



ECACE
EARLY CHILDHOOD ACCESS
CONSORTIUM FOR EQUITY

SECOND ANNUAL REPORT

of the Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity

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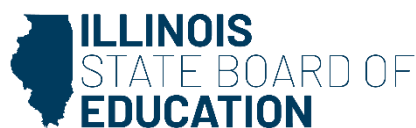
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State Agency Partners

ECACE is administered by the Illinois Community College Board and Illinois Board of Higher Education and supported by a steering committee that additionally includes the Illinois Department of Human Services, Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), and Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC).



This report was authored by staff from Illinois Community College Board, Illinois Board of Higher Education, and Afton Partners.



ECACE HIGHLIGHTS

Reporting Period: AY22-23 (July 2022-December 2023)

The **Early Childhood Consortium for Equity (ECACE)** was created to upskill the early childhood incumbent workforce to meet the demand for well-qualified early educators in Illinois.

By the numbers...

8,229

Number of incumbent and non-incumbent workforce members **enrolled in an early childhood program** in AY22-23

4,694

Number of students who **received scholarships** in AY23-24

56.5%

Increase in **incumbent enrollment** from AY19-20 to AY22-23

1,205

Number of students whose **debt was removed**

Consortium Membership

41 Community Colleges
11 Public Universities
10 Private, Non-Profit Institutions

"I have worked in a daycare facility for over 10 years, but the pay barely allows me to cover my monthly bills, let alone have money leftover for schooling. Receiving the ECACE scholarship meant I could continue my schooling without having to get a second job to support my family!"

—Lincoln Land Community College Student

Through ECACE, higher education institutions:

Adjusted programming to meet incumbent workforce needs, including clarifying transfer pathways and recognizing prior learning.

Removed financial barriers to enrollment through scholarships and debt relief.

Increased collaboration within and across institutions to better serve incumbent workers.

Conducted outreach to incumbent workers and early childhood employers, becoming more responsive to their needs.

Provided academic and wrap around supports such as mentors to ensure student persistence and completion.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The [Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity \(ECACE\)](#) was created through [Illinois Public Act 102-0174](#) in July 2021 with the purpose of upskilling the early childhood incumbent workforce to meet the demand for well-qualified early educators in the state.¹ The Consortium is made up of 62 higher education institutions, including community colleges, public universities, and private not-for-profit institutions, working together to remove barriers for early childhood workers to enroll, persist, and complete credentials and degrees. ECACE is administered by the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) and Illinois Community College Board (ICCB), in partnership with other state agencies and is also supported by an Advisory Committee of early childhood employers, advocates, state agency partners, and others.

This report includes all legislatively required reporting, including but not limited to enrollment, persistence, and completion of students; outreach to students and employers; institutions' work to redesign the programs to support working adults, and employment information for enrolled workforce members.

Findings in Brief

During this 18-month reporting period, ECACE achieved many notable things in service of upskilling early childhood incumbent workers in Illinois. Key work included the following.

- **Enrollment, Persistence, and Completion:** Supported members of the incumbent workforce to enroll, persist, and complete. From baseline (AY 2019-20) to AY 2022-23, Consortium institutions saw a **56.5 percent increase in enrollment**. In just one year – the first full year of the Consortium (AY 2022-23) – Consortium institutions experienced a **33.9 percent increase** in workforce member enrollment. Nearly **73 percent (72.9 percent)** of incumbent members of the workforce persisted or completed during this time.
- **Financial Supports:** Removed financial barriers to higher education by distributing **\$76.4 million in scholarships to 4,694 recipients** as of July 2024 and removing **outstanding debt for 1,205** total students as of December 2023.
- **Program Design and Modality:** Redesigned early childhood post-secondary programs and courses to be **more accessible** to the early childhood incumbent workforce. This included offering more **flexible formats** and modalities, ensuring seamless transfer pathways, and recognizing prior learning.
- **Transfer Pathways:** **Transferred over 2,053 students** into four-year early childhood programs, over 30 percent of whom held an AAS degree.
- **Outreach and Engagement with the Workforce and Employers:** Conducted outreach through over **2,100 events with over 40,000 members** of the incumbent workforce participating. Engagement with employers (11,382 reported connections) to be more responsive to their hiring, retention, and professional development needs.
- **Relationships:** Built stronger relationships within and across higher education institutions, **strengthening the system** to better serve incumbent workers.
- **Student Supports:** Offered holistic student supports, including mentors, coaches, and tutors that met with students over **50,000 times** and provided guidance and assistance to enrolled early childhood students, navigators to recruit and direct students to institutions, and other academic and wraparound supports to ensure persistence and completion.

