always allow them to participate and succeed in traditional higher education programs. State data provided by the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (INCCRRA) from 2020 shows that an estimated 28,000 child care teachers and assistants would benefit from an opportunity to seek postsecondary credentials. In 2020, 22,611 teachers worked in licensed center settings, 41% of whom were persons of color.[9] Of these teachers, just under 25% held an associate degree and could be ready to pursue a bachelor's degree; another 31.8% had a high school diploma or a certificate and could be ready to pursue an associate degree. Among the 18,139 assistant teachers working in licensed child care settings at the time – 53% of whom were persons of color – 11.3% had an associate degree and could be ready to pursue a bachelor's degree. Another 73.3% had a high school diploma or some college and could

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[9] Data was provided directly from INCCRRA, March 2020.

be ready to seek an associate degree. Additionally, approximately 8,000 family child care providers in licensed or license-exempt settings do not have a college degree.

Younger members of the incumbent workforce are much less likely to have a degree than their older counterparts. For example, approximately 45% of licensed center teachers under age 25 have a degree, compared to 74% of those 35 and older. This indicates that many workforce members stop out after high school or before finishing a degree and return to school later in their careers.[10]

After reviewing this data and months of planning, the resulting idea was that stakeholders – higher education institutions, state agencies, and others – could do more collectively than alone to support at scale the advancement and upskilling of the ECEC workforce. ECACE was subsequently codified in legislation on July 28, 2021, The Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity Act (the Act or ECACE Act). At the same time, Governor Pritzker announced $200 million over three years to support the upstart of the Consortium and the immediate upskilling of the ECEC workforce.[11]

REPORT CONTENTS, REQUIREMENTS, AND DATA SOURCES

The Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity Act delineates requirements pertaining to the work of the Consortium and related reporting. Section 30 of the Act requires the Consortium to "report to the General Assembly, the Senate and House Committees with oversight over higher education, the Governor, and the Advisory Committee on the progress made by the Consortium." This inaugural report covers the bill's signing on July 28, 2021, through December 31, 2022. However, some data (e.g., enrollment, tuition) is only available for AY 2022, through June 30, 2022.

In addition to the required reporting, this first ECACE report highlights key accomplishments during the launch of ECACE and information about workforce supports provided through the initiative with the use of federal child care stimulus funds, such as the ECACE Scholarship and Higher Education Navigators (navigators). Additional details are provided about institutions' work to implement smooth pathways to degrees and credentials and to ensure higher education students have access to programs and coursework designed to meet the needs of working adults. Data for the report was compiled from various sources, including IBHE and ICCB standard collections, institutions' quarterly grant reports, navigator monthly reports, surveys of institutions, the Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC) for ECACE Scholarship data, meetings, and other sources. Appendix A provides more detail about reporting requirements, timelines, and the sources of information used in the report.

For more information about ECACE, visit www.ecace.org.

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[10] Whitehead, J. (2021). Illinois' Early Childhood Workforce 2020 Report. Bloomington, IL: INCCRRA.
[11] IDHS allocated COVID-19 Federal Relief funding to support this work.

Academic Year (AY) 2022 was used largely as a time for collaborating, planning, and doing a "soft launch" of key Initiative activities. During the first six to nine months after the authorization of the ECACE Act, representatives from six state agencies spent extensive time collaboratively planning for launch of all of the various initiative components. Additionally, the Consortium was required to set goals for enrollment and persistence or completion of ECEC workforce members by September of 2024. Therefore, much of AY 2022 was spent planning, developing resources and materials, building programs, and recruiting students.

Collaborative Planning

A Steering Committee comprised of representatives from IBHE, ICCB, GOECD, IDHS, ISBE, ISAC, and others met every other week to support the launch of the ECACE work. Such a comprehensive initiative required establishing many policies, procedures, and structures. Therefore, related working groups comprised of agency representatives met on the off weeks to collaboratively plan for the launch of the scholarship, navigators, Advisory Committee, communications, and data and reporting. Early Steering Committee meetings focused on decision-making around policies and processes related to ECACE, typically brought forward by committees, and appointing members to the Advisory Committee. The Steering Committee strongly believed that cross-agency collaboration was important to ensure the Advisory Committee represents a diverse group of stakeholders, including diversity of race, gender, geography, and sector.

The Scholarship Working Group developed policies and procedures for launch of the ECACE scholarship – including who would be eligible, how to verify eligibility, how much funding students would receive, and the programs students could pursue with the scholarship. This Working Group also engaged representatives from INCCRRA, who developed a way to verify that students were part of the incumbent workforce. The Navigator Working Group contemplated the role of navigators in providing outreach to members of the incumbent workforce and how to best engage these working adults in ECACE programs through regional support. Additionally, the Working Group mapped out a job description and planned for initial navigator onboarding and training. The Communications Working Group worked on ways to communicate with a wide array of stakeholders about the ECACE scholarship and navigators. Later, participants in a Reporting Working Group began mapping out requirements for legislative reports and conceptualizing how to collect and report data.

GOAL SETTING

An important initial focus of ECACE was setting goals around engagement and upskilling of the ECEC workforce. The ECACE Act tasked IBHE's Educator Workforce Subgroup on the Early Childhood Workforce to establish goals on enrollment and the persistence and/or completion of the incumbent workforce. To support this, ICCB and IBHE staff created draft goals based on the proportion of teachers and assistant teachers without bachelor's degrees who could upskill to a certificate, associate degree, or a bachelor's degree and related stackable Gateways to Opportunity® (Gateways) Credential.[12] In August 2021, the Educator Workforce Subgroup on the Early Childhood Workforce approved the goals for the Consortium to collectively support nearly 5,000 (4,933) members of the incumbent ECEC workforce to enroll and persist or complete by September of 2024.

In addition to state goals, targets were developed by institution, sector, and region of the state. Due to many students needing an associate degree, the Consortium's 40 community colleges' collective goal is the largest of the three sectors, with a goal to support 3,500 or 17.5% of those in the incumbent workforce to upskill to a certificate or associate degree. The goal for universities is to support over 1,400 students, 18.6% of the incumbent workforce working towards a bachelor's degree.

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[12] Gateways to Opportunity Credentials are stackable, industry-recognized credentials that demonstrate achievement of competencies.

Table 2: ECACE Goals to Support the Incumbent ECEC Workforce

	Enrollment Fall AY 2020 (Benchmark Year)	Enrolled or Completed Students as of Fall AY 2022	Enrolled or Completed Students as of Fall AY 2023	Enrolled or Completed Students as of Fall AY 2024	Enrolled or Completed Students as of Fall AY 2025	Additional # of Students Enrolled or Completed
Community Colleges	3,527	4,162	5,162	6,291	7,027	3,500
Public Universities	1,200	1,375	1,796	2,077	2,182	983
Private, Nonprofit Universities	962	1,042	1,235	1,363	1,412	450
Total	5,689	6,579	8,193	9,731	10,621	4,933

In addition to state and sector goals, regional goals were established to ensure the Consortium is focused on enrolling students throughout the state. Disaggregated by the ten Economic Development Regions of Illinois (EDR), goals were set based on the population of the incumbent workforce in each area with the potential to upskill to an undergraduate certificate or degree. [13] The Consortium has the highest goal of reaching 3,516 students in the Northeast region, which includes the Chicago metro area. The Consortium has the lowest collective goal of reaching 50 students in the West Central region.

Figure 5: Institutions by Economic Development Region

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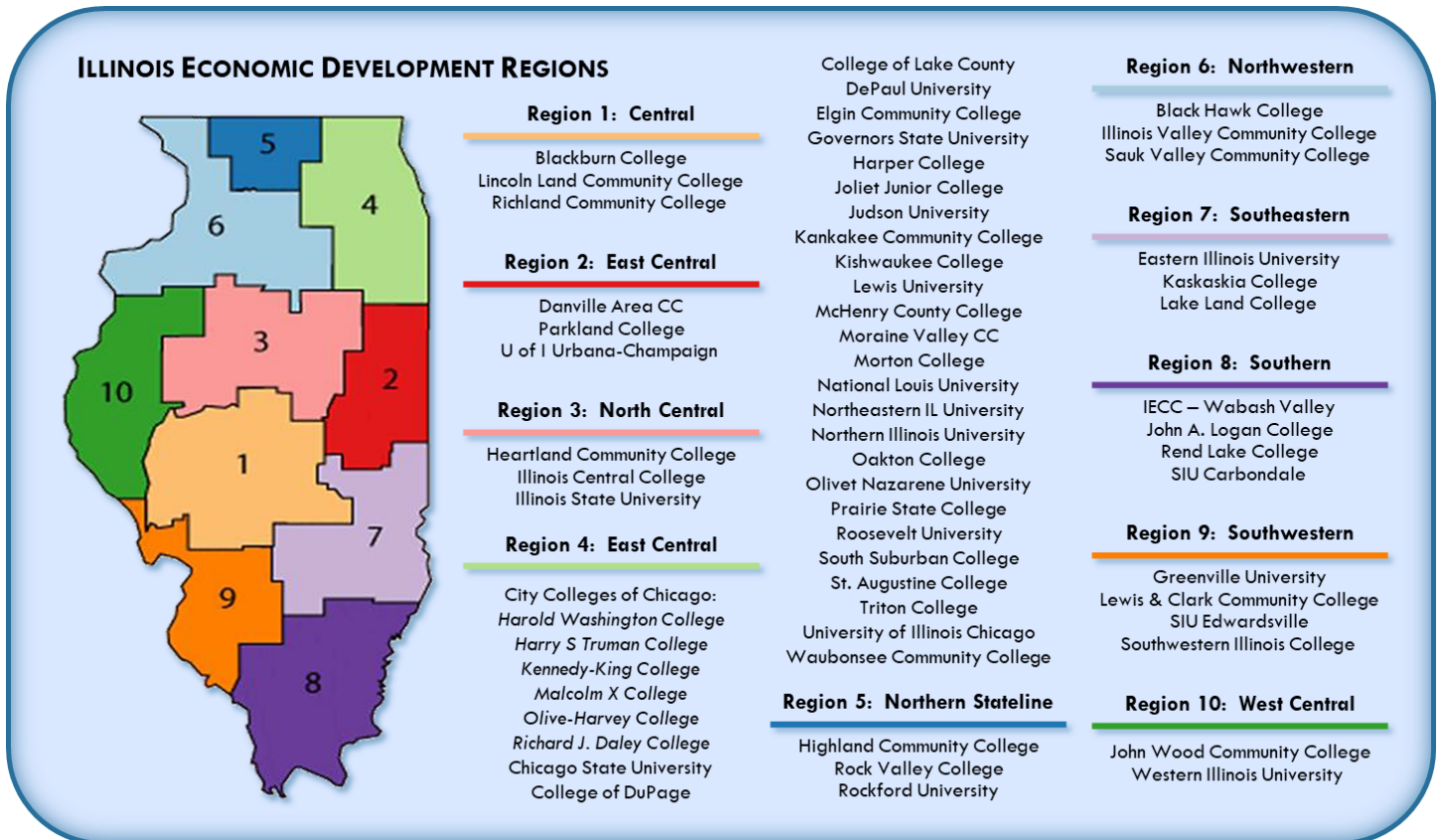
[13] The ten Economic Development Regions were established by the Illinois Department of Employment Security. https://ides.illinois.gov/resources/labor-market-information/economic-development-region.html

Table 3: ECACE Goals to Engage the Incumbent Workforce by Economic Development Region

Economic Development Region		Projected Growth		
#	Name	4-Year Level	2-Year Level	Total
1	Central	63	36	99
2	East Central	41	64	105
3	North Central	86	144	230
4	Northeast	960	2,556	3,516
5	Northern Stateline	45	108	153
6	Northwest	43	138	181
7	Southeastern	36	106	142
8	Southern	52	62	114
9	Southwestern	83	260	343
10	West Central	24	26	50
	Statewide	1,433	3,500	4,933

Goals were set based on the assumption that a scholarship covering the full cost of attendance would be made available to the workforce; and grants to institutions would be provided to expand programs, adjust curricula, and provide student support. The scholarship was launched in November 2021, just four months after the Act was signed into law. Grants to institutions have been provided; however, these were significantly delayed, and most agreements with institutions were not executed until late spring 2022, at least nine months after the Act was signed. This significantly impacted the launch of the work, including delays in hiring mentors, initiating marketing and recruitment campaigns, and other activities which may impact institutional and state goals.

At the time of the signing of the Act, Governor Pritzker announced funding to upstart the Consortium, to support higher education to create seamless pathways designed to serve working adults, and to provide for the upskilling of the ECEC incumbent workforce over three years (AY 2022–AY 2024). IDHS allocated over $200 million in federal child care funding to support this initiative. Most of the funding, over $197 million, is distributed to IBHE, ICCB, and ISAC to administer ECACE.

Table 4: ECACE Initiative Funding and Purpose by Agency

Agency	Amount Budgeted	Purpose
IBHE	$39,599,971	- Convene and support the Consortium and Advisory Committee - "Backbone" the initiative - Provide grants and support to higher education institutions and navigators
ICCB	$37,998,524	- Convene and support the Consortium and Advisory Committee - "Backbone" the initiative - Provide grants and support to higher education institutions and navigators
ISAC	$120,000,000	- Administer the ECACE Scholarship
IDHS	$5,983,266	- Hire and support regional navigators
Total	**$203,581,761**	

GRANTS TO COMMUNITY COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

ICCB and IBHE provide grant funding to all Consortium institutions to address the intention and requirements of the ECACE Act – to support the immediate upskill of the incumbent workforce and to redesign programs and seamless pathways tailored to the needs of working adults. In addition, IBHE provides Early Childhood Faculty Preparation grants to four universities to prepare diverse students at the graduate level to become faculty for early childhood higher education programs.

Institutional Grants

Community colleges and universities are each provided with grants comprising both base funding and supplementary per-student funding based on institutional goals. The purpose of the institutional grants is to provide three years of funding (AY 2022, AY 2023, AY 2024) for institutions to:

- Support the development of an infrastructure tailored to the needs of working adults;
- Provide mentors and other academic and holistic supports to ensure persistence and completion;
- Develop pathways and programs to increase access, persistence, and completion of credentials and degrees; and
- Participate in the Consortium as active and collaborative members.

State contracts for grant funding for IBHE, ICCB, and subsequently, institutions were not executed until late spring 2022 due to delays in the contracting process. Therefore, state agencies' and institutions' work are significantly delayed in many areas.

Early Childhood Faculty Preparation Grants

To ensure a deep and diverse bench of candidates preparing to become early childhood faculty, IBHE developed the Early Childhood Faculty Preparation Grant (ECFP). The initiative is designed to address shortages among higher education faculty in this field, particularly faculty of color, needed to support a well-

qualified and culturally competent workforce. Four institutions were selected via a competitive bid process in the fall of 2022 to provide graduate programs in early childhood that develop expertise in both early childhood and teaching adult learners.

CONSORTIUM MEMBER CONTRIBUTIONS

A Consortium of 61 institutions requires significant resources to support its administration. Consortia such as ECACE often require individual institutions to contribute. As such, the Act requires the Consortium to report on "member contributions, including financial, physical, or in-kind contributions, provided to the Consortium."

Reports of significant contributions were not anticipated, considering the amount of funding noted above and the time the information was requested.[14] Thirteen (21%) institutions reported contributions that totaled approximately $743.5 thousand. One of these institutions reported 55%, or $404,941, of these contributions. The other twelve institutions collectively reported $338,627. Forty-eight of 61 institutions (79%) did not report additional contributions to the Consortium.[15] Contributions ranged from $212 to over $400,000.

Table 5: Member Contributions, by Sector, Through December 2022

Sector	# of Institutions	Member Contributions
Community Colleges	8	$685,279
Private, Nonprofit Institutions	3	$36,855
Public Universities	2	$21,434
Total	**13**	**$743,568**

Source: Institution reported data

Overall, the most reported contribution was personnel – or staff and faculty time. This held true when disaggregated by sector (community colleges, public universities, and private, non-profit institutions). This is as expected, considering the number of people and departments within institutions needed to support the work of the Consortium. Personnel was followed by miscellaneous costs and fringe benefits as the highest areas of contribution.

Institutions provided a significant amount of in-kind support during AY 2022, as contracts were not executed until nearly the end of the State's fiscal year. Despite this, institutions participated in a substantial number of meetings, such as those of the Consortium and working groups, and did a great deal of planning. However, we did not ask institutions to look back and capture this information.

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[14] Institutions were asked in the fall of 2022 to provide data on contributions to the Consortium. Due to the collection date, most institutions were unable to report contributions retroactively for AY 2022.
[15] More than one institution reported not tracking member contributions since this grant does not require matching funds.

The ECACE Act created two bodies that, with the support of state agencies, provide the infrastructure for the ECACE Initiative, the Consortium and the ECACE Advisory Committee. The Consortium is a collective of institutions working together toward a common goal: upskilling the ECEC workforce. The Advisory Committee provides insight and connections to the field and a level of support and accountability for the Consortium. The section below details work of both from the enactment of the legislation through December 31, 2022.

ECACE CONSORTIUM

The Consortium comprises 61 institutions, including 40 community colleges, 11 public universities, and 10 private, nonprofit four-year institutions. The idea behind the Consortium is that a single institution cannot fully address the preparation and professional development needs of the Illinois ECEC workforce. However, together, institutions can collaboratively improve access, persistence, and completion of degrees and credentials. Individually and together, Consortium institutions have agreed to remove barriers to credential and degree completion, to align and smooth pathways across and among institutions, to advance equity, and to work to recognize the current workforce's prior learning, skills, and abilities.

IBHE and ICCB convene and provide administrative support for the Consortium. All public universities and community colleges with Gateways Entitled early childhood programs are members by statute. Private, nonprofit institutions with early childhood programs are encouraged to become members of the Consortium and are required to sign on to the same set of agreements adopted by the public institutions, including statutory requirements. Efforts to include private institutions are critical to assist in addressing potential education deserts and to ensure that there is sufficient capacity to address the goals set out for ECACE.

According to the ECACE Act, the purpose of the Consortium is to "serve the needs of the incumbent early childhood workforce and the employers of early childhood educators and to advance racial equity while meeting the needs of employers by streamlining, coordinating, and improving the accessibility of degree completion pathways for upskilling and the sustained expansion of educational pipelines at Illinois institutions of higher education." Additionally, the Act requires member institutions to cooperate on many activities, some of which are listed below. This report addresses progress on these activities:

- Expand access to degrees and credentials for the incumbent workforce;
- Ensure the full transfer of the associate of applied science degree (AAS) into the bachelor's degree;
- Develop standardized methods for awarding credit for prior learning;
- Work with employer partners and districts to determine the demand for programs and courses;
- Determine how institutions will provide higher education credit for the Child Development Associate (CDA); and
- Provide course-sharing options and opportunities for courses unavailable at a student's home institution.

The Consortium met six times from July 28, 2021, through December 31, 2022; all meeting minutes and materials are posted on the ECACE website. Consortium members focused on 1) developing the structure and foundation for Consortium work and collaboration and 2) addressing time-sensitive issues related to legislation, time-limited funding, and the broader ECACE Initiative. The Consortium first convened on September 22, 2021, and included public community colleges and universities. The first meeting was focused on adoption of a charter for the Consortium, determining if and how to include private, nonprofit institutions, and discussing required legislative activities.

