

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **EARLY CHILDHOOD ACCESS CONSORTIUM FOR EQUITY RELEASES FIRST ANNUAL REPORT *Enrollment in Higher Education Programs by Members of the Current Early Childhood Workforce Increases***

SPRINGFIELD – Today, the Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity (ECACE) released its first annual report, which provides a comprehensive picture of the work since the launch of the initiative designed to support members of the incumbent (current) workforce in their pursuit of higher education credentials. ECACE is a groundbreaking, multifaceted effort by 61 public and private higher education institutions, six state agencies, and community partners to create and align systems and programs to meet the state’s workforce needs in early childhood education and care settings and is a key strategy in the state’s higher education strategic plan, “.” The Office of Governor JB Pritzker allocated a little over \$200 million in federal child care funding to support this initiative from the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS).

“This innovative project is truly unique, and we are pleased that the Consortium has already made an impact in increasing equitable access to higher education for those working in child care in a short amount of time,” said ECACE Co-Project Director at IBHE Christi Chadwick.

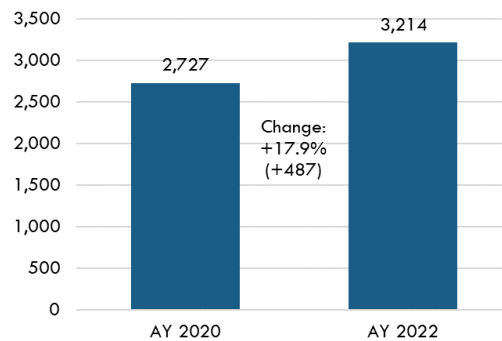
“Centering student success is the Consortium’s number one guiding principle and is crucial in helping remove barriers for working adults to enroll, persist, and complete.”

“The ECACE has led to innovation in the higher education system that has helped many pursue education pathways that previously seemed out of reach. Thousands of incumbent early childhood workers have been able to return to college to complete degrees and certificates and enhance their skills. This will continue to help fill the gaps in the employment pipeline of early childhood as well as continue to support those in the workforce who rely on high quality childcare, says Dr. Marcus Brown, Co-Project Director for ECACE and Deputy Director for Academic Affairs and Student Success at the Illinois Community College Board.

According to the report, enrollment in higher education programs by members of the current workforce increased from the baseline year by 17.9%. This represented nearly 500 additional

enrolled students. The vast majority of current workforce members continued to be enrolled in bachelor's degree and applied associate (AAS) programs.

**Overall Enrollment of Incumbent Members of the Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce for All ECACE Member Institutions**



The number and proportion of enrolled current members of the early childhood education and care workforce are both expected to increase in academic year 2023. White (+27.8%), Latino (+16.7%), and African American (+9.4%) current enrollments all grew from the baseline year, resulting in a slight change in the race/ethnicity distribution.

The Consortium set a goal to support nearly 5,000 members of the current workforce to enroll in higher education and persist or complete by September 2024. In partnership with the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB), the Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC) launched the ECACE Scholarship Program in late November 2021 to remove the affordability barrier and help ensure thousands benefit from the initiative. In the first year (soft launch), of the ECACE Scholarship, \$5.7 million in scholarships were awarded to 412 students. By December 31 of the second year, an additional \$7 million had been awarded to over 1,000 students.

Additionally, ECACE Higher Education Navigators play an important community-facing role designed to recruit and connect current early childhood education and care workforce members to Consortium institutions. More than 30 navigators employed within regionally based Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (CCR&Rs) across the state hosted over 700 events and sent nearly 50,000 emails to recruit students between July and December 2022.

Colleges and universities have worked to redesign pathways and provide supports to ensure working adults are able to access programs and persist in their studies. At least one mentor is available for students at each Consortium institution. Mentors provide intentional contact with students to ensure that they stay on track and receive timely, consistent support from enrollment to graduation.

Moreover, to ensure that students succeed in their coursework, institutions provide wrap around supports including 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.

A full version of the report can be accessed [here](#).  
To learn more about the Consortium, click [here](#).  
To learn more about the ECACE Scholarship, click [here](#).

About the Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity

The Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity, created through Illinois Public Act 102-0174, is a collaboration of all public universities and community colleges in Illinois and committed private institutions to develop and provide streamlined paths to credentials and degrees for the early childhood incumbent workforce. Work of the consortium is facilitated by the [Illinois Board of Higher Education](#) and the [Illinois Community College Board](#) in partnership with the [Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development](#), [Illinois Department of Human Services](#), [Illinois Student Assistance Commission](#), and [Illinois State Board of Education](#).

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