In addition to these accomplishments, ICCB and IBHE, along with the institutional members, overcame challenges and learned important lessons that can inform future work supporting early educators in higher education.

- **Mentors:** Mentors were **critical in supporting students** to be successful and to persist and complete.

¹ "'Incumbent workforce' means an individual or a group of individuals working or having worked in the early childhood industry, including family child care and center-based care settings, Preschool for All school-based settings, and HeadStart, that serves children from birth to age 5 and includes teachers, assistant teachers, directors, family child care providers, and assistants" (Illinois General Assembly, 2021).

- **Scholarship:** Scholarship funds were **essential for many early childhood educators** to affordably pursue higher education.
- **Time and Resources:** **Significant time and staff resources** were required to make changes within higher education institutions. Redesigning courses or implementing a new transfer policy required lengthy approval processes across one or more terms.
- **Collaboration:** Collaboration across internal institutional teams **supported ECACE's success** at the institution.
- **Institutional Teams:** Those institutions that built **strong institutional teams reported more progress** and more student support.

Report Contents, Requirements, and Methodology

This report covers successes, challenges, and outcomes for an 18-month period from July 1, 2022, through December 31, 2023, to meet Section 30 requirements of the ECACE Act. Enrollment, persistence, and completion data, however, are only for Academic Year (AY) 2022–23. Additionally, the report provides a broader narrative of the work of ECACE, including outcomes, successes, and challenges. IBHE and ICCB engaged Afton Partners to help support the data analysis and writing of this annual report. In most cases, disaggregated information is provided for community colleges and four-year Consortium public and private institutions. The Executive Summary provides limited data; more information can be found in the full report and in the appendices.

Throughout the report, we show both the change from the “baseline year” (AY 2019–20) through AY 2022–23 and the change from the “soft launch” year of the Consortium (AY 2021–22) through AY 2022–23, which was the year the Consortium work fully launched. ECACE used AY 2019–20 as a baseline year for which to measure progress, even though most of the work of ECACE was implemented beginning in AY 2022–2023.² While the ECACE Scholarship was partially awarded in AY 2021–22, AY 2022–23 was the first complete academic year that students could access the scholarship funds and in which students could access redesigned programs. AY 2019–20 was chosen as a baseline year because it was pre-pandemic and may be a better baseline for institutions to measure progress than during the pandemic, which challenged both institutions and students.

Figure 1. Timeline for the Consortium Launch and Baseline/Comparison Data



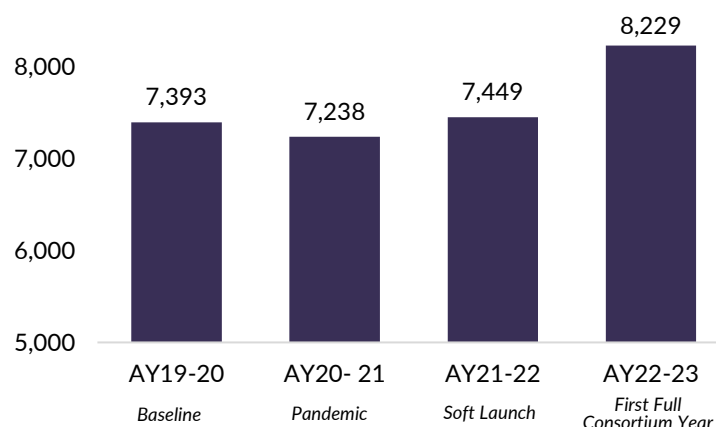
Goals and Outcomes: Enrollment, Persistence, and Completion

ECACE has set a goal to enroll 4,933 students that persist or complete by September of 2024. The data in this section suggests that the Consortium is well on its way. For context, the report first looks at overall enrollment (incumbent and non-incumbent) in early childhood programs at Consortium institutions.

Early childhood programs saw a 11.4 percent increase in overall (incumbent and non-incumbent) enrollment from 7,393 in the baseline year of AY 2019–20 through AY 2022–23. From AY 2021–22 to AY 2022–23, enrollment of all students in early childhood programs increased by 10.6 percent, from 7,449 to 8,229.

² AY 2021–2022 is considered a “soft launch” year for ECACE, as much of the year was used for planning. The first scholarships were awarded in March 2022, and institutions received grant funding to support student upskill in the Spring of 2022.