The first meeting of the full Consortium in its current form occurred on December 8, 2021. To provide for the smooth functioning of ECACE, each college and university designated one person to serve as the official representative for the institution and be a member of the official body. The role of the institutional representative is to be the authorized "voice" for the institution, to make decisions on behalf of the institution, and to be a liaison between the Consortium and the institution. At that time, the Consortium agreed on roles for institutional representatives and teams, discussed the idea of the Guiding Principles to guide the focus and

decisions of the Consortium, and decided to launch two working groups to achieve requirements in the Act (i.e., Guiding Principles and CDA for Credit) and a community of practice (AAS Transfer).

From January through April 2022, the Guiding Principles Working Group met to reflect upon key principles around which the Consortium would operate. The group outlined the fundamental ideas around which collective institutions' decisions, policies, and procedures would all be made. In April 2022, the Consortium adopted the Guiding Principles. The number one guiding principle is "**Center student success.**"

Other principles include:
- **Share leadership**, recognizing the role and importance of all stakeholders and the value of consensus building;
- **Behave as equals**, including across positions, roles, institutions, and sector;
- **Respect Consortium agreements, while accommodating institutional differences**, as the context and culture of each institution matters and; and
- **Simplify student navigation**, recognizing that a key piece of the work of ECACE is ensuring seamless, accessible, and transparent pathways.

"The Consortium has helped bring a shared sense of community around this project. We have appreciated the brainstorming and problem-solving that have occurred."

— An Institutional Partner

Adopting these principles is an important foundational activity and early success for the Consortium. Together, over 60 institutions agreed that, above all things, students would be at the center of the work. And together, regardless of role, institution, or sector, Consortium institutions would respect others' differences while focusing on collectively increasing access for working adults. Since this time, institutions and agencies have reported recognizing the value of coming together for a common goal. In the words of one institutional member, "The Consortium has helped bring a shared sense of community around this project. We have appreciated the brainstorming and problem-solving that have occurred."[16]

The other Working Groups, CDA for Credit and the AAS Transfer Community of Practice, are discussed in later sections.

ECACE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The second body created through the Act is the ECACE Advisory Committee (Advisory Committee or Committee). The Advisory Committee forum is designed to foster statewide dialogue, particularly between higher education institutions and employers, to ensure that the Consortium understands employer perspectives as it develops policies and processes to support working adults. The Advisory Committee's unique membership brings together cross-sector stakeholders who often sit at different tables to advocate for and address similar issues facing the field of early childhood education and care. The Act charges five state agencies – IBHE, ICCB, ISBE, IDHS, and GOECD – to jointly convene and co-chair the committee. Committee member composition is detailed in the Act and includes representation from child care providers, school districts, early childhood advocates, legislators, other state agencies, labor unions, public and private colleges and universities, and other experts. Members are appointed by legislatively designated co-chairs of the Committee or the chairperson of the Illinois Senate and House Higher Education Committees.

In fall 2021, the Steering Committee, which includes six state agencies from the Advisory Committee, met biweekly to discuss potential appointees and to intentionally make appointments for a diverse committee with representation across gender, race, geography, and organization. In addition, a working group of cross-agency staff met bi-weekly to build out the charge, functions, and principles from which the Advisory Committee would operate. The group created tools for the committee, including a welcome packet for new Advisory Committee members, Guiding Principles, ground rules, and the committee charge.

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[16] Afton Partners May 2023 Needs Assessment.

The Act tasks the Advisory Committee with providing "guidance on the operation of the Consortium." To this end, at its inaugural meeting on March 18, 2022, the Committee adopted the following charge:

- Act as champions for the Consortium and purposes of the Act;
- As outlined in Section 30 of the legislation, review reports submitted to the General Assembly, to the Senate and House Committees with oversight over higher education, and to the Governor on the progress made by the Consortium;
- Provide advice and recommendations to the lead agency(s) and higher education institutions as they meet their responsibilities as detailed in the Act;
- Provide a forum to bring together employers in the early childhood education and care industry, higher education, and other stakeholders to share perspective to best support the work of the Consortium; and
- Provide consultation and feedback to the state agencies charged with setting new metrics and goals for the Consortium after the close of the 2024–2025 academic year.

Beginning in March 2022, the Advisory Committee held quarterly meetings, with all meeting minutes and materials posted on the ECACE [website](#). Meetings were dedicated to establishing a baseline of broad knowledge for stakeholders across sectors, ensuring that members were aware of the Consortium's early progress and goals, gathering feedback on key work of the Consortium, and developing strategies for "spreading the word" about ECACE in different sectors.

In particular, the Advisory Committee provided guidance on the following:

- **Child Development Associate (CDA):** The committee discussed the Consortium work to determine how to provide higher education credit for the national CDA credential. The Advisory Committee provided perspective to the Consortium and CDA for Credit Working Group on trends in the field, the need for a pathway from the CDA to higher education, and the anticipated impact of credit for prior learning on ECEC workforce members.

- **Demand for Well-Qualified Educators:** Employers on the committee shared their perspectives on staffing shortages and the need for a more qualified workforce to increase the quality of early childhood programs. The Committee provided thoughtful reflection on work in higher education that might impact workforce motivation for upskilling, including competency-based academic programs and state-level work addressing compensation.

- **Access to Higher Education:** The Committee discussed ways to address challenges and opportunities for the ECEC workforce accessing higher education. One concern shared by both employers and higher education was the impact of the current workforce shortage on some child care directors, who are anxious about losing staff to public school or other higher paying industries, and their willingness to share the work of ECACE with their team. The committee reflected upon the pervasiveness of this attitude, the impact of this on enrollment goals, and potential strategies to overcome this barrier – including work with the ECACE higher education navigators.

Consortium member institutions have all committed to supporting the incumbent ECEC workforce to upskill and attain postsecondary credentials by: 1) ensuring programs are available when, where, and how students need them; and 2) redesigning programs to better reflect the needs of working adults; 3) providing seamless pathways to completion and transfer; and 4) recognizing and honoring, where possible, the prior learning of the incumbent workforce. The following sections outline progress through December 2022 in many of these areas.

ACCESS AND PROGRAM MODALITY

In the Initiative's first year, ECACE institutions completed significant work to develop or adjust programs to increase access to programs and coursework for workforce members by ensuring the availability of courses when, where, and how students need them. Many higher education programs traditionally offer daytime in-person courses, usually inaccessible to working adults.

All Consortium institutions offer at least some online courses as part of their program modalities, and most offer more than one way to complete the curriculum. By using direct student feedback, institutions have adjusted their programs to meet the needs of students. For example, by surveying their students, Governors State University discovered not everyone preferred a completely asynchronous program, as many enjoyed being online simultaneously with their classmates and instructor. This blend of asynchronous and synchronous is a popular model of ECACE programs and is used by DePaul University, Illinois State University, College of DuPage, and South Suburban College, to name a few. ECACE institutions have reported that their early childhood students enjoy the community and engagement of synchronous classes and the flexibility of an asynchronous modality. Therefore, some institutions are offering asynchronous courses with synchronous or in-person opportunities for discussion, asking faculty questions, interacting with peers, and tutoring.

In addition to variations in course modality, some colleges and universities have modified the length of their courses to allow for faster degree completion and increased focus on course content. Shorter courses may allow students to focus on content in small chunks with increased intensity. For instance, the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign offers eight-week synchronous and 16-week asynchronous courses. This structure enables their students to finish three courses in a semester while only completing two classes simultaneously.

Illinois Community Colleges Online

To streamline pathways and increase access, the Act charges the Consortium with cooperating so that students can access courses when, where, and how they need them, including when courses are not available at students' home institution. To this end, every community college was required to submit a plan for developing, expanding, or enhancing the Illinois Community Colleges Online (ILCCO) platform on their campus. First piloted in 2001, ILCCO is a statewide system allowing community college students to access online courses at other institutions when courses are unavailable online at their home institution.

To assist institutions with participation, Lake Land College developed and implemented training on course sharing for colleges during the fall 2022 semester. The training sessions were designed from two course-sharing focus group sessions held on July 28, 2022, and August 2, 2022, and comprised 25 staff members from colleges currently participating in ILCCO. The training sessions focused on using the Online Course Exchange (OCE), the platform that facilitates online course sharing between colleges. Twelve training sessions, attended by 80 staff members from Illinois community colleges, were held between September and December 2022. Further training was provided to staff at individual colleges.

Last year, the OCE system was modified to identify ECACE courses. Additionally, documentation for OCE was updated to include new features in the system and to provide more guidance to new course-sharing institutions.

As of April 2023, about 1,600 ILCCO courses, mostly part of the General Education Core Curriculum (GECC) package, from 20 colleges are available for sharing through ILCCO. This includes the complete GECC package and 79 ECACE program courses from 14 colleges. This represents a significant increase, as before July 1, 2022, there were only 50 ECACE courses listed.[17]

AAS TRANSFER

In addition to increasing access to courses, four-year Consortium colleges and universities have redesigned their programs to ensure seamless transfer of students with an Associate of Applied Science (AAS) Degree and to recognize students' prior learning and competencies. Historically, the applied associate degree was conceived as a terminal degree leading directly to employment. More recently, research has demonstrated the benefit of teachers with higher degrees on young children's development and education, and there has been a national movement towards ECEC teachers having bachelor's degrees. However, when seeking to transfer this terminal degree to a bachelor's degree, students often faced course loss. Increasingly, multiple fields including early childhood have called for individuals to have access to opportunities to extend their learning through professional pathways to the baccalaureate degree. To address this, the ECACE Act, and now institutions, have created a permanent pathway for individuals with an AAS degree in early childhood to seamlessly advance to a baccalaureate degree program.

Section 130-10 of the Act ensures that Consortium universities transfer the AAS degree in its entirety, with no courses repeated in the bachelor's degree plan. This means that all general education and professional coursework in the AAS Early Childhood major must be transferred and applied to the bachelor's degree. Students transferring the AAS degree are admitted as juniors and cannot be required to take more credits for graduation than a student who began their studies at the institution as a freshman. This legislation is an innovative and rare approach to guaranteeing credit mobility for AAS transfer students and "streamlining, coordinating, and improving the accessibility of degree completion pathways," as all but 3 of the 40 Consortium community college members offer the AAS degree.

The work of the Consortium builds on a history of partnerships between community colleges and universities and their programs in Illinois. The Illinois Articulation Initiative (IAI) includes three early childhood courses approved for transfer between the participating institutions. In 2013, the IBHE led Early Childhood Educator Preparation Program Innovation grants to support partnerships with community colleges and universities that focused on program alignment, articulation agreements, and other mechanisms (joint student advising, dual admissions) to create a more streamlined path between the AAS and the bachelor's degree. Results of this regional work are available online.[18] Most recently, most institutions in Illinois with early childhood programs have aligned their curriculum to the Gateways Credential Competencies (Competencies), which may provide the tools for clear pathways for students to progress from the AAS to the bachelor's degree. [19]

Despite these initiatives, systemic barriers to the transfer of the AAS degree remained. Most of the courses in the AAS degree focus on the development of professional knowledge and skills, with approximately 15 hours of general education coursework. Transfer of the AAS to the bachelor's degree requires that students complete a somewhat inverted program that contrasts with the traditional organization of university degree programs. General education coursework – considered lower division – may need to be taken at the university as juniors and seniors and many of the major courses – historically considered upper division – may be taken at the community college as freshmen and sophomores.

An additional barrier to systematic transfer is the difference in the content of courses at community colleges and universities. Community college early childhood programs are typically focused on teaching or administering programs for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. Programs that lead to a Professional Educator

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[17] Online courses available for sharing can be found at https://oce.ilcco.net/courses/full_courses_view.php.
[18] *Illinois Education Research Council. Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, Campus Box 1064, Edwardsville, IL 62026.* http://www.siue.edu/ierc
[19] The Gateways Credential Competencies are leveled to allow students to build skills, knowledge, and dispositions for teaching young children birth-grade 2.

License (PEL) must cover content and skills for working with children across the full early childhood spectrum from birth to grade 2, and they may have embedded courses that lead to bilingual, English as a second language (ESL), or special education endorsements. Therefore, transfer students may have earned some but not all the competencies in courses such as "math methods for early childhood," and institutions must find a way to provide partial course content.

All Consortium four-year institutions have at least one pathway to support students transferring with an AAS degree, and all are not requiring students to take more credit hours than would be needed had they begun at the institution as a freshman. Most institutions offer programs to AAS transfer students that lead to the Gateways ECE Level 5 and the PEL. Generally, Consortium institutions are applying 60 to 66 credit hours of the AAS to the bachelor's degree, with an additional 54 to 62 credits in professional coursework and general education requirements for the completion of a bachelor's degree, no more than is required of traditional students. Transferred general education coursework is applied to graduation and licensure requirements. Transferred coursework in the early childhood major is equated to coursework in the bachelor's degree program or is accepted as electives.

Consortium institutions have revised program content somewhat as well. All programs leading to the PEL have accepted the AAS coursework focused on child development, child and family relations, and some pre-kindergarten methods as equivalent to their own. A few institutions have revised their curriculum in line with the Gateways ECE credential competencies, focusing on the content and skills incorporated in the Level 5 competencies with the assumption that the AAS transfer students would be entering with the Gateways ECE Levels 2 to 4 completed. These kinds of program innovations are essential to creating the infrastructure for serving incumbent worker transfer students in the future.

As reported by institutions, as of December 31, 2022, there were at least 248 students with an AAS degree enrolled in Consortium universities across the state. Four urban institutions (National Louis University, Roosevelt University, Governors State University, and Lewis University) reported enrolling 58.5% of these transfer students. These institutions draw transfer students from the City Colleges of Chicago and 14 surrounding suburban community colleges. Of the public universities, Illinois State University had the largest number of AAS transfers, 16.6% of the total.

As of December 31, 2022, many universities reported that that a smaller than anticipated number of transfer students enrolled over the last year have an AAS degree. In the first and second quarter of AY 2022, institutions reported approximately 29% of transfer students held an AAS degree, and eight institutions reported no AAS students at all. Alternatively, many institutions reported a significant percentage of transfer students with 60+ hours but no degree (30% of students) and associate of arts degrees (28% of students). It is unclear why this is the case. Potential reasons may include a decreasing number of AAS completions in recent years, regional differences in the prevalence of the AAS as a preferred pathway, and an increasing number of students who know they intend to transfer and have intentionally selected a pathway that will facilitate easy transfer. Alternatively, it may be that recent AAS completers have "stopped out" — achieving the desired degree or taking a break before returning to school — or do not see an incentive to upskill, as this may not result in a significant increase in wages.[20] A shift may result due to the changing landscape of transfer that will honor the transfer of the AAS degree. However, that is not yet fully recognized in enrollment.

HIGHER EDUCATION CREDIT FOR THE CHILD DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATE

In June 2022, less than a year after the establishment of ECACE, the Consortium unanimously adopted a framework for institutions to provide higher education credit to those who have an active Child Development

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[20] Historically, compensation in the early childhood education and care field has been low, particularly for those working in community-based settings. According to a 2020 workforce report, a licensed center teacher in Illinois with a bachelor's degree made $15.00 per hour compared to $12.50 for a teacher with a high school diploma or GED.

Associate (CDA) Credential.[21] By adopting this framework, the Consortium created a formal process for recognizing and honoring the knowledge, skills, and abilities that working adults may have when entering higher education. The CDA is a national credential that recognizes foundational competencies acquired through work experience and training and demonstrated through an assessment, observation, and portfolio. With the ECEC workforce shortage in Illinois, anecdotally stakeholders have reported an increase in those choosing the CDA pathway as a timely and affordable alternative to become "teacher qualified."[22]

The policy framework was developed by a cross-sector working group comprised of representatives from community colleges and universities, child care providers, child care resource and referral agencies (CCR&Rs), and industry advocacy organizations. The working group drew from the evidence that identifying prior learning and student competencies provides meaningful pathways into higher education in a way that may benefit both students and higher education programs; a 2020 study published by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education and the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) found that adult students of all races, ethnicities, and income levels who received credit for prior learning were more likely to complete college credentials than adult students who did not.

The framework includes a recommendation to award six semester hours of meaningful early childhood credit to active CDA holders without contingencies. In other words, students should not be required to be reassessed to be awarded credit. The framework establishes deadlines of January 31, 2023 and January 31, 2024 to establish a process for awarding the Preschool and Infant Toddler CDA, respectively.

At the time of the report, all Consortium institutions have a process in place to award credit for the CDA, with most institutions awarding six hours; and six institutions offering more than six hours, with credit ranging between seven and 11 hours. The four courses that are most awarded for CDA credit include the following:
- Introduction or Foundations in Early Childhood (56% of institutions);
- Health, Safety, and Nutrition (39% of institutions);
- Child Development (30% of institutions); and
- Practicum (20% of institutions).

Institutions were not required to implement credit for the Preschool CDA until January 31, 2023, and the Infant Toddler CDA until January 31, 2024, but some institutions began providing the credit before the deadlines. As of December 31, 2022, 26 students were provided with credit.

Table 6: Students Awarded CDA Credit and Maximum-Minimum Hours Awarded for CDA by Sector, Q1 & Q2 AY 2023

Sector	Students Awarded Credit	Minimum Semester Hours* Awarded	Maximum Semester Hours Awarded
Community Colleges	24	6	8
Private, Nonprofit Institutions	0	6	11
Public Universities	2	6	9

Eight to nine quarter hours were determined to be an appropriate equivalent to six semester hours, as the course structure and conversion from semester to quarter hours varies somewhat by institution.

Other components of the framework include:
- Consortium-endorsed best practice models;

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[21] The Act tasked the Consortium to "*decide how to assign college credit for the incumbent workers who have a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential and for future workers obtaining a CDA*".

[22] According to Title 89: Social Services Chapter iii: Department of Children and Family Services Subchapter E: Requirements for Licensure Part 407 Licensing Standards for Day Care Centers, Appendix G, someone with a CDA meets the qualifications for being the teacher in a licensed child care center. https://dcfs.illinois.gov/content/dam/soi/en/web/dcfs/documents/about-us/policy-rules-and-forms/documents/rules/rules-407.pdf

- A recommendation that ISBE ensures a clear process for making programmatic changes related to acceptance of the CDA; and
- A recommendation that ICCB reviews agency policies for prior learning assessment to ensure that any barriers to implementing the recommended process for awarding credit for the CDA are addressed.

Subsequently, the ICCB amended administrative rules to ensure credit for prior learning through this and other processes can be evaluated and awarded at the time of application or admission. Changes to the administrative rules went into effect February 2023. ISBE has also provided significant guidance to institutions entitled to recommend candidates for the ISBE Professional Educator License about processes to make program changes and how to support students on individualized pathways, such as those with credit for prior learning and on areas of licensure flexibility.