Figure 2. Overall Enrollment for Early Childhood Incumbent and Non-Incumbent Workers, AY19-20 to AY22-23³

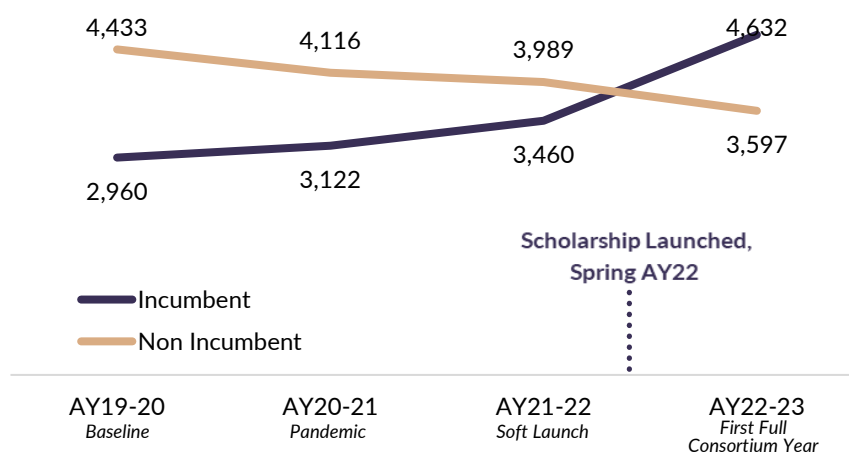


Incumbent Workforce Enrollment

Increased enrollment by incumbent workforce members seems to have driven increases in enrollment overall. Figure 3 disaggregates the enrollment data by the incumbent and non-incumbent student population. From AY 2019-20 (baseline) to AY 2022-23, Consortium institutions saw a **56.5 percent increase in enrollment** from 2,960 to 4,632 in incumbent workforce members. Interestingly, during this time, enrollment of non-incumbent workforce members decreased by 18.9 percent, from 4,433 to 3,597, a consistent downward trend from AY 2019-20.

In just one year, from AY 2021-22 to AY 2022-23, early childhood incumbent workforce members **increased by 33.9 percent** from 3,460 to 4,632. Importantly, AY 2022-23 was the first full year of the Consortium and the ECACE Scholarship. Enrollment data by sector can be found in the [Enrollment Section](#) of the full report.

Figure 3. Incumbent and Non-incumbent Worker Enrollment in All Consortium Early Childhood Programs, AY19-20 to AY22-23



The proportion of students who are members of the incumbent workforce increased as well, from 40 percent in AY 2019-20 to 56.3 percent in AY 2022-23. This held true for both community colleges and four-year colleges and universities.

³ Duplication and/or overlap of student records may exist when combining higher education sector datasets (via ICCB and IBHE) as students may concurrently enroll across sectors in the same academic year.

Table 1. Proportion of Students Who are Incumbent Workforce Members, by Sector, AY19-20 to AY22-23

	AY19-20 Baseline	AY20-21 Pandemic	AY21-22 Soft Launch	AY22-23 First Full Consortium Year
Community Colleges	44.1%	47.8%	50.7%	57.1%
Four-Year	36.1%	39.4%	43.1%	55.4%
Overall	40.0%	43.1%	46.4%	56.3%

Race and Ethnicity of Incumbent Workforce Members

As shown in Table 2, the enrollment of incumbent workers across all races increased from AY 2019-20 (baseline) to AY 2022-23, with the greatest increases in enrollment of African American students (+66.8 percent). African American incumbent students increased by 41.2 percent during the first full year of the Consortium, an increase from 633 to 894 students. Enrollment data race/ethnicity and sector can be found in [Enrollment Section](#) of the full report.

Table 2. Illinois Community College Enrollment of Incumbent Members of the Early Childhood Workforce by Race/Ethnicity, AY19-20 to AY22-23

Race/ Ethnicity	AY19-20 Baseline	AY20-21 Pandemic	AY21-22 Soft Launch	AY22-23 First Full Consortium Year	Percent Change AY19-20 to AY22-23	Percent Change AY21-22 to AY22-23
Asian	93	106	96	119	+28.0%	+24.0%
African American	536	571	633	894	+66.8%	+41.2%
Latino	849	987	1,083	1,324	+55.9%	+22.3%
White	1,287	1,278	1,452	2,007	+55.9%	+38.2%
More Than One Race	58	49	51	94	+62.1%	+84.3%
Other	137	131	145	194	+41.6%	+33.8%
Total	2,960	3,122	3,460	4,632	+56.5%	+33.9%

Pell Status and Adult Learners

The percentage of incumbent workforce members that received federal Pell grants remained relatively consistent over time at approximately 42 percent in AY 2019-20 and 44 percent in AY 2022-23. At community colleges, the percentage of Pell eligible students increased from 40.1 percent to 42.9 percent in AY 2022-23. Pell recipients remained relatively stable at four-year institutions, with 44.8 percent eligible in AY 2019-20 and 45.4 percent eligible in AY 2022-23. This may indicate that the income levels across enrolled members of the incumbent workforce have remained relatively stable with increases in enrollment.

Overall, enrollment of adult learners (age 25 and older) and non-adult learners (under age 25) increased from AY 2019-20; however, enrollment rates of those under 25 increased at a greater rate. The proportion of adult learners (over 25) who are incumbent workers decreased from 84.8 percent in AY 2019-20 to 64.0 percent in AY 2022-23.

Program Creation, Design, and Modality

Colleges and universities recognized that working adults (and their employers) benefit from a variety of modalities and program offerings and put in place programs and supports to increase access and to recognize their prior learning and competencies.

Access and Engagement

Consortium institutions took an array of approaches to support incumbent workforce members’ access to higher education, including:

- Offering **evening, weekend, and online** (both synchronous and asynchronous) courses;
- Developing **innovative online modules** designed to ensure consistent learner experience and high student engagement;
- Leveraging technology to offer **Hy-flex courses**, which allow students to choose whether to attend a class in person or virtually at a scheduled time;
- Providing **on-site courses** at child care centers, in communities, and through cohorts;
- Including opportunities for workforce members to **build community and rapport**, access instructors, and ask questions of faculty and peers, during online synchronous café-style meetings; this was important for online students, particularly those enrolled in asynchronous courses;
- Offer **accelerated courses** (typically 8 weeks) and summer courses;
- Providing **new courses and options** to meet student and provider needs, such as courses in Spanish, opportunities for more hands-on experience, apprenticeship programs, and virtual observations.

As of September 2023, institutions offered courses across the following formats: daytime in-person, evenings or weekends in person, online – both synchronously and asynchronously, and hybrid (see Table 3).

Table 3. Percentage of Institutions Offering Various Course Modalities to the Incumbent Workforce, by Sector, Fall 2022–Fall 2023

Sector	In Person	In-Person Evening or Weekend	Online Asynchronous	Online Synchronous	Hybrid
Community Colleges	85%	71%	88%	59%	N/A ⁴
Public Universities	92%	54%	92%	77%	46%
Private Institutions	80%	60%	80%	50%	70%
All Institutions	86%	66%	88%	61%	N/A

Illinois Community College Online (ILCCO)

To increase student access to courses, many community colleges began offering and accepting courses offered through ILCCO and the Online Course Exchange (OCE) or increased the number of courses offered.⁵ As of March 2024, 133 early childhood courses (up from 79 in March of 2023), were made accessible through ILCCO by 22 Consortium schools (up from 14 institutions in March of 2023). Overall, 1,683 ILCCO courses, primarily from the General Education Core Curriculum (GECC), were offered at 28 colleges (up from about 1,600 ILCCO courses at 20 colleges in March of 2023).⁶

Leveraging Competencies and Prior Learning

Colleges and universities spent considerable time developing and providing opportunities to recognize and provide credit for competencies developed prior to entering their institutions.

⁴ At least three community college institutions qualitatively reported offering hybrid courses. This choice was not an option in two-year institutional reporting forms.

⁵ Illinois Community Colleges Online (ILCCO) is a membership organization available to all Illinois community college districts. The statewide system, called the Online Course Exchange (OCE), allows community college students access to online courses at other schools when the course is unavailable online at the student’s home institution.

⁶ It is only possible to pull a point-in-time report of ILCCO courses, so this data is from March 2024 which is outside of the reporting period (July 1, 2022, to December 31, 2023).

Transfer Pathways

All Consortium four-year institutions implemented at least one pathway to support the full transfer of the applied associate degree (AAS) to the bachelor's degree. Many four-year institutions modified their early childhood programs to create better alignment with the AAS degree through modularizing courses, removing requirements for redundant coursework, and redesigning courses to reflect competencies earned and still needed. Interestingly, institutions reported that only approximately 31.7 percent of students transferring into four-year institutions held an AAS in early childhood, up from 29 percent from our first annual report. It will be interesting to see whether these patterns change over time and whether more students earn and transfer AAS degrees.