Historically, the ECEC incumbent workforce has faced various barriers to accessing, persisting, and completing degrees and credentials. These barriers may be economic, geographical, or structural. In addition, working adults may encounter challenges related to navigating the higher education system and accessing academic and other support to help them persist and succeed. Through the ECACE initiative, the State and individual colleges and universities provide a variety of supports to address these obstacles and to encourage immediate upskilling and course and degree completion. These include financial, academic, and holistic support through institutions and personalized assistance to enroll in institutions by regionally based navigators.

FINANCIAL SUPPORTS

As mentioned earlier in this report, the ECEC incumbent workforce, particularly those working in home and community-based settings, tends to earn low wages and may be unable to contribute significantly to higher education. Two ECACE supports – scholarship and debt relief funding – are designed to address this barrier.

ECACE Scholarship Program

In partnership with IBHE and ICCB, ISAC launched the ECACE Scholarship Program in late November 2021. The ECACE Scholarship (scholarship), one of the first initiatives launched through ECACE, addresses the often-prohibitive cost of attending higher education. The cost of higher education spans beyond tuition and fees and includes expenses such as books and supplies, housing, transportation, and more. The ECEC workforce tends to earn low wages and may have additional financial needs not met by their current income. Additionally, while all Consortium programs are intended to deliver courses at a convenient time and place, workforce members may need to reduce their work hours to allow time to participate in classes and field experiences, study, and address other matters related to their education. The ECACE Scholarship is a rolling scholarship that allows students to continue to apply and enroll throughout the year.

During AY 2022 and AY 2023, the ECACE Scholarship covered up to the full cost of attendance (COA) after other federal scholarships and grants were applied for members of the incumbent ECEC workforce seeking an undergraduate degree or credential in the field at Consortium-member institutions.[23] Scholarship recipients must work or have worked with children birth to five in early childhood congregate care settings, such as child care, preschool, family child care, Head Start, and other similar programs. Recipients are expected to continue or return to the field after they complete their program of study in positions such as teachers, directors, or others in similar settings in Illinois. The full list of eligibility criteria for AY 2022 and AY 2023 is listed in Appendix B.

ECACE Scholarship Development and Soft Launch

Advised by an interagency working group (i.e., Scholarship Working Group) with representatives from IBHE, ICCB, IDHS, and GOECD, ISAC planned and implemented the scholarship four months after the signing of the ECACE Act. Many policies, rules, and processes for this new program had to be developed from scratch as quickly as possible and required the input of many different stakeholders. The Scholarship Working Group met biweekly to develop the scholarship and continues to meet biweekly to address any issues that may arise and to monitor scholarship uptake.

The first year of the scholarship is considered a "soft launch," as the application opened in November 2021, as new processes were being implemented. ISAC began awarding scholarships in March 2022, and scholarships were applied retroactively to cover the beginning of the academic year. Students enrolled in fall 2021 and

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[23] Students at participating private, not-for-profit institutions may receive a scholarship amount no more than the cost of the most expensive early childhood education program at an Illinois public university.

spring 2022 were reimbursed for expenses paid during those semesters. Generally, in fall 2021 and spring 2022, only students currently enrolled took advantage of the scholarship.

First-Year Scholarship Outcomes (AY 2022)

For AY 2022 (fall 2021-summer 2022), the program's first year, over $5.7 million in ECACE Scholarship funds were distributed to over 400 members of the incumbent workforce, 92% of whom were women. During this soft launch year, 40% of scholarship recipients were attending private, nonprofit institutions, 31% attending community colleges, and 29% attending public universities.

*Table 7: ECACE Scholarship Awards by Sector, AY 2022*

Sector	Recipients	Total Awards	Average Award per Student	Institutions with Scholarship Students
Public Universities	119	$1,770,688	$14,880	9 of 11 Institutions
Community Colleges	127	$874,180	$6,883	34 of 40 institutions
Private, Nonprofit Institutions	166	$3,084,271	$18,580	8 of 11 institutions
TOTAL	**412**	**$5,729,139**	**$13,906**	**51 of 62 institutions**

Source: ISAC Report to the Consortium

Recipient Demographics

Over 46% of AY 2022 scholarship recipients are persons of color. Of all scholarship recipients, 22% identified as Black or African American, 18% Hispanic/Latino/Latina, 2% Asian, and 4% more than one race/ethnicity. Forty-three percent of AY 2022 scholarship recipients were White. Figures 6 and 7 provide a comparison to workforce members in licensed child care centers in calendar year 2020. Recipient data looks relatively similar, with lower rates by white workforce members.

Figure 6: Race and Ethnicity of ECACE Scholarship Recipients in AY 2022

More than One, 4%
Asian 2%
Unknown 10%
White 43%
Latino 18%
African American 22%
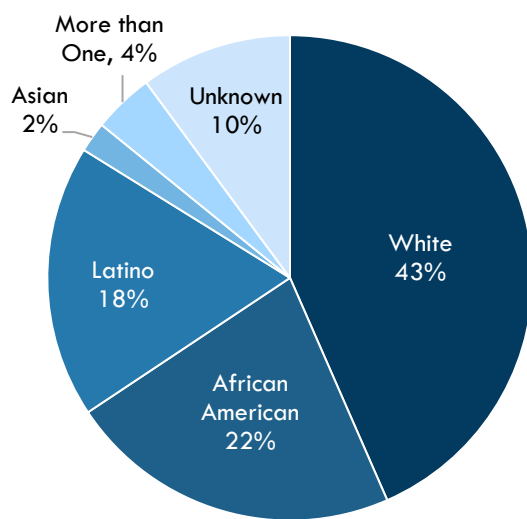
Source: ISAC, 2022

Figure 7: Race and Ethnicity of Licensed ECEC Center Staff, 2020
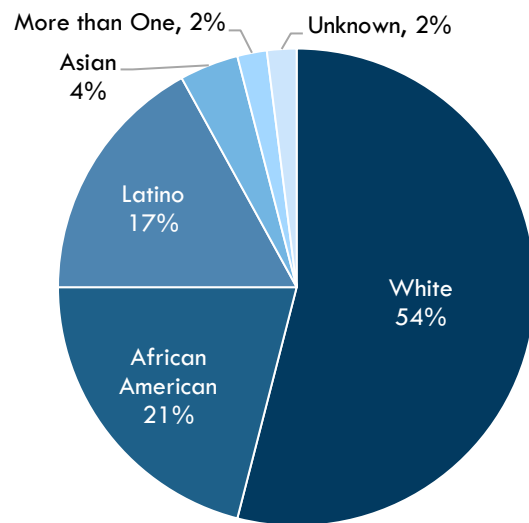
More than One, 2%
Unknown, 2%
Asian 4%
Latino 17%
White 54%
African American 21%

Source: Whitehead, J. (2021). Illinois' Early Childhood Workforce 2020 Report. Bloomington, IL: INCCRRA.

Seventy-five percent of scholarship students have an expected family contribution (EFC) of under $10,000, indicating that the scholarship is reaching students with the greatest financial need. EFC is calculated by the

Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and reflects how much the student and their family would be expected to contribute to the student's education based on the student's or family's income, assets, and benefits. A lower EFC indicates greater financial need. The remaining scholarship recipients had an EFC of $10,000-$19,999 (11%), $20,000-$29,999 (6%), and $30,000 or more (8%).

ECACE Scholarship recipients are older than traditional college students, with approximately 45% of ECACE Scholarship students being older than 30.[24] In 2019, less than 15% of undergraduate students nationally were over age 30. However, ECACE scholarship recipients tend to be somewhat younger than the licensed ECEC workforce in Illinois. This is not surprising, as data from a 2020 Workforce Report demonstrates that older workforce members are much more likely to have a degree than younger members.

Approximately 38% of ECACE recipients are under the age of 25; whereas, as of 2020, only 22% of directors, teachers, and assistants were under 25 years of age.[25]

Geographical and Institutional Breakdown

There was quite a bit of variation in scholarship uptake across the state and institutions, which is likely due to this being a "soft launch" year for the scholarship. We know that several things likely impacted scholarship usage in AY 2022 – current enrollment of the incumbent workforce, knowledge of those currently enrolled about the scholarship, the timing of the opening of the scholarship application (November) and awards (beginning in March), and other available sources of funding that students were already receiving.

Regarding geographical breakdown, during this soft launch year (AY 2022) 41% of recipients were from the collar county area, 20% from Chicago, and 39% from all other areas of the state. Nearly half of all recipients (49%), and about 62% of all funds disbursed were at three four-year institutions: National Louis University, Northern Illinois University, and Illinois State University. Scholarships were awarded at 9 of the 11 public universities in the Consortium. Seventy-one percent of the funds distributed and 61% of the awards made to students at public universities were at two institutions: Northern Illinois University ($703,000 and 50 recipients) and Illinois State University ($556,000 and 23 recipients). There were fewer than 10 recipients at each of the other seven public universities with scholarship students.

Scholarships were awarded at 34 of the 40 community colleges in the Consortium. Eight community colleges had more than five recipients each, representing 45% of community college recipients and 37% of the funds distributed by community colleges. The breakdown is as follows: Joliet Junior College (12 recipients), John A. Logan College (eight recipients), Heartland Community College (seven recipients), College of DuPage, Elgin Community College, Kankakee Community College, Lewis and Clark Community College, and Southwestern Community College (six recipients each).

Eight of the 11 private, nonprofit institutions in the Consortium awarded scholarships to their students. Seventy-five percent of the funds were distributed, and 77% of the awards were made to students at private, nonprofit institutions at one school: National Louis University ($2.3 million and 128 recipients). Another $308,000 went to 15 recipients at Lewis University and $231,000 to eight at Olivet Nazarene University. Five or fewer recipients were at the other five private nonprofit institutions with scholarship students.

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[24] Fifteen percent of undergraduate students were over 25 years of age, and 5% were over 35 years of age. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Spring 2020, Fall Enrollment component. See Digest of Education Statistics 2021, table 303.50. Fall 2019 data. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/csb/postsecondary-students

[25] Whitehead, J. (2021). Illinois' Early Childhood Workforce 2020 Report. Bloomington, IL: INCCRRA. This data is for teachers, assistant teachers, and directors in licensed child care settings. Unfortunately, the age categories available for the licensed workforce are not exactly aligned to the scholarship data.

Scholarship Applications

Of the 905 ECACE Scholarship applicants received by ISAC during AY 2022, 46% resulted in awards, 8% were considered ineligible, and 19% were incomplete. The top reasons applications were deemed incomplete were verification form missing (56%) and FAFSA missing (35%). Those with incomplete applications were notified and encouraged to complete their applications. The following were the top reasons applicants were considered ineligible:

- Working in an ineligible position (35%);
- Not enrolling in a participating school (33%); and
- Not being an undergraduate student (28%).

The other 27% of students were pre-approved for the scholarship by ISAC but not deemed eligible by Consortium institutions for a variety of reasons. Some students applied but did not enroll or were not enrolled in an eligible program. Anecdotally, navigators and institutions reported that workforce members applied for a scholarship not realizing that the application was specific to AY 2022.

Every new initiative requires changes to processes, as implementation highlights strengths and opportunities for improvement. ISAC, IBHE, and ICCB have worked together to address challenges related to ECACE Scholarship processes and to continuously improve the process to access ECACE funding. For example, institutions wanted to know the students who had applied for the scholarship once their applications were processed by ISAC. ISAC created a new process by which institutions could see which students have applied and their application eligibility status prior to being prequalified for funding. This allowed mentors and others at institutions to work with students with incomplete or ineligible applications. Institutions and navigators have reported challenges related to the time it takes for students and institutions to receive payment, due to the extensive process required to access federal funds through another state agency. Institutions have been implementing thoughtful approaches to supporting students while they are waiting for their scholarships, such as extending the time for tuition payment to be made and providing credits at the bookstore so students can access books and other course materials when classes begin.

Second-Year Scholarship Data: AY 2023 through end of December 2022

The ECACE Scholarship is now in its second year, and as of December 31, 2022, there were already more applications and scholarships than in all of AY 2022. At that time, there were 1,026 scholarship recipients, an increase of 149% over the first year of the program. A total of $7,068,593 was awarded, about $1.4 million more than AY 2022. These numbers reflect only a portion of fall 2022 students, as students' applications continue to be processed and awards continue to be made through spring 2023. Like AY 2022, 75% of recipients have an EFC of less than $10,000. For another year, it appears the scholarship is reaching students with the greatest financial need.

To expand the scope of the scholarship and reach more students, eligibility will be expanded in AY 2024. Additional information will be provided in upcoming reports.

Debt Relief

During the higher education strategic planning process which led to the ECACE, institutions and advocates in the Subgroup of the Early Childhood Workforce strongly recommended providing funding to students with outstanding debt to eliminate barriers to accessing higher education. In Illinois, as in many states, the ECEC workforce has historically faced challenges accessing transcripts and reenrolling at a former institution due to financial holds on their accounts. Significant work has been done to address outstanding debt for the incumbent workforce in Illinois, but the working group believed this problem was not fully addressed.

All Consortium institutions were provided with grant funding to address debt for prospective students. Between July 1, 2022, and December 31, 2022 – the first term in which institutions had funding – 13 institutions reported

providing debt relief to 87 students. Of the 87 students, 64 were from 4 institutions – National Louis University, John A. Logan College, South Suburban College, and Waubonsee Community College. Forty-one institutions had yet to pay for student debt relief.[26]

State agencies and institutions have been working to determine why, in the first term, more students did not take advantage of these funds and potential ways to address debt relief. Through a working group and other conversations, institutions mentioned various factors that may have impacted this. Some reported they had yet to encounter students unable to enroll due to debt and wondered if students with debt would even choose to seek out higher education if they believed debt would prevent their access. Other institutions mentioned recently using different funding sources to address debt throughout the institution and wondered whether there was significant remaining demand for funds. Institutions also said that challenges related to old debt where accounts had gone to collections or when students needed more information about how much was owed caused delays in the process.

Some institutions are working on policies and procedures to address the difficulty of paying external institutions. Every institution has a different method for repayment, and neither paying nor receiving institutions are used to working with someone other than students to pay the prior debt. This can require working with multiple departments within institutions. The working group is tackling potential ways to address challenges, which includes providing talking points for mentors and navigators, and others to intentionally ask about outstanding debt, distributing information about the availability of funds and the process for students to access funds to pertinent institutional departments, ensuring the mentor knows where to send students to access funds, and incorporating information about the funds and who to contact in student materials.

ACADEMIC AND HOLISTIC SUPPORTS

Consortium institutions provide academic and holistic support, or wraparound services, to ensure that workforce members can acquire needed skills to be successful in academic and workplace settings and to persist and complete credentials and degrees. As nontraditional students, members of the ECEC workforce may face challenges returning to school. As mentioned, the ECEC workforce comprises primarily women, often balancing full-time employment, family needs, and other responsibilities. These working adults may have been out of school for long periods and need to refresh skills such as academic writing, math, and time management. Additionally, a significant percentage of the workforce speaks a primary language other than English, particularly those working in the City of Chicago, Suburban Cook County, and in family child care settings, and may need support in their primary language.[27] The section below provides an overview of work to provide academic and holistic supports to students through December 31, 2022.

Mentors

As of December 31, 2022, there were 105 individuals serving as mentors or in related positions at Consortium institutions, and every Consortium institution had at least one person serving in this role. Mentors provide critical student support and funds are earmarked for this purpose are included in each Consortium institution's ECACE grant.[28] Mentors are envisioned as a central point for students to seek help within the complex structures of an institution. An ideal mentor is responsive and proactive, initiating intentional contact with students to ensure that they stay on track and receive timely, consistent support from enrollment to graduation. Consortium institutions provide support in a variety of settings and modalities. For instance, Harper College's mentors are available virtually and in person during the day and evening. Some mentors at Western Illinois University speak multiple languages to support non-native English speakers.

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[26] Seven community colleges did not provide this information in time to include in the report.
[27] Whitehead, J. (2021). Illinois' Early Childhood Workforce 2020 Report. Bloomington, IL: INCCRRA, p. 11
[28] For the purposes of this report, we are using the term mentors. However, some institutions refer to those in these support roles as coaches, success coaches, or other titles.

A mentor's core responsibilities include assisting students in navigating institution processes; intentional tracking and support for students' progress; providing academic direction (and, in some cases, advising); connecting or providing students with resources, outreach, communications, and relationship building, including partnerships with ECACE navigators. Institutions were provided a general job description for mentors, but they were encouraged to tailor their mentors' work to fit the needs and context of their institution. Institutions were asked to devote at least one person with no less than 0.5 FTE dedicated to this role so that mentors can be accessible to students, maintain relationships across the institution, and gain the necessary knowledge and skills to perform this critical role.

> *When reflecting on what meaningful changes ECACE has made at their institution, one representative of an institution noted that mentors have been "the biggest bright spot."*

To fill these roles, many institutions have hired new employees, while others have dedicated the time of existing staff and faculty for mentoring roles. Some institutions have found success in leveraging existing staff and faculty members' connections within the institution, especially when funding delays and hiring difficulties would have otherwise left vacancies for this position. When reflecting on what meaningful changes ECACE has made at their institution, one representative of an institution noted that mentors have been "the biggest bright spot." Another said they have had amazing success with our mentors. These individuals have made a world of difference with our students! Another said the success of the Consortium begins with the ECACE Scholarship and the requirement for institutions to hire mentors.

Other Institutional Academic and Holistic Supports

In addition, institutions are providing a variety of academic and holistic supports often organized and supported by mentors. To ensure that students succeed in their coursework, institutions provide materials such as loaner laptops, wi-fi hot spots, books, and academic tutoring. Two institutions, Greenville University and Kaskaskia College, have designed and set aside study stations. DePaul University, Illinois State University, and University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign offer academic workshops. Olivet Nazarene University uses writing tutors to support academic writing, necessary for success in higher education and to complete the state's performance-based assessment. The College of DuPage and St. Augustine College offer courses in Spanish to further reduce linguistic barriers.

Students seeking an Illinois Professional Educator License (PEL) and Early Childhood Education Endorsement must first pass the Early Childhood Education content test. Across the state, many early childhood students struggle to pass the content test on the first attempt. The pass rate for the first attempt was 52% for the 2020–2021 year.[29] Test preparation and access to practice tests is being provided by many universities, including Eastern Illinois University, Greenville University, National Louis University, Northeastern Illinois University, Northern Illinois University, Olivet Nazarene University, Roosevelt University, and Southern Illinois University Carbondale, to ensure students have both knowledge and test-taking skills to be successful. In addition, some institutions such as Eastern Illinois University pay for the cost of the content tests to help address financial barriers.

Numerous institutions use cohort models where a group of early childhood students progress their program together. According to a report by INCCRRA, cohort programs may provide social support to which non-traditional learners are particularly responsive. Cohorts may foster a sense of community and may also include features such as coaching, mentoring, and funding assistance. [30] One example of the cohort model is Northern Illinois University's (NIU) Elgin Community College (ECC) cohort. Students from Elgin's U-46 school district take courses together in an area that is geographically convenient to them. NIU uses specific course instructors for the ECC cohort and provides course sections for their enrollment only.

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[29] Illinois State Board of Education. Initial and Cumulative Examinee Performance on the Test of Academic Proficiency and Content-Area Tests by Ethnicity: Annual and All Years; First time pass rates on the early childhood education content test in AY 2021 was 52% overall, 31% for African American and 42% for Latinx test takers. https://www.isbe.net/Documents/Pass-Rates-2020-2021.pdf
[30] INCCRRA (2019). Higher Education Cohorts. https://www.ilgateways.com/docman-docs/professional-development/higher-education-programs/ece-toolbox/1956-higher-education-cohort/file

Schools with entirely online courses often supplement their programs by having professional development activities and online sessions for students to come together. For example, several institutions offer an online café, where students can come and ask questions or talk with peers. Other institutions offer remote or in-person sessions such as tutoring, discussion groups, and game nights. These events help students stay engaged while in a virtual environment. To support online learning and support, Southwestern Illinois College and others use grant funds to purchase technology such as equipment to film their online courses and/or student teaching practices and laptops for student use.

Many others offer opportunities to help workforce members build "soft skills" needed to be successful in higher education. These include studying, time management, mental health awareness, motivation, and financial literacy. College of DuPage helps with study skills, time management, and organizing the work and time into attainable chunks over the semester. Governors State hosts monthly speakers to talk about things like stress management, student teaching expectations, and diversity, equity, and inclusion.

To help students develop a broader awareness of the profession, some institutions are providing access to professional development opportunities like speakers, conferences, newsletters, memberships to professional organizations, and other materials and resources. For example, Joliet Junior College provides their students with publications like the NAEYC Developmentally Appropriate Practice book, the Illinois Early Learning Guidelines, and the Illinois Early Learning and Development Standards. Similarly, Eastern Illinois University, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, and University of Illinois Chicago offer professional development workshops.

HIGHER EDUCATION NAVIGATORS

From June through December 2022, ECACE Higher Education Navigators (navigators) conducted intensive outreach and technical assistance to support access to higher education. This included sending nearly 50,000 (49,732) emails, hosting over 700 (732) information sessions, and holding 1,643 virtual and in person meetings to engage and support workforce members.

Navigators occupy an important community-facing role designed to recruit and connect incumbent ECEC workforce members to Consortium institutions. Navigators build relationships in communities, engage with workforce members and employers, and provide personalized assistance to help workforce members access higher education to advance their careers. The impact of the role they play to support workforce members to navigate complex higher education and financial aid systems and to support them in developing the confidence needed to go to college cannot be understated. Each of the 16 IDHS Service Delivery Areas (SDAs) is supported by one to nine navigators, depending on the SDA's workforce population. More than 30 navigators are employed within regionally based CCR&Rs in each SDA to leverage the CCR&R's relationships with state agencies and local communities. The sections below provide information about the planning and launch of the ECACE Higher Education Navigator Program and the work of the navigators through December 31, 2022.

Like many areas of the ECACE initiative, a cross-agency working group developed and continues to guide the navigators' work. In fall 2021, the Navigator Working Group planned for this new position and outlined the role, duties, reporting requirements, and training needs. CCR&Rs began hiring navigators in January 2022, and 25 were employed by the end of June that same year. Early in 2022, IBHE took responsibility for administering the training and support of the navigators, with ongoing guidance and feedback from the Navigator Working Group. From March to December 2022, IBHE organized and implemented over 20 hours of professional development for navigators, which included ten hours of formal training and ten hours of facilitated Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings. Ongoing PLC meetings allow navigators to exchange and develop best practices and share problems of practice for group discussion. IBHE also supports the navigators with monthly coaching and support sessions. In addition, as part of the onboarding process, IBHE facilitated eight sessions to connect navigators with institutions, which included institution presentations and time for discussion.

Field Outreach

Navigators' outreach responsibilities include engaging with workforce members and sharing information about opportunities to support access to higher education. From June through December 2022, navigators received and responded to over 2,000 interest forms completed by workforce members. The interest form was hosted by INCCRRA and posted on various websites, including those of INCCRRA, ISAC, and ECACE. To support broad outreach, the State developed an electronic interest form for workforce members to request to engage with a navigator. Inquiries are shared with navigators who respond to and track follow-up activities for each contact they receive. To promote navigators and to distribute the interest form, INCCRRA sent multiple mass emails that reached over 60,000 Gateways Registry members.

From June 2022 through December 2022, 732 information sessions, including on-site presentations to staff at child care centers, virtual webinars, tables and booths at college and career fairs, presentations at local advisory committees, and more were held by navigators across the state.[31] Navigators also held 497 meetings with higher education institutions to develop relationships and gather informational and promotional materials for the ECEC workforce. For example, several navigators partnered with community colleges to recruit for and host open houses on campus; navigators assisted workforce members with applications at these events while institutional staff overviewed the academic programs.

Table 8: Navigator Outreach and Partnership Activities, June–December 2022

Activity	Number
Information sessions	732
Meetings with higher education	497
Interest forms received	2,058
Follow-ups with interested workforce members	7,140
Outreach emails	31,961

Source: Navigator Reports June 2022–December 2022

In addition to those in licensed center settings, navigators reached out to an estimated 8,000 family child care providers, which can be a more difficult population to reach when providers are based out of their homes and may not be connected to other providers' networks. Navigators also visited many public-school districts with teaching assistants in preschool and kindergarten classrooms, and high schools with graduating seniors looking to join the ECEC field.

Navigators support workforce members by linking them to resources and building confidence. For example, one navigator helped a workforce member who said that she has always wanted to go back to school but was uncertain she could manage the academic challenges. The navigator was able to help find her best fit institution that had recently hired two tutors. This plus the scholarship provided the incentive the student needed to enroll.

Technical Assistance

From June to December 2022, navigators provided personalized technical assistance to workforce members to complete the necessary steps to attend a higher education institution, which included 4,667 phone calls, 17,762 emails, and 1,643 virtual (745) and in-person (898) meetings. Navigators helped workforce members to find and apply to the right institution, complete the FAFSA and ECACE Scholarship applications, and connect with institutional resources, including mentors. Many navigators provided technical assistance when, where, and how workforce members needed it, including through on-site information sessions, meetings in coffee shops, through evening phone calls, and via text messaging.

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[31] Navigators began providing monthly reports to IDHS in AY 2023. Social media outreach, while not captured for this report, was another outreach strategy used by navigators.

Table 9: Navigator Technical Assistance, June – December 2022

Activity	Number
Phone calls	4,667
Emails	17,762
In-person meetings	898
Virtual meetings	745

Students have developed strong trust and relationships with navigators. For example, one navigator was able to help a workforce member find nontraditional resources to reenroll. Twelve credits short of a degree, a student was blocked from enrolling due to outstanding debt. The navigator supported her efforts to navigate the institution, get on a payment plan, and use institutional debt relief funding to finish her degree. Even after being connected with the institution, the workforce member asked to continue regular check-ins with the navigator, who had become a trusted member in her support system.

Responsiveness to Employers

During their first year, navigators employed a variety of strategies to engage and be responsive to the needs of employers, including hosting frequent sessions at child care centers to share ECACE opportunities with workforce members. Navigators worked with employers to schedule visits at convenient times, such as when employers could find classroom coverage or during scheduled staff meetings.

While many employers welcomed the work with navigators, some employers were reluctant to connect staff with navigators and other ECACE resources. Particularly for understaffed centers, administrators and staff were often busy and may not have had time for a navigator visit. Some employers expressed concern that staff may need to reduce working hours to pursue higher education or may pursue other, higher-paying job opportunities once they have earned additional credentials or degrees. In these cases, navigators were sometimes able to, over time, develop trusting relationships with employers, many of whom became more supportive of the upskilling of their staff.

> *"…the use of navigators to reach out to the incumbent workforce and the financial support has really assisted individuals to move forward in their education."*
>
> *— An Institutional Partner*

One institution reported, the use of navigators to reach out to the incumbent workforce and the financial support has really assisted individuals to move forward in their education."

As expected with a start-up initiative, it took time for navigators – all in newly created positions – to become proficient in their role. The role of the navigator is quite complex, requiring knowledge and skills ranging from completing the FAFSA to understanding the culture and context of child care providers and workforce members. Engaging workforce members, supporting them in applying for the scholarship, and connecting them to a higher education institution was the focus of their initial training. In the early work of the Consortium some navigators struggled to balance meeting the demands of engaging the ECEC workforce and building relationships with higher education institutions. Additional training and monthly professional learning groups focused on multiple strategies to build these relationships with individual institutions to highlight the unique opportunity and supports that each offers students.

Additionally, the Consortium partners have grappled with the role of the navigators. Though part of the navigator's role is pairing the workforce with higher education, their role is not to recruit for any particular institution. The navigators provide coaching and technical assistance and support individual student choice in enrollment. As institutions are working toward individual and collective state enrollment goals, this tension was something that was not always comfortable.

To meet the goals for engaging the workforce, institutions will need to engage in robust outreach efforts to welcome students and assure them that programs are designed to support working adults. Holding events to reach the incumbent workforce and assist with admissions activities, like FAFSA and scholarship applications, allows interested individuals to engage with ECACE schools before acceptance. Engaging with employers and ensuring programs are responsive to their needs and the needs of students creates lasting partnerships and a pipeline of incumbent workers to higher education.

OUTREACH

Between July and December 2022, ECACE institutions reported just under 500 events to recruit students and connections with over 1,000 employers.[32] These outreach efforts included social media and email campaigns, direct mail marketing, recruitment fairs, and other creative efforts. Kishwaukee College and John A. Logan created videos that were posted on social media, and University of Illinois Urbana Champaign launched an aggressive social media and direct mail market campaign. Most institutions hosted open houses and in-person and virtual sessions with area child care centers and community organizations. For example, Highland Community College hosted a student fair at their local YMCA, where they provided a "one-stop shop" for information, enrollment, mentoring, and more. John Wood College held a kickoff summit with local child care directors and CCRRs to share information about initiatives at their college. Some institutions, such as Danville Area Community College, Sauk Valley Community College, and Rockford University, have forged relationships with local school districts and regional offices of education to engage paraprofessionals who may be interested in becoming a teacher.

Institutions are finding ways for their early childhood faculty and staff to participate in more events to reach the incumbent workforce, promote scholarships, and make articulation agreements. Across Illinois, institutional staff worked to make meaningful connections between institutions, such as with directors of transfer centers and early childhood program staff at other community colleges and universities. Universities partner with community colleges and regional navigators when they hold open houses and fairs, presenting opportunities for incumbent workers to further their education beyond the associate degree. For example, Chicago State University attended open houses hosted by Prairie State College and Parkland College to engage students. McHenry County College partnered with Northern Illinois University to help promote their new online cohort using joint marketing materials.

Institutions are also attending early childhood conferences like the Illinois Association for the Education of Young Children (ILAEYC) and the Region V Head Start Conference to present information at resource booths and to present on their Consortium work. Collectively, the public Consortium member universities held a "Grow Your Career in Early Childhood" virtual early childhood fair. Additional efforts by institutions include meeting with local directors and school superintendents, attending local early childhood collaboration meetings, and participating in interviews with local media to market the ECACE Scholarship and institutional programs. Some institutions partnered with local employers to allow students experiencing unemployment to access work in a child care facility and to qualify for the ECACE Scholarship.

WORKFORCE MEMBER PARTICIPATION

More than 7,800 participants joined Consortium outreach events in the first two quarters of AY 2022. Incumbent worker participation has been strong at college open houses and fairs and seems to increase when there are opportunities for support in completing the FAFSA and ECACE Scholarship applications. There has also been robust participation by the incumbent workforce in information sessions regarding the ECACE Scholarship and child care and preschool programs. For example, because of an information session at the College of Lake

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[32] Data was not collected prior to July 2022, and was not collected for all institutions.

County Community College, 26 students were accepted into their new early childhood program taught in Spanish, and more applicants were added to a waiting list.

ENGAGING AND BEING RESPONSIVE TO EMPLOYERS

The Act focuses heavily on the importance of higher education institutions engaging with and being responsive to the needs of the workforce and employers. Partnering with local employers can provide the guidance needed to aid institutions in developing programs that prepare candidates well for employment. Additionally, connections with employers create opportunities for students to complete student teaching at their place of work. As of December 31, 2022, 67% of four-year institutions reported they allow students to complete some or all the student teaching requirements this way. Some institutions partner with local school districts to meet field placement and student teaching requirements. This type of partnership often allows teachers to connect with university faculty to provide feedback and improve the experience for future students.

Some institutions are working with providers to establish cohorts for their staff, such as the newly formed partnership between City Colleges of Chicago (CCC) and It Takes a Village (ITAV) that is currently focusing on both providing youth who are interested in starting a career in early childhood education with the path to do so and upskilling current teachers at their Centers. ITAV's workforce members will earn their CDA and obtain college credit on a pathway that leads to a Gateways Level 2 Credential, with many teachers continuing on to earn their Level 4 and beyond.[33] This cohort's students are provided wraparound support at ITAV and CCC, including program counselors, registration and financing assistance, coaches, and a dedicated learning environment. Students take courses on-site at one of ITAV's central locations or a convenient CCC campus, and instruction is meant to complement students' work experiences. ITAV and CCC maintain consistent communication to ensure students get the support they need to persist.

Partnering with area providers is one way that institutions such as Rockford University, Highland Community College, Lewis University, and Lake Land College have assisted employers in filling their open positions. This practice benefits employers, allowing them to be fully staffed, and the students who need experience working to qualify for the ECACE Scholarship.

Across the state, institutions made connections within their communities to support and engage providers. Some institutions, like Waubonsee Community College and Blackburn College, reported engaging with or sitting on Illinois' newly formed regional Birth to Five councils to coordinate, collaborate, and host information sessions to share material with local providers in the CCR&R system. One institution mentioned that their outreach efforts brought former workforce members back into the field by leveraging the scholarship to eventually seek higher-level positions.

Another successful outreach method has been meeting the incumbent workforce at their worksites. Many institutions, such as Heartland College, mentioned that this was a successful way to build relationships with not only a potential student but the broader program as well. The ECACE Project Coordinator at the College of DuPage visits child care centers weekly during employee break times to answer questions. She also takes grant-funded laptops to assist interested students in applying for scholarships and college.

Many institutions have advisory boards on which employers sit to provide guidance on program implementation.[34] For example, all community college programs receiving Carl Perkins funds, for which all early childhood AAS programs are eligible, are required to have a Program Advisory Committee that includes industry representation. This requirement is also a part of the program approval process for ICCB. Likewise, some four-year institutions have advisory committees as well, including National Louis University and University of Illinois Chicago, who include providers, advocates, and other industry experts on their committees.

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[33] As mentioned earlier, Gateways Credentials are stackable. The Level 2 is generally aligned with a basic community college certificate and will allow many to work in a licensed center as an assistant teacher. The Level 4 reflects acquisition of an associate degree.
[34] https://icsps.illinoisstate.edu/images/CTE/Advisory-Committee-Guidebook-Updated.pdf

Cost may be a major barrier for students beginning or continuing their education. Because of this, Section 30 of the Act requires reporting on "tuition rates charged, and net prices paid, reported as including and excluding student loans, by enrolled members of the incumbent workforce." State agencies believe these requirements are intended to better understand the out-of-pocket costs, including but not limited to tuition and fees, that the incumbent ECEC workforce members face and the degree to which they may be accumulating debt to support their education. In AY 2022, the Consortium used ECACE Scholarship students as a proxy for incumbent workers due to challenges in identifying the incumbent workforce at the institutional level.[35] To meet reporting requirements, agencies used information collected from colleges and universities via surveys, supplemented with data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). However, due to issues with the survey data collection and the timing of the ECACE scholarship launch and awards in its initial year, the data on tuition, net price, and student loans was difficult to interpret. For example, Consortium institutions reported on the percentage of students with federal loans but not the total number of students, making aggregation challenging. Additionally, students took out loans for the fall and spring semesters before the scholarship was awarded, and, according to one institution, at least some of these students did not choose to repackage their loans. This is particularly puzzling since, at public institutions, the scholarship covers the full cost of attendance.

Despite challenges with the data, most members of the incumbent workforce receiving the ECACE Scholarship appear to have minimal out-of-pocket costs, and most did not take out federal student loans for AY 2022. The ECACE Scholarship seems to be a success in breaking down cost barriers by covering most scholarship recipients' full cost of attendance. Table 10 shows the differences in average tuition and fees and cost of attendance by sector for Consortium member institutions. As designed, the ECACE Scholarship should leave community college and public university students with no out-of-pocket costs.

At private institutions, the scholarship is capped at the amount of the cost of attendance for full-time students at the most expensive public four-year institution. In AY 2022, this was approximately $33,000 at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. Students at these institutions may have a gap between their scholarship funding and COA, particularly if they are enrolled full-time. Five of the 10 private, nonprofit institutions have tuition rates lower than the scholarship cap, and 2 of 10 have a cost of attendance lower than the cap.[36] Since many scholarship students (45%) attend only part-time, the scholarship may cover all tuition and fees and cost of attendance for many students attending private institutions. Additionally, some institutions reported supplementing scholarship funding with institutional grants, tuition discounts, and alternative scholarships.

Table 10: Consortium Institutions' Average Cost for Full-Time Students, by Sector, AY 2022

	Average Tuition & Fees for Full-Time Students	Average Cost of Attendance for Full-Time Students**
Community Colleges	$4,337.28	$17,215
Public Universities	$13,391.91	$28,116
Private, Nonprofit Institutions	$29,195.60	$43,823

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), [2021-2022].

***Data in the table represent cost of attendance for full-time students living off campus, without family, in-district/in-state, as this best reflects the ECEC workforce members participating in the scholarship.*

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[35] This is an interim process used for AY 2022 while institutions operationalize internal tracking of their incumbent workforce students.
[36] U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), [2021-2022].

Largely, data collected show that most scholarship students (at least 94%) did not take out federal loans for AY 2022.[37] Scholarship students at eight institutions, only two of which were private, took out federal student loans, but the reasons for accepting and not returning loans are unclear. As mentioned, since scholarship awards were made mid-to-late spring 2022, students with loans needed to work with institutions' financial aid offices to repackage their awards and reverse any loans for the fall and spring semesters. One institution reported that some students took out loans before the scholarship was awarded in March 2022 and did not return the loan money after they received it. Considering that the scholarship covers up to the full cost of attendance at most institutions, this would indicate that the initial year of data collection may not be a good indicator of typical out-of-pocket expenses incurred by scholarship students and the ECEC incumbent workforce.

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[37] At most 6% (12) scholarship students took out and did not return loans in AY 2022. We believe the number is less, but due to challenges with the data, this cannot be verified.

The ECACE Act requires the Consortium to report on enrollment, persistence, and completion of the early childhood workforce at Consortium institutions. In addition, the Consortium is charged with reporting on some background information about the early childhood workforce, including years worked and type of employer. Information in this section includes full Consortium enrollment comparisons from AY 2020 to AY 2022. In addition, disaggregated information is provided for community colleges and four-year Consortium public and private institutions.

It should be noted that much of what was being measured and reported occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic resulted in lower undergraduate enrollments and drastically altered program delivery models. The pandemic heightened issues for many students, ranging from fiscal to technological to emotional, and impacted enrollment statewide. The ECEC workforce, comprised largely of women – many of whom are women of color, continued to work during the pandemic to support parents who needed to work. The full impact of this on higher education enrollment patterns cannot be determined.

Also, fall and spring enrollment in AY 2022 was not yet impacted by the ECACE Scholarship, which was first made available in spring 2022 and included provisions for scholarship funds to be awarded inclusive of the fall 2021 academic term. Additionally, institutions had yet to receive grant funding, and the focus of recruiting was largely for AY 2023. Thus, it is unclear the degree to which the changes in enrollment can be attributed to the work of the Consortium.

METHODOLOGY

This first ECACE report focuses on the change in enrollment of incumbent members of the ECEC workforce at ECACE member institutions in early childhood programs from the baseline year of 2020 to the first year in which the ECACE Consortium was established, which was 2022. To report on incumbent workforce member enrollment, IBHE and ICCB implemented an innovative cross-agency data matching project, which included data from three state agencies – IBHE, ICCB, and ISAC – and the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (INCCRRA). The data matching project included early childhood enrollment and completion information at the student level derived from IBHE's Illinois Higher Education Information System and ICCB's Centralized Data System. It also included ECACE scholarship information on both application and receipt at the student level from the Illinois Student Assistance Commission and Gateways to Opportunity employment information at the individual level from INCCRRA. Matching data with INCCRRA allowed the Consortium to determine which workforce members have been employed in licensed child care center settings. For this first report, the Consortium was not able to access ISBE data, which would enable the Consortium to include information on enrollment of the incumbent workforce in a school/district setting. There are plans to include additional information from ISBE on ECEC paraprofessionals working in school district settings in future reports.

Incumbency status was measured using the Illinois Gateways to Opportunity Registry (Gateways Registry) managed by INCCRRA. Incumbency status included the same position types that were used in determining ECACE scholarship eligibility (See Appendix B). The operational definitions used in the report aligned with the operational definitions used to determine ECACE scholarship eligibility, as incumbency status was measured as currently working or having worked in an early childhood setting, as determined by the Gateways Registry.

Enrollment Patterns for the ECEC Workforce Across All Consortium Member Institutions

All enrolled incumbent members of the ECEC workforce are included in the reporting – newly enrolled students and students who have been previously enrolled and persisted. However, as noted above, the emphasis of the report is on the difference in total enrollment between the baseline year of AY 2020 and the most recent academic year of A22 to determine the potential change after the ECACE Consortium was established.

Future iterations of the report will include information on retention, persistence, and completion. This information was not included in the first report, as the time horizon for measuring retention, persistence, and completion after the Consortium was established was limited, and most of the core work of the Consortium, including the scholarship distribution occurred in the spring of AY 2022. Also, future iterations of the report will include additional information on community college transfer students who enroll at bachelor's granting institutions.

Key findings include the following.
- The number of enrolled incumbent members of the ECEC workforce across all ECACE member institutions grew by 17.9% from AY 2020 to AY 2022. This represented nearly 500 additional enrolled students.
- The vast majority of incumbents continued to be enrolled in bachelor's degree and applied associate (i.e., AAS) programs.
- Most of the incumbent enrollment growth occurred among freshmen and juniors, and there were slightly fewer incumbent seniors enrolled across ECACE member institutions.
- The number and proportion of enrolled incumbent members of the ECEC workforce are both expected to increase in AY 2023.
- More low-income incumbent members of the ECEC workforce were enrolled in the first year of the Consortium than in AY 2020, but they represented a slightly smaller proportion of all enrolled incumbents.
- In terms of age, all the enrollment growth occurred with younger members of the incumbent ECEC workforce. Because of this, the distribution shifted substantially and went from being comprised of two-thirds of adult learners aged 25 and older (67.2%) during the baseline year to only 57.2% the first year of the Consortium.
- White (+27.8%), Latino (+16.7%), and African American (+9.4%) incumbent enrollments all grew from the baseline year with some variation in growth across groups, resulting in a slight change in the race/ethnicity distribution.
- In both the baseline year and the first year of the Consortium, nearly all the enrolled incumbent members of the early childhood workforce were Illinois residents (nearly 99% in both years).
- Similarly, nearly all enrolled incumbent members of the ECEC workforce were female (roughly 98% in both years).

As illustrated in Figure 8, there were nearly 500 additional incumbent members of the ECEC workforce enrolled at ECACE member institutions when comparing the baseline year to the first year of the Consortium. This represented an increase of 17.9%.

Figure 8: Overall Enrollment of Incumbent Members of the ECEC Workforce for All ECACE Member Institutions



Change: +17.9% (+487)

AY 2020: 2,727
AY 2022: 3,214
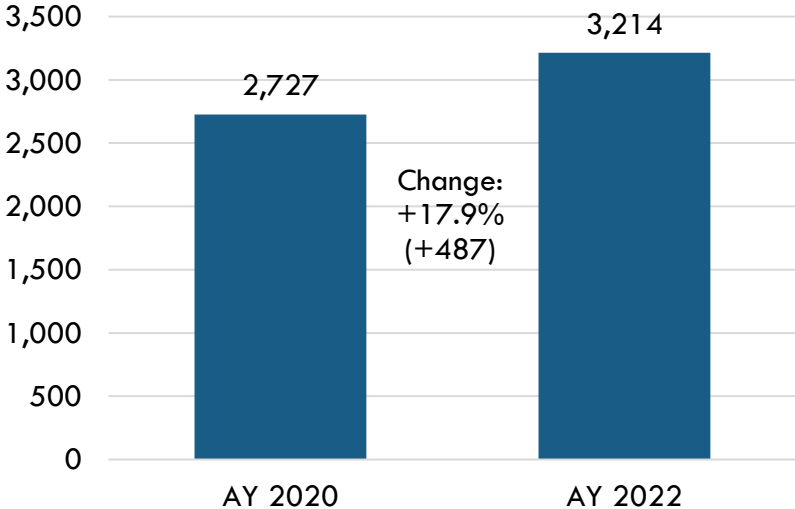
As shown in Figure 9, there was incumbent enrollment growth across all program levels, but the growth was larger in some program levels than others. Enrollment growth in applied associate programs was comparatively small at 3.8% but still represented an additional 45 students. Proportional growth in associate programs outside of applied associate programs was the largest at 51.2% and represented an additional 66 students. Bachelor's level programs experienced the largest headcount growth as the 27.2% equated to an additional 292 incumbent members of the early childhood workforce enrolled. Applied associate and bachelor's degree programs represented the vast majority of enrollments of incumbent members of the ECEC workforce in both the baseline year and the first year of the ECACE Consortium.

Figure 9: Enrollment of Incumbent Members of the ECEC Workforce by Program Level
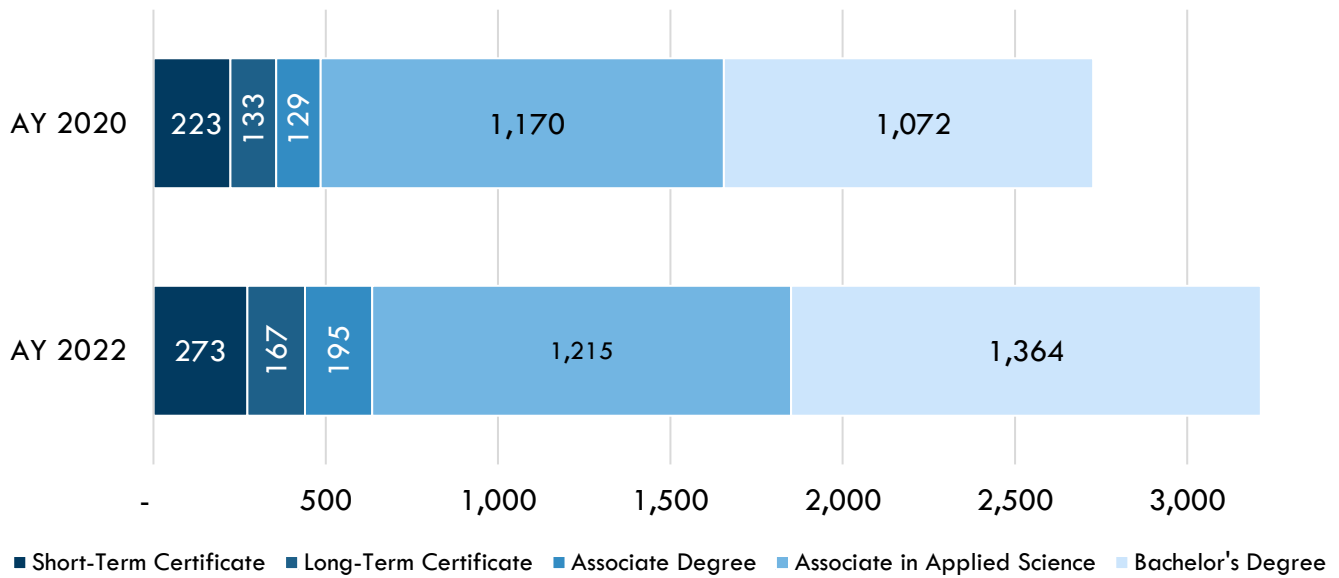
Because of the differential rates of growth across program levels, incumbent enrollment in applied associate programs went from representing the largest proportion in the baseline year, to swapping positions with bachelor's programs in 2022 and becoming a close second.

Figure 10: Program-Level Distribution of Enrolled ECEC Incumbent Workforce Members
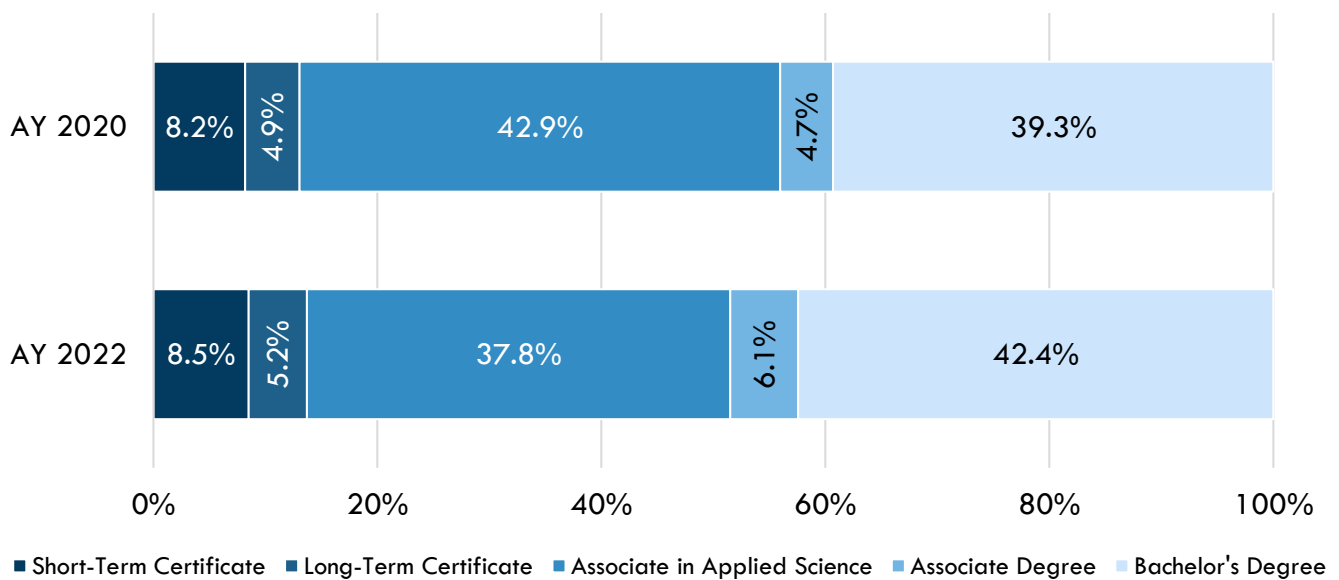
Class Level Distribution

There was variation in the class-level distribution of incumbent members of the ECEC workforce. The number of seniors was smaller in AY 2022 relative to the baseline year, and they were the only class level experiencing a contraction. The number of juniors increased by nearly two-thirds from the baseline year to the first year of the Consortium, representing an additional 213 incumbent members of the ECEC workforce. The greatest enrollment headcount growth occurred among freshmen who were members of the ECEC workforce (+270).

Figure 11: Enrollment of Incumbent Members of the ECEC Workforce by Class Level
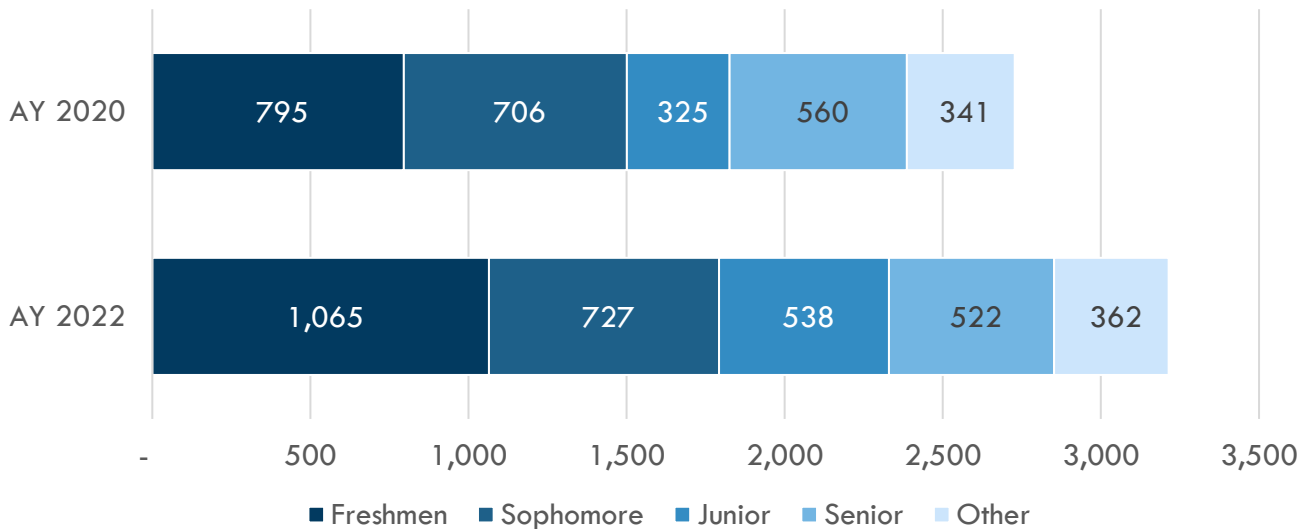
As a result of the previously described differential change, the share of seniors was smaller in the first year of the consortium (16.2%), down from 20.5% in the baseline year. Also, the proportion of freshmen increased, and they remained the largest group, and the share of juniors increased.

Figure 12: Class Level Distribution of Enrolled Incumbent Members of the ECEC Workforce
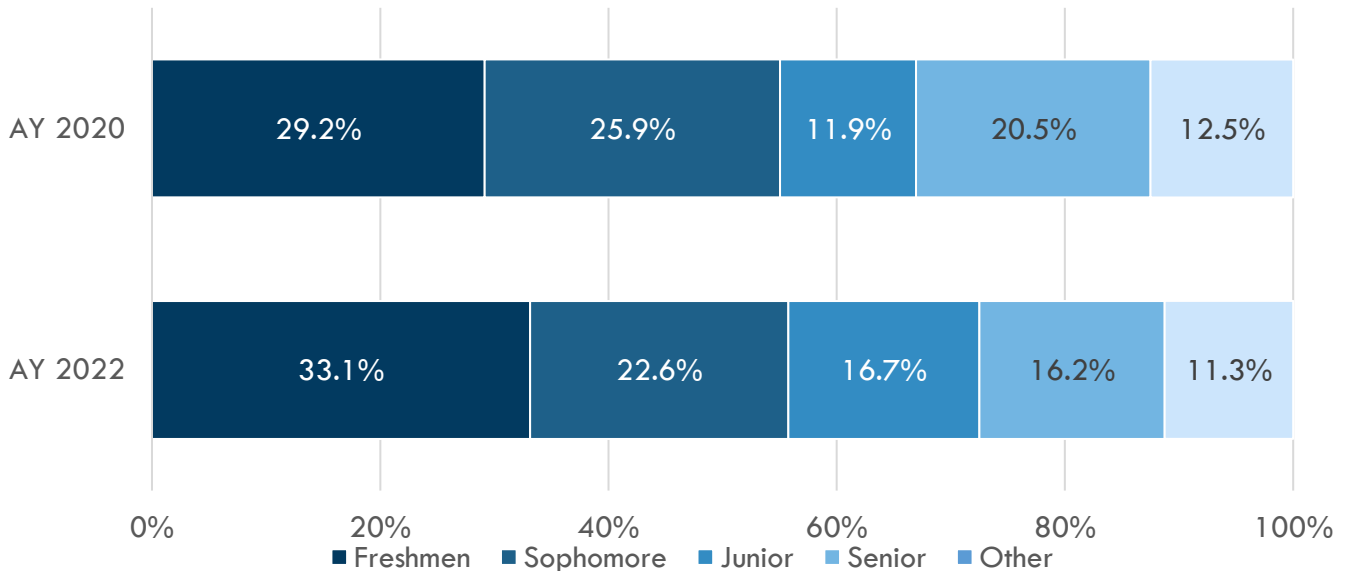
Pell Status

As shown in Figure 13, the number of incumbent members of the ECEC workforce who received a federal need-based Pell grant grew by 14% from the baseline year to the first year of the Consortium, but with a larger growth in non-Pell students.[38] The proportion receiving Pell was similar from the baseline year (44.7%) to 2022 (43.3%). As shown in Figure X, as the group of enrolled incumbent members of the ECEC workforce expanded at Consortium member institutions, collectively those institutions enrolled a slightly smaller proportion of low-income students, as proxied by Pell status. More low-income incumbent members of the ECEC workforce were enrolled, but they represented a slightly smaller proportion of all enrolled incumbents.

Figure 13: Enrolled Incumbent Members of the ECEC Workforce by Pell Status
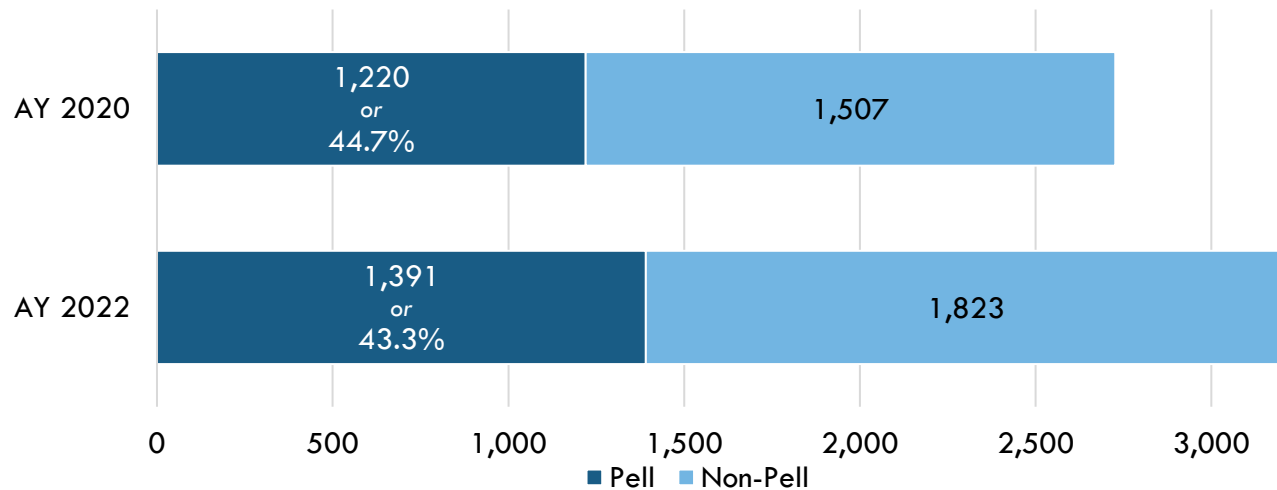
Adult Learners

The number of enrolled incumbents who were adult learners, or 25 years and older, was static from the baseline year to 2022; all enrollment growth occurred with younger members of the incumbent ECEC workforce (those under 25). Because of this, the distribution shifted substantially and went from being comprised of two-thirds of adult learners (67.2%) during the baseline year to 57.2% the first year of the Consortium.

Figure 14: Enrolled Incumbent Members of the ECEC Workforce by Adult Learner Status

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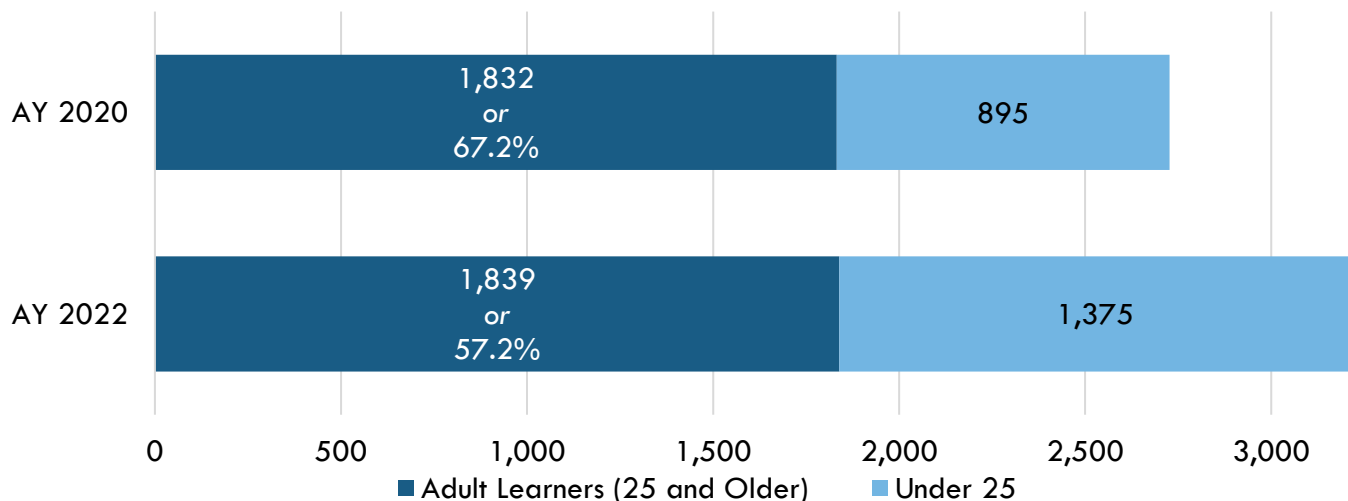
[38] The Pell Grant is a federal program administered by the U.S. Department of Education to provide need-based financial aid to qualifying low-income students attending college.

Race/Ethnicity

As shown in Table 11, there were differing patterns in enrollment change across the two years, among race and ethnicity groups. There was robust growth in incumbent enrollment among the three largest groups: African American, Latino, and White. Asian incumbent members of ECEC workforce experience a slight enrollment contraction at Consortium member institutions in total (-4.6%), while enrollment for those falling within the Other category was flat (168 in both years). Enrollment of white incumbent members of the ECEC workforce increased by over one-quarter, followed by Latinos at 16.7%, and African Americans at nearly 10% enrollment growth.

Table 11: Change in Enrolled Incumbent Members of the EC Workforce by Race/Ethnicity

Group	AY 2020	AY 2022	Change
Asian	87	83	-4.6%
African American	545	596	9.4%
Latino	857	1,000	16.7%
White	1,070	1,367	27.8%
Other	168	168	0.0
Total	2,727	3,214	17.9%

Because of the differing levels of incumbent enrollment change by group, the race/ethnicity distribution slightly shifted from the baseline year to the first year of the Consortium. This resulted in proportionally more representation among white enrolled EC incumbents, and marginally lower representation among African American incumbents, Asian incumbents, and incumbents falling in the Other category.

Figure 15: Race/Ethnicity Distribution of Enrolled Incumbent Members of the ECEC Workforce
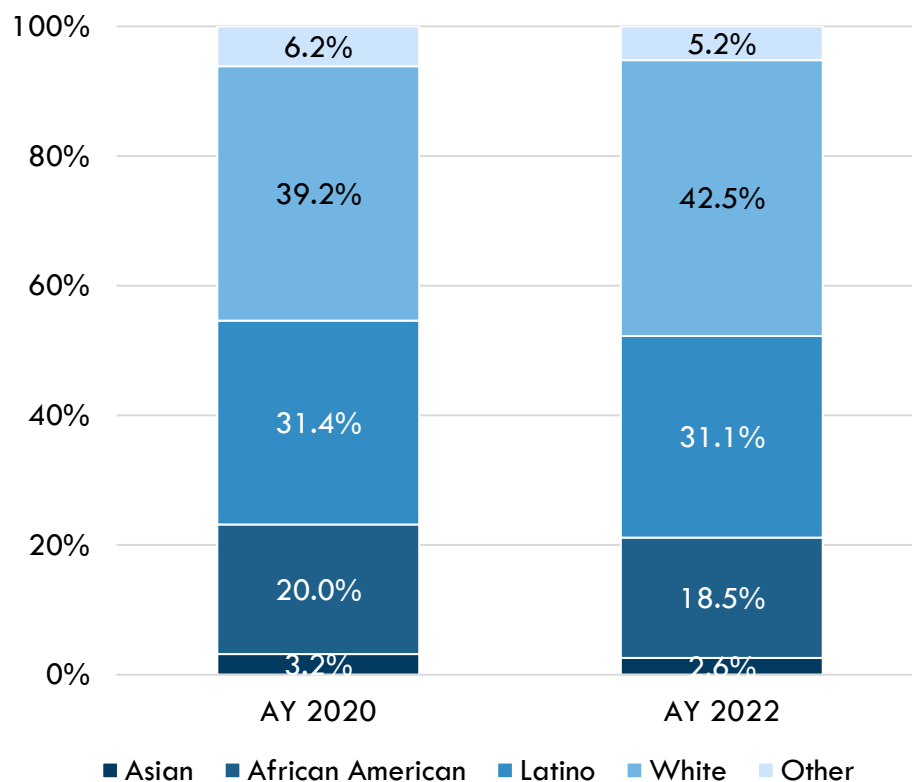
*Other includes American Indian or Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, International Students, those identifying as two or more races, and not reported/unknown.

The following two sections of the report include the same enrollment trends but are specific to the Illinois community colleges that are ECACE Consortium members institutions and the degree-granting ECACE member institutions falling under IBHE purview, including four-year public and private, nonprofit institutions.

Institutions Under IBHE Purview

Summary
- The pool of incumbent members of the ECEC workforce enrolled at IBHE institutions grew by over a third from the baseline year to the first year in which the ECACE Consortium was established (compared AY 2020 to AY 2022).
- There was enrollment growth among incumbents at Consortium member institutions under IBHE purview across all class levels except for seniors. As a result, the class level distribution shifted and resulted in a much smaller proportion of seniors. The number and proportion of enrolled incumbent members of the ECEC workforce receiving the ECACE scholarship are both expected to increase in AY 2023.
- Even as the group of enrolled incumbent members of the ECEC workforce expanded at the ECACE member institutions under IBHE purview, those institutions, in total, enrolled a slightly higher proportion of low-income students, as proxied by Pell status.
- There was growth for incumbent members of the ECEC workforce among all racial and ethnic groups, but some groups experienced larger growth from the baseline year than others. This differential growth somewhat shifted the race/ethnicity distribution, resulting in a proportional decline in enrolled African American incumbents and a parallel proportional increase in white incumbents.
- In both the baseline year and the first year of the Consortium, nearly all the enrolled incumbent members of the ECEC workforce were Illinois residents (around 98% in both years).
- Nearly all of the enrolled incumbent members of the ECEC workforce were female (around 98% in both years).

Without considering those who completed degrees, there was measurable change in the number of incumbent members of the ECEC workforce enrolled at ECACE member institutions falling under IBHE purview from the base year of AY 2020 to the first year of the Consortium. As shown in Figure 16, the number of incumbent members of the ECEC workforce enrolled at IBHE institutions went from 1,184 in the baseline year to 1,600 in AY 2022, an increase of 416 (35.1%).
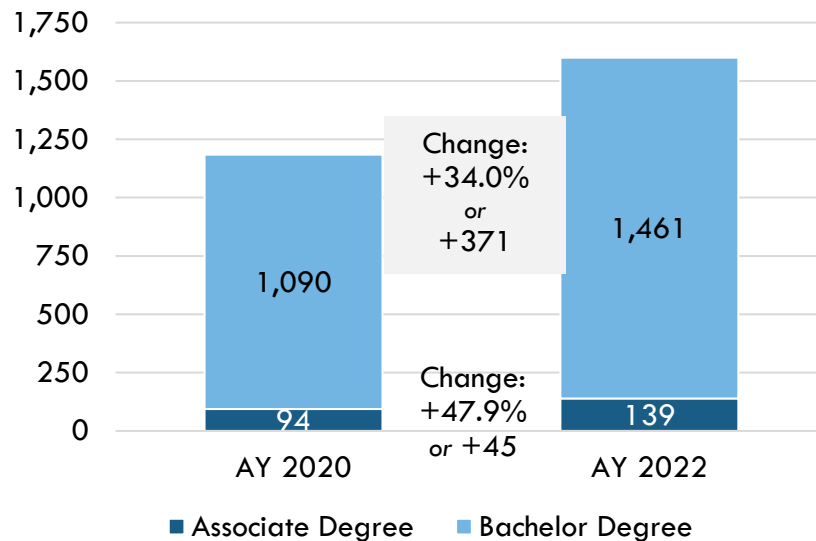
Figure 16: Enrollment of Incumbent Members of the ECEC Workforce at Four Year Institutions
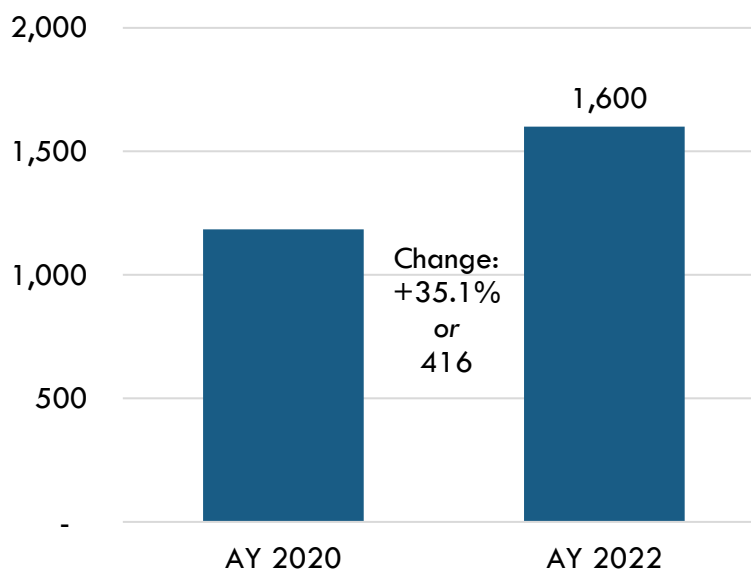
Degree Type at Four-Year Institutions

As shown in Figure 17, the number of incumbent members of the ECEC workforce in associate and bachelor's degree programs both grew from the baseline year and the distribution remained fairly similar, with a slight uptick in the proportion enrolled in associate degree programs, which are only offered at one institution under IBHE purview, St. Augustine College.

Figure 17: Total Enrollment of Incumbent Members of ECEC Workforce at Four Year Institutions by Program Degree Level

Class Level Distribution at Four-Year Institutions

As shown in Figure 18, there was enrollment growth among incumbents at Consortium member institutions under IBHE purview across all class levels with the exception of seniors. As a result, the class level distribution shifted from the baseline year to the first year after the ECACE Consortium was established. As illustrated in Figure X, nearly half of the enrolled incumbent members of the ECEC workforce were seniors in the baseline year, and over 75% were upper division students. However, in AY2022, only 34.5% were seniors, and 71.6% were upper division students.
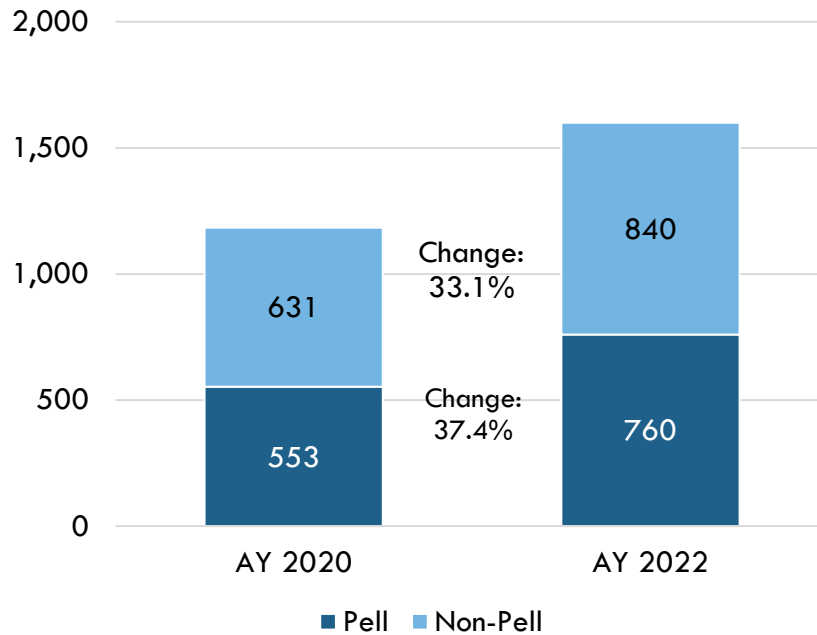
Figure 18: Incumbent Enrollment at Four Year Institutions, Change by Class Level
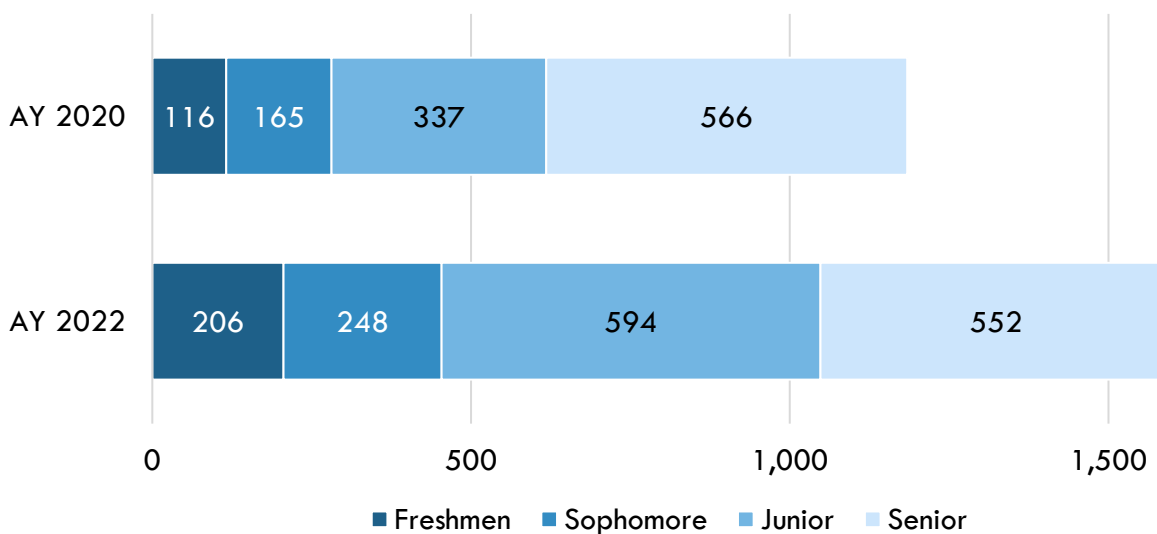
Pell Status at Four-Year Institutions

The number of incumbent members of the ECEC workforce who received a Pell award grew by 37.4% from the baseline year to the first year of the Consortium, while the proportion not receiving Pell grew by 33.1%. This kept distribution similar with a tiny increase in the proportion of the enrolled incumbents who received Pell grants, from 46.7% to 47.5%.

Figure 19: Incumbent Enrollment at Four Year Institutions, Change by Pell Status


Race/Ethnicity at Four-Year Institutions

As shown in Table 12, there was enrollment growth for incumbent members of the ECEC workforce among all racial and ethnic groups. However, the race/ethnicity distribution changed from the baseline year to the first year of the Consortium, with a decline in the proportion of African American students enrolled and an increase in the proportion in white students enrolled.

Table 12: Incumbent Enrollment at Four Year Institutions, Change by Race/Ethnicity

| Group	AY 2020	AY 2022	Change
Asian	23	34	47.80%
African American	257	295	14.80%
Latino	403	559	38.70%
White	412	613	48.80%
Other	89	99	11.20%

Figure 20: Enrolled ECEC Incumbents at Four Year Institutions, Race and Ethnicity Distribution
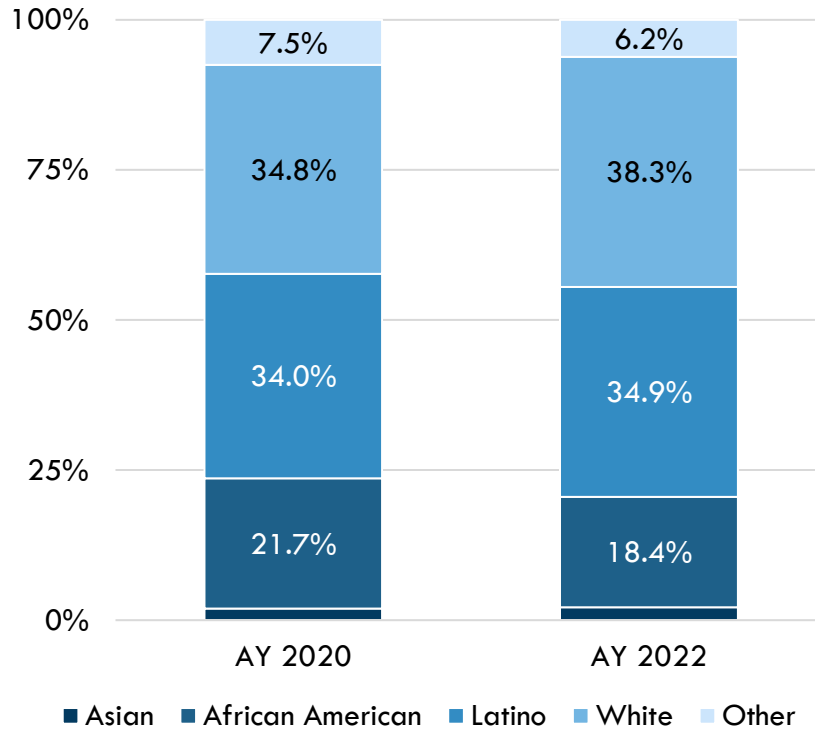
Adult Learners at Four-Year Institutions

As shown in Figure 21, there was enrollment growth among incumbent members of the ECEC workforce who were adult learners and those who were younger than 25. However, the growth among those who were younger than 25 was much greater (72.5% relative to 13.9%). While adult learners remained the majority, the majority narrowed from 63.8% in the baseline year to 53.8% in AY 2022.

*Figure 21: Enrolled ECEC Incumbents at Four Year Institutions, Adult Learners*
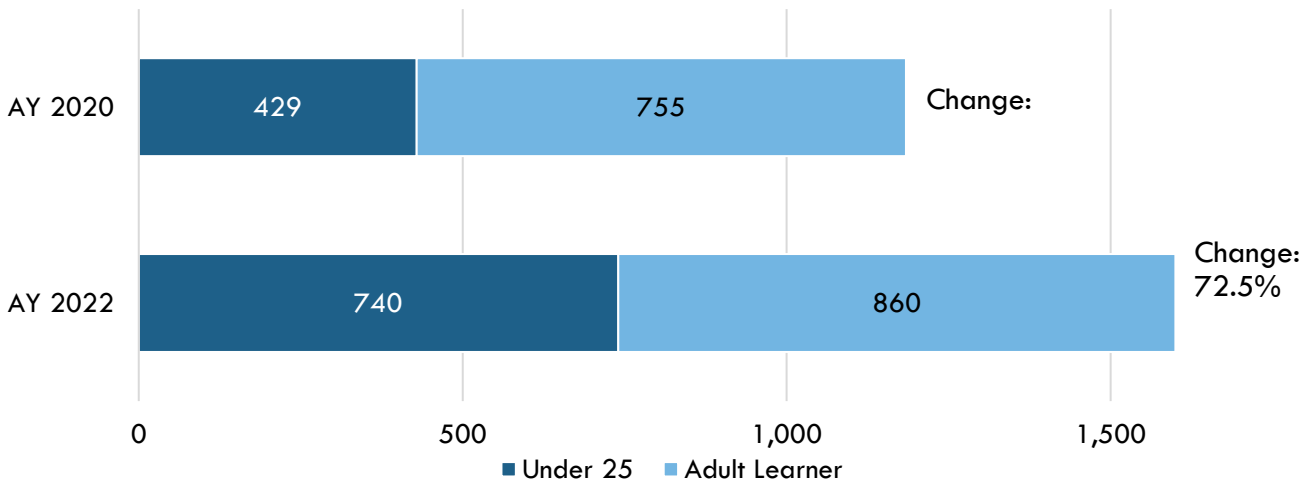
Key Findings/Summary

- The pool of incumbent members of the ECEC workforce enrolling at Illinois community colleges grew by 5.6% from the baseline year (AY 2020) to the first year in which the ECACE Consortium was established (AY 2022).
- Growth in number of incumbent members of the ECEC workforce completing certificates/degrees and Gateway Credentials at Illinois community colleges was considerable. There were 344 student completers in AY 2020 compared to 449 AY 2022, for a growth of 30.5%.
- There was enrollment growth among incumbent workers within the Freshman class level at +27.2%, while the Sophomore and Other classes decreased slightly. As a result, the class level distribution shifted and resulted in a larger proportion of Freshman when comparing AY 2020 to AY 2022.
- The number of incumbent members of the ECEC workforce in Illinois community colleges for AY 2022 were primarily enrolled in Associate in Applied Science programs (71.3%; N = 1,179) followed by Short-Term Certificate programs (16.1%; N = 267), Long-Term Certificate programs (9.9%; N = 164), and Other programs (2.7%; N = 44). The distribution remained fairly similar with Short-Term Certificates having slight growth proportionally comparing the baseline year and the first year of the Consortium.
- The number of incumbent members of the ECEC workforce enrolling at an Illinois community college who received a Pell award was level. There were 674 Pell students in AY 2020 and 661 in AY 2022.
- There was enrollment growth for the incumbent members of the ECEC workforce in Illinois community colleges amongst White students (+14.9%) and African American students (+5.9%) from AY 2020 to AY 2022. As a result, the race/ethnicity distribution of race/ethnicities shifted during the timeframe, with White and African American exhibiting a proportional increase compared to the other races/ethnicities.
- The number of enrolled incumbents who were adult learners (age 25 or older) remained fairly static from AY 2020 to AY 2022 (N = 1,093 in AY 2020; N = 1,004 in AY 2022). Growth did occur with younger students (those under 25), increasing from 473 in AY 2020 to 650 in AY 2022.
- In both the baseline year and the first year of the Consortium, nearly all the enrolled incumbent members of the ECEC workforce in Illinois community colleges were Illinois residents (around 99% in both years).
- Nearly all the enrolled incumbent members of the ECEC workforce in Illinois community colleges were female (98% in AY 2020 and 97% in AY 2022).

Illinois community colleges meet both local and statewide needs for education and workforce development by providing high-quality, accessible, cost-effective educational opportunities, programs, and services for a diverse student population. The system provides traditional and non-traditional students with smooth transitions into and across higher education and training for in-demand occupations with economic value. Community colleges create an educated and skilled workforce by increasing credential attainment, building quality career pathways, closing the skills gap, and addressing the future needs of the workforce.

Critically, for Illinois community colleges, there was an increase in the number of incumbent members of the ECEC workforce enrolled at ECACE member institutions falling under ICCB purview from the base year of AY 2020 to the first year of the Consortium. As shown in Figure 22, the number of incumbent members of the EC workforce enrolled at Illinois community colleges went from 1,566 in the baseline year to 1,654 in AY 2022. This represented an increase of 5.6% from AY 2020 to AY 2022.
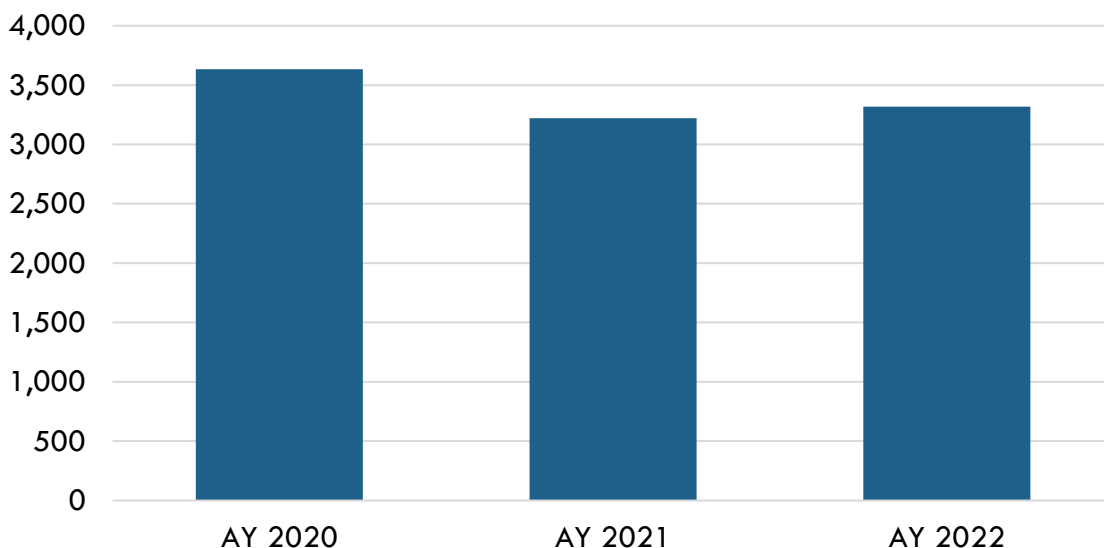
Figure 22: *Enrollment of Incumbent Members of the*
ECEC Workforce at Illinois Community Colleges
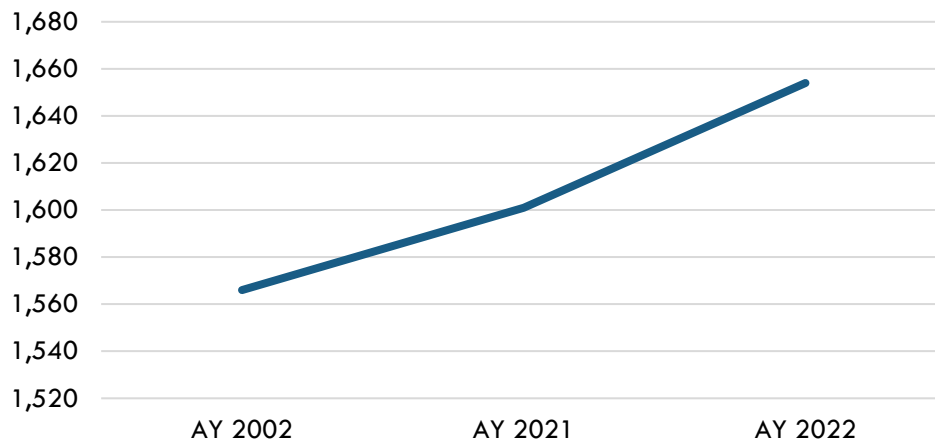
When examining early childhood program enrollments at community colleges, the pandemic impact on students should be considered. During the pandemic, faced with unprecedented challenges, all Illinois Community Colleges implemented campus measures to ensure a safe instructional environment, employing substantial adjustments to instruction by moving many courses to remote or online modalities to aid with mitigation efforts. The system expanded and enhanced student support services and financial assistance. Still, with community colleges serving a substantial number of at-risk students, the pandemic heightened issues for that population ranging from fiscal to technological to emotional, and impacted enrollment statewide.

The pandemic impacted enrollment significantly across the system, with overall enrollment at community colleges in all programs decreasing by 14.1% from AY 2020 to AY 2021. When isolating early childhood enrollments (both incumbent early childhood workforce students and non-incumbent students), the rate of decline during that same timeframe decreased at a lesser rate at -11.3%. As seen in Figure 23, when analyzing the impact of the ECACE Consortium from AY 2021 to AY 2022, ECEC enrollment (for both incumbent ECEC workforce students and non-incumbent students) increased by 3.0% while overall community college enrollment decreased by -2.1%.

Figure 23: *Enrollment of Incumbent and Non-Incumbent Members of the*
ECEC Workforce at Illinois Community Colleges

While the emphasis of this inaugural report is enrollment, there was considerable growth in the number of incumbent members of the ECEC workforce completing certificates/degrees and Gateway Credentials at Illinois community colleges. As indicated in Table 13, completions increased in AY 2021 through AY 2022. There were 344 completions in AY 2020 and 449 completions in AY 2022, for a growth of 30.5%.

Table 13: Completions of Incumbent Members of the ECEC Workforce at Illinois Community Colleges

Completion Grouping	AY 2020	AY 2021	AY 2022	% Change AY20 to AY22
Completed a College Certificate and/or Degree Only	305	301	351	15.1%
Completed a College Certificate/ Degree and Gateways Credential	39	94	98	151.3%
Total	**344**	**395**	**449**	**30.5%**

The remaining analysis will focus on incumbent members of the ECEC workforce enrolling at Illinois community colleges.

Certificate and Degree Type at Illinois Community Colleges

As shown in Figure 24, incumbent members of the ECEC workforce in Illinois community colleges for AY 2022 were primarily enrolled Associate in Applied Science programs (71.3%; N=1,179) followed by Short-Term Certificate programs (16.1%; N=267), Long-Term Certificate programs (9.9%; N=164), and Other programs (2.7%; N=44). Examining distribution of students in certificate and degree types, it remained fairly similar, with Short-Term Certificates having slight growth proportionally compared to Associate in Applied Science programs and Long-Term Certificate programs.

Figure 24: Enrollment of Incumbent Members of the ECEC Workforce by Certificate and Degree Type at Illinois Community Colleges
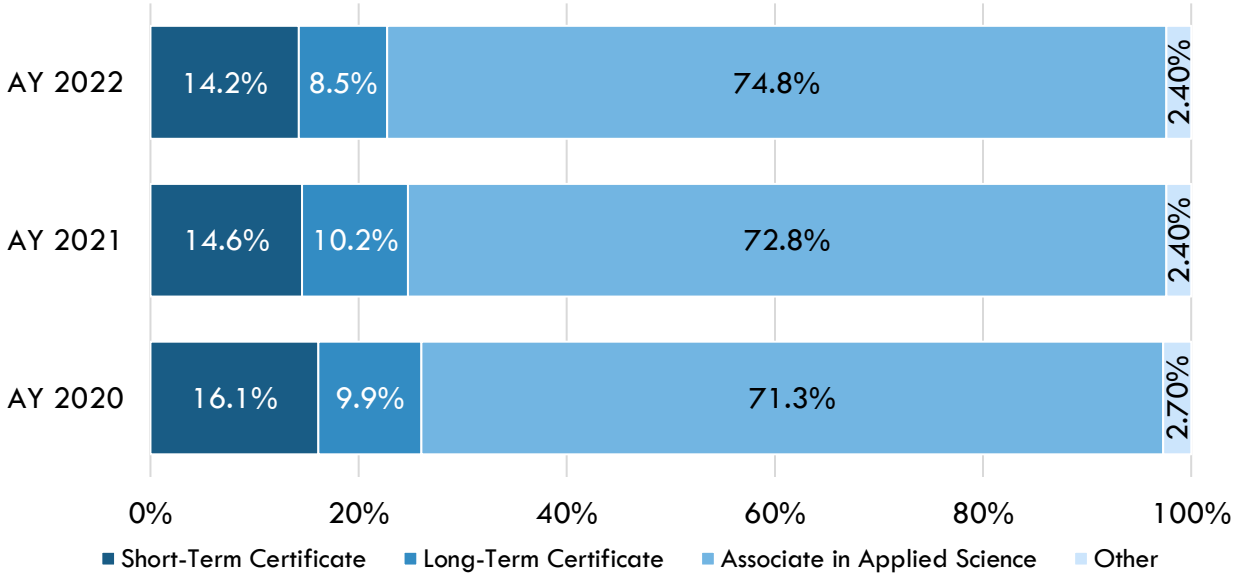
Class Level Distribution at Illinois Community Colleges

Class levels, as shown in Figure 25, consist of Freshman, Sophomore, and Other for Illinois community colleges. For the Other classification, this included students that have a bachelor's or associate degree but are enrolled in an early childhood program in a community college at the same level or lower. It may also include students enrolled in a bridge adult education credit bearing program. In AY 2022, freshmen consisted of 52.3% (N =

865) of the student population enrolled in early childhood programs, followed by sophomores at 27.7% (N = 458) and then Other at 20.0% (N = 331). The proportion of freshmen shifted fairly substantially in AY 2022 (52.3%) as compared to AY 2020 (43.4%) for incumbent early childhood workers enrolling in Illinois community colleges. As indicated in Figure 26, substantial growth occurred from AY 2020 to AY 2022 in the Freshman class (+27.2%). For the Sophomore and Other student classifications, the number of students decreased during the timeframe.

Figure 25: Incumbent Members of the ECEC Workforce Enrollment by Class Level at Illinois Community Colleges
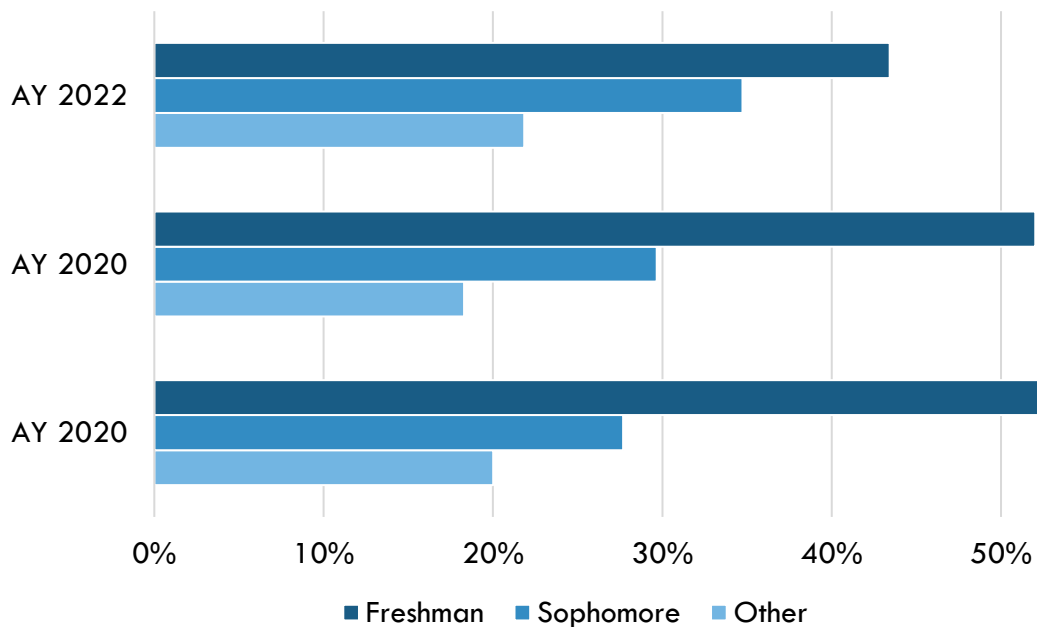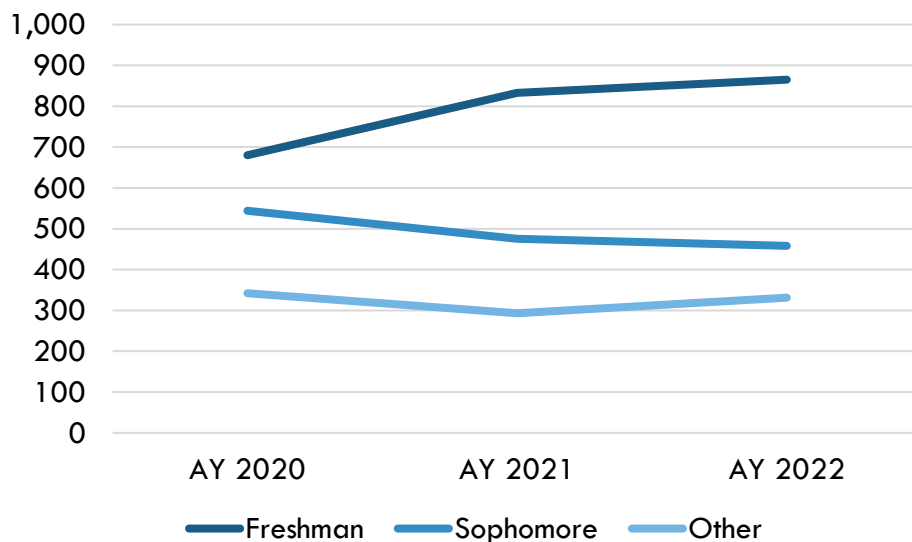

Figure 26: Enrollment of Incumbent Members of the ECEC Workforce by Class Level at Illinois Community Colleges
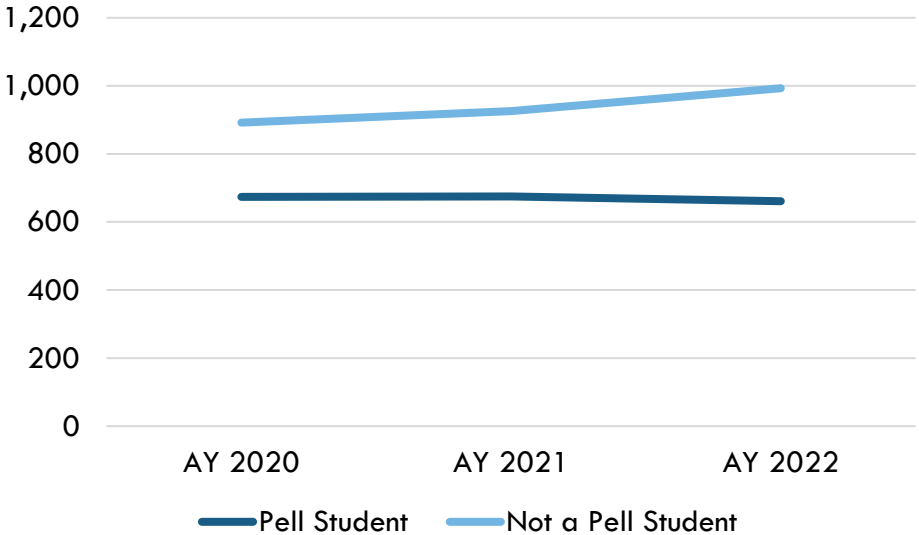

Pell Status at Illinois Community Colleges

The number of incumbent members of the ECEC workforce that received a Pell award was fairly level from AY 2020 to AY 2022, as shown in Figure 27. There were 674 Pell students in AY 2020 and 661 in AY 2022. The number of students not receiving Pell increased during the same timeframe (+11.3%). In terms of the

distribution, Pell students decreased slightly from AY 2020 (43.0%) to AY 2022 (40.0%), with an uptick in the proportion of the enrolled incumbents who did not receive Pell grants.

Figure 27: Enrollment of Incumbent Members of the ECEC Workforce by Pell Status at Illinois Community Colleges
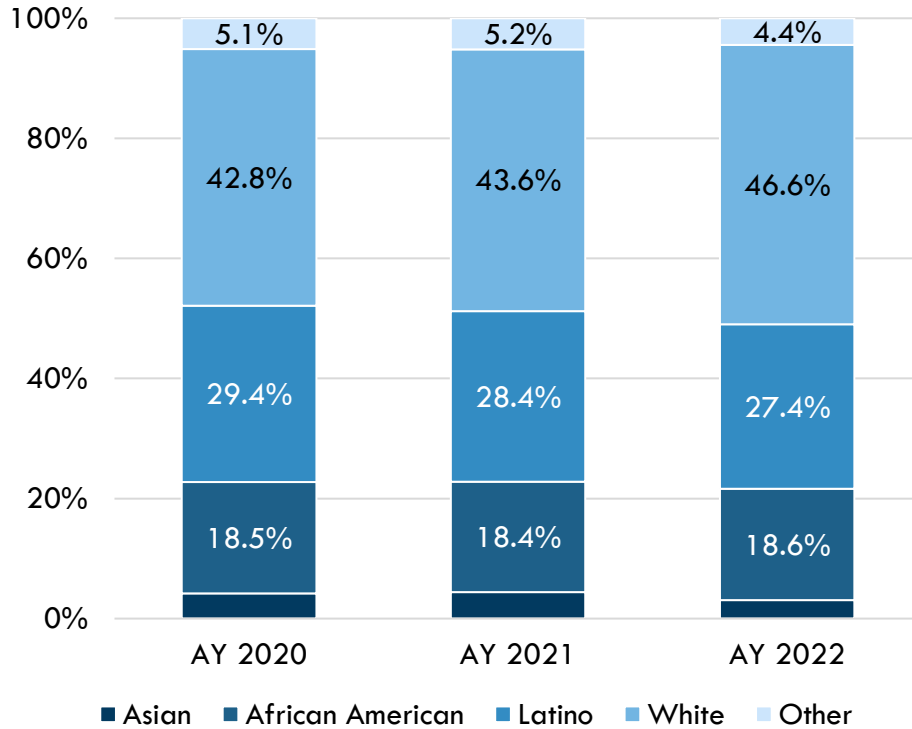

Race/Ethnicity at Illinois Community Colleges

There was enrollment growth for the incumbent members of the ECEC workforce enrolling in Illinois community colleges amongst White students (+14.9%) and African American students (+5.9%) from AY 2020 to AY 2022, as shown in Table X. During the same timeframe, Latino students decreased slightly (-1.5 %) while Asian students had the most substantial decrease (-22.7%).

Table 14: Enrollment of Incumbent Members of the ECEC Workforce by Race/Ethnicity at Illinois Community College

Race/Ethnicity	AY 2020	AY 2021	AY 2022	% Change AY20 to AY22
Asian	66	71	51	-22.7%
African American	290	294	307	5.9%
Latino	460	455	453	-1.5%
White	670	698	770	14.9%
Other	80	83	73	-8.8%
Total	1,566	1,601	1,654	5.6 %

As shown in Figure 28, the distribution of race/ethnicity for incumbent workers enrolling in early childhood programs was very similar across all academic years. African American students exhibited a slight increase proportionally when comparing AY 2020 to AY 2022, while White students increased the most across all race/ethnicities. The other race/ethnicity categories decreased proportionally from AY 2020 to AY 2022.
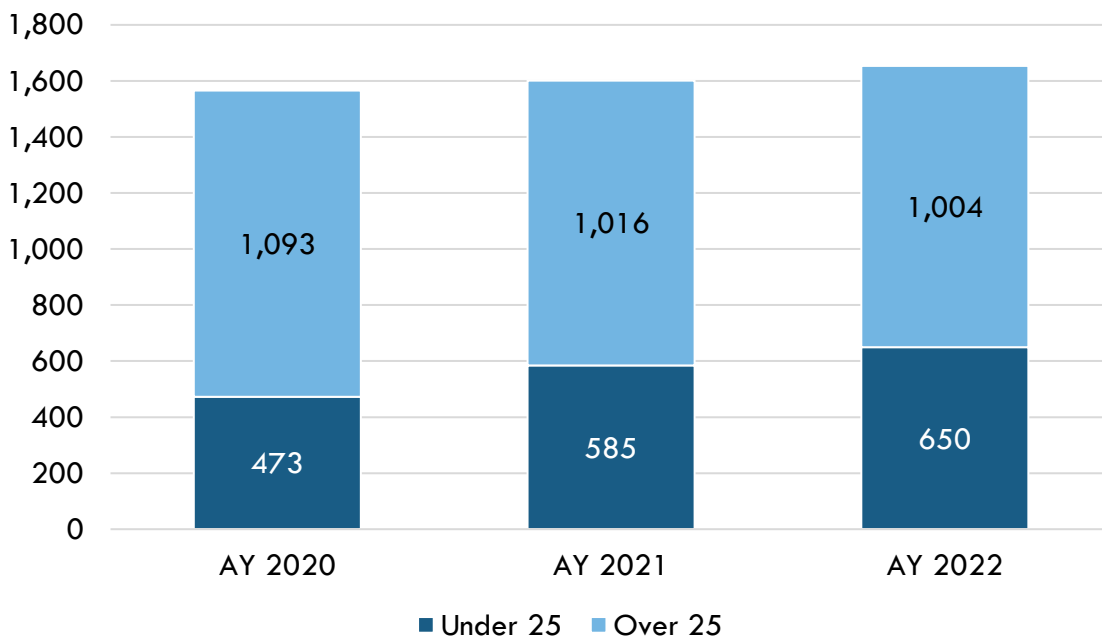
Figure 28: Enrollment of Incumbent Members of the ECEC Workforce by Race/Ethnicity Illinois Community Colleges

Adult Learners at Illinois Community Colleges

The number of enrolled incumbents who were adult learners (age 25 or older) remained fairly static from AY 2020 to AY 2022, as shown in Figure 29 (N = 1,093 in AY 2020; N = 1,004 in AY 2022). Growth in enrollment occurred with younger members of the incumbent ECEC workforce (those under 25). Because of this, the distribution shifted somewhat and went from 30% of students being younger AY 2020 to 39% in AY 2022.

Figure 29: Enrollment of Incumbent Members of the ECEC Workforce by Age at Illinois Community College

Gender at Illinois Community Colleges

The distribution of gender for incumbent workers enrolling in early childhood programs at Illinois community colleges was very similar across all academic years. Almost all students were female in AY 2020 through AY 2022. In AY 2020, females were 98.0% of the student population (N = 1,609) with it being 97.3% in AY 2022 (N = 1,535).

Residency at Illinois Community Colleges

The residency of incumbent workers enrolling in early childhood programs at Illinois community colleges was almost entirely Illinois. In both the baseline year and the first year of the Consortium, nearly all the enrolled incumbent members of the ECEC workforce were Illinois residents (around 99% in both years).

ICCB Data Source

Under the authority of the P-20 Longitudinal Education Data System Act (105 ILCS 13/1 et seq.) (the "LDS Act"), ICCB is the State Education Authority responsible for collecting and maintaining enrollment, completion, and student characteristic information on community college students. The data within this report derived from ICCB's Centralized Data System.

The Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity is a multifaceted initiative, bringing together state agencies, public and private higher education institutions, and other partners to create and align systems and programs to meet the state's workforce needs in early childhood education and care settings. The initial year of work highlighted in this report showcases important Consortium successes in the recruitment, retention, and support of members of the incumbent workforce in their pursuit of higher education credentials. Since the end of December 2022, much additional work has occurred. While this work will be addressed in detail in future reports, a few highlights are mentioned below.

- A Consortium of 61 institutions was launched; guiding principles for the Consortium that prioritize centering student success were approved. An Advisory Committee chaired by five state agencies and comprising employers, legislators, higher education, and advocates was launched and continues to provide guidance on Consortium operations.

- Thousands of individuals participated in outreach events to learn about the ECACE Scholarship and opportunities to begin or complete higher education programs. During AY 2022–23, the IBHE led a series of professional development sessions for regional navigators to support their practice and enhance collaboration. Work continues to identify and share best practices among navigators.

- Enrollment in higher education programs by members of the incumbent workforce increased from the baseline year by 17.9%. During AY 2022–23, IBHE and ICCB developed new procedures for continuing to track the enrollment, retention, and completion of members of the incumbent workforce at Consortium institutions. Future reports will highlight multiyear trends.

- The ECACE Scholarship was launched, and over $5.7 million in funds were distributed to over 400 members of the incumbent workforce in the first soft launch year. Most recipients had federally defined Expected Family Contributions of less than $10,000, which means ECACE scholarship recipients had substantial financial need. Over 46% of AY 2022 scholarship recipients are persons of color. In the first six months AY 2022–23, ECACE awarded more scholarships than during all of AY 2022–22. During AY 2022–23, state agencies discussed expansion of eligibility for the ECACE scholarship to include individuals who hold bachelor's degrees in other fields seeking early childhood credentials, freshmen and sophomore students at universities in early childhood programs, and others. In May 2023, ISAC launched a revised ECACE scholarship application, with over 2,200 individuals seeking financial assistance in the first few weeks. State agency personnel continue to study and address points in the scholarship application process where individuals may stop out before funds can be awarded, as well as ways to maximize use of debt relief funds.

- Academic policies were put in place across all Consortium member institutions to provide six hours of college credit for holders of the national industry-recognized Child Development Associate credential. Consortium member institutions also were able to access a performance-based online assessment developed in partnership with INCCRRA and the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development that allows members of the incumbent workforce to demonstrate prior learning for potential college credit. Further work on standardized methods to provide credit for prior learning has been identified as a priority among Consortium institutions.

- Bachelor's-granting institutions made provision for full transfer of credit for holders of the AAS in early childhood fields. As of summer 2023, the IBHE launched a community of practice for these colleges and universities to share best practices and further refine the design of the ways their bachelor's programs transfer in AAS degrees.

- Community colleges laid the groundwork to scale availability of online coursework through the Illinois Community Colleges Online (ILCCO) platform. As of April 2023, 79 early childhood courses from 14 community colleges are available via ILCCO, with further scaling under way.

- IBHE and ICCB engaged consultants – Afton Partners – to conduct a needs assessment of Consortium member institutions and chart a path for future development of the Consortium. This needs assessment will inform planning for future Consortium meetings and work groups.

In February of 2023, Governor Pritzker announced the launch of Smart Start Illinois, a comprehensive vision for expanding access to high-quality early learning and care across Illinois. Smart Start Illinois lays the foundation for groundbreaking innovation in the funding and contracting of publicly funded early childhood education and care. This plan also calls for strategic work to address preschool deserts in Illinois. Looking ahead, the Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity will be a key partner in growing the number of well-qualified professionals to work in newly funded early childhood education and care settings and supporting the retention and educational advancement of the incumbent workforce as envisioned in Smart Start Illinois.

For more information on the Consortium, please visit https://www.ecace.org.

State agencies collect data from a variety of sources and through a variety of methods, including already established reporting functions, surveys, institutional grant reports, navigator reports, and information shared by State agencies and organizations, including IBHE, ICCB, IDHS, INCCRRA, ISBE, and ISAC.

The information in the table below outlines the data to be collected and the timeframe for which collection and reporting is required. Items 1 – 8 are required via legislation; item number 9 (and potentially others) will be added as relevant and as data is available. Some information is required to be reported annually and some biannually.

Item	ECACE Required Reporting	Annual Report (Spring)	Mid-Year Report (Fall)
1	Student **enrollment** numbers for the fall and spring terms or semesters, **retention** rates, **persistence** in relevant associate, baccalaureate, and credential programs, including demographic data that is disaggregated by race, ethnicity, and federal Pell Grant status	X	X
	Completion numbers and rates, **employer type**, and **years worked**	X	
2	**Tuition rates** charged and **net prices paid,** reported both as including and excluding **student loans,** by enrolled members of the incumbent workforce	X	
3	**Outreach plans** to recruit and enroll incumbent workforce members	X	X
4	**Participation of the incumbent workforce in outreach programs,** which may include participation in an informational session, social media engagement, or other activities	X	X
5	**Student academic and holistic support plans** to help the enrolled incumbent workforce persist in their education	X	
6	Evidence of **engagement and responsiveness** to the needs of **employer partners**	X	
7	**Consortium budget**, including the use of federal funds	X	
8	**Member contributions**, including financial, physical, or in-kind contributions, provided to the Consortium	X	
9	**Scholarship** awards (temporary, as data is available)	X	

In AY 2022 and AY 2023, to qualify for the ECACE Scholarship Program, an applicant must:

- Be a U.S. citizen or eligible noncitizen, as defined by the U.S. Department of Education;
- Be a member of the incumbent workforce, currently working or having worked in the early childhood industry (in either a licensed or license-exempt facility), including home-based child care (e.g., family, friend, neighbor), center-/community-based care, Preschool for All programs, school-based preschool settings, and Head Start programs, that serve children from birth to age five. Acceptable positions include teachers, assistant teachers, directors, family child care providers and assistants;
  - Applicants must provide documentation confirming their current membership in the Gateways to Opportunity Registry;
- Be enrolled or accepted for enrollment on a full- or part-time (at least 3 credit hours) basis at a public or nonprofit private 2- or 4-year Gateways-entitled and Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity member institution, as an undergraduate* student, pursuing an early childhood education major;
  - If attending a 2-year public community college, be enrolled in an Associate of Applied Science degree program leading to a Level 4 Gateways credential or related certificate program in early childhood education;
  - If attending a 4-year institution, be at the junior level or above, or hold an Associate of Applied Science, Associate of Arts, or Associate of Science degree focused in early childhood education;
- Be enrolled or accepted for enrollment in a course of study which, upon completion, qualifies the student to receive:
  - A postsecondary credential or undergraduate degree in the field of early childhood education, or
  - A Professional Educator's License in early childhood education;
- Maintain satisfactory academic progress as established by the college;
- Complete the application process by submitting an Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity Scholarship Program application and a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA®) on or before the ISAC-established date in order to receive priority consideration;
- Be certified as meeting eligibility requirements by the college at which the scholarship will be used; and
- Not be in default on any student loan, nor owe a refund on any State or federal grant.

Retrieved from ISAC's webpage as of April 12, 2023: https://www.isac.org/ECACEscholarship.
*A student already holding a bachelor's degree in any field is not eligible for the ECACE Program.

ECACE Timeline

- **ECACE Creation and Launch**
    - July 2021: Gov. Pritzker Signs the ECACE Act, Announces $200M for the Consortium
    - July 2021 – June 2022: Cross-Agency Planning & Collaboration: Steering Committee and Working Groups
- **ECACE Funding and Budgets**
    - May 2022 – December 2022: ECACE Institutional Funding & Agreements
    - July 2022 – December 2022: Member Contributions
    - December 2022: EC Faculty Preparation Grants Awarded
- **Scholarships**
    - July 2021 – November 2021: Develop, Build Scholarships & Processes
    - November 2021 – June 2022: AY 2022 Scholarship
    - July 2022 – December 2022: AY 2023 Scholarship
    - November 2021 – December 2021 – Application Launch
    - March 2022: First Awards Made
- **Consortium**
    - September 2021 – December 2022: Appointing Members & Developing Charge
    - September 2021: Initial Mtg. of Public Inst.
    - December 2021: First Convening of All Partners
    - April 2022: Guiding Principles Adopted
    - December 2021 – June 2022: Credit for CDA Working Group & CDA Framework Adoption
- **Advisory Committee**
    - August 2021 – February 2022: Appointing Members & Developing Charge
    - March 2022 – December 2022: Launch & Quarterly Meetings
- **Higher Education Programs**
    - July 2021 – September 2021: Goals Developed & Submitted
    - July 2021 – June 2022: Planning Programs for Working Adults; Planning AAS Transfer Pathways; Course Sharing through ILCCO
    - July 2022 – December 2022: Implement Programs Re/Designed to Support Working Adults; Four Year Institutions Launch AAS Transfer Pathways; ILCCO Training & Technical Assistance Work
- **Student Wrap Around Supports**
    - April 2022 – June 2022: Mentors Temporarily Assigned
    - May 2022 – December 2022: Hired & Supporting Students
    - July 2022 – December 2022: Academic & Other Supports Implemented
- **Institutional Outreach**
    - November 2021 – June 2022: Outreach & Engagement
    - July 2022 – December 2022: Outreach & Participation & Engaging Employers (data collected)
- **Navigators**
    - January 2022 – April 2022: Hiring, Training, Outreach Began
    - July 2022 – December 2022: Outreach & Technical Assistance (Data Captured)
- **Enrollment**
    - July 2021 – June 2022: Student Enrollment Data Collected
    - July 2022 – December 2022: Student Outreach Data Collected