Table 4. Four Year Institutions Transfer Students, by Degree

Degree	Number of Transfer Students	Percentage of Transfer Students
AAS	650	31.7%
AA	589	28.7%
AS	75	3.7%
60+ credits	486	23.7%
Other	253	12.3%
Total	2053	100%

Credit for Prior Learning

Many institutions reported working on ways to provide course credit for prior learning. The most notable way was through providing credit for the national Child Development Associate (CDA). The CDA is a national credential that recognizes foundational competencies acquired through work experience and training as demonstrated through assessment, observation, and portfolio. While all institutions implemented a way to provide six semester hours (or the equivalent number of quarter hours) for the CDA, most credits were awarded through community colleges.

Table 5. Number of Students Receiving Credit for CDA, by Sector

Sector	# of students receiving credit for CDA
Community Colleges	321
Public Universities	6
Private, Non-Profit Institutions	22
Total	349

Financial Supports

Students benefitted from substantial funding to help them access higher education, including scholarships to take courses and debt relief, to allow them to address financial holds.

ECACE Scholarship

Whereas most sections of the report focus on work through December 2023, this section on the ECACE Scholarship covers the full 2023-24 academic year, since data was readily available. The ECACE Scholarship is intended to mitigate the often-prohibitive costs of higher education that extend beyond tuition and fees to include expenses such as books and supplies, housing, transportation, and more. In AY 2023-24, the

scholarship covered up to the full cost of attendance for both undergraduate and graduate students who are members of the incumbent early childhood workforce.⁷

For AY 2023-24, \$76.4 million in ECACE Scholarship funds were distributed to nearly 4,700 members of the incumbent workforce, 89 percent of whom were women.⁸ During this time, 41 percent of scholarship recipients attended community colleges, 35 percent attended private, nonprofit institutions, and 24 percent attended public universities. This is a large increase from AY 2022-23, in which \$29.6 million in scholarship funds were distributed to nearly 2,100 members of the incumbent workforce and from AY 2021-22 (the soft launch of the ECACE scholarship) where only \$5.7 million in scholarship funds were distributed to a little over 400 members of the incumbent workforce.

Table 6. Scholarship Data by Sector, AY23-24

Sector	Applications	Recipients	Total Awards	Average Award per Student	Institutions with Scholarship Students
Community Colleges	3,105	1,930	\$18,991,428	\$6,116	41 of 41 Institutions
Public Universities	1,450	1,142	\$26,021,054	\$17,946	11 of 11 Institutions
Private, Non-Profit Institutions	2,079	1,622	\$31,399,956	\$19,359	10 of 10 Institutions
TOTAL	6,634	4,694	\$76,412,438	\$16,279	62 of 62 Institutions

For AY 2023-24, 45 percent of scholarship recipients were persons of color. Of all recipients, 43 percent identified as White, 21 percent Black or African American, 17 percent Hispanic or Latino, 2 percent Asian, 5 percent more than one race or ethnicity, and 12 percent either preferred not to answer or did not provide a response. The racial makeup of scholarship recipients was relatively similar to that of Illinois early childhood workforce members in licensed child care centers overall, as reported in 2020. One notable difference: 43 percent of scholarship recipients identify as White; whereas 54 percent of early childhood classroom staff and directors in licensed child care centers identify as White (Whitehead, 2021).

Debt Relief

Institutions were encouraged to use ECACE grant funds to eliminate outstanding account balances and financial holds for early childhood students to ensure unpaid balances did not prevent them from completing their degree or credential. From July 1, 2022, through December 31, 2023, 1,205 total students were awarded debt relief. Some institutions experienced challenges eliminating student debt due to issues of privacy, debt already sent to collections, debt held at other (non-Consortium) institutions, the potential tax burden, and students' concerns about the legitimacy of the offer of funding.

Because of the ECE Scholarship I have earned, I am one semester away from my 2nd degree, I earned a substantial raise at work and got promoted to the center Director. NONE of this would have been possible if this grant was not available. It is because of this grant that I also have enrolled in ISU for the fall to pursue my B.A in ECE. This grant has changed the trajectory of my life and has impacted my family's life tremendously. Because of this grant I can continue to grow and advance in a field that I absolutely enjoy. My current and future students at my center deserve to have the best educators in their classroom. This grant is making that possible.

– Student Testimony, Joliet Junior College

⁷ Students attending participating private, not-for-profit institutions were eligible to receive a scholarship amount that did not exceed the cost of the most expensive early childhood program at an Illinois public university.

⁸ Less than 1% were men; the remaining 9% did not respond.

Mentors and Student Academic and Wrap-Around Supports

Consortium institutions provided academic and holistic support 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. Mentors played a key role in providing students with these supports. From July 1, 2022, through December 31, 2023, mentors met with Consortium students more than 50,000 times to provide technical assistance, support, and coaching through text messaging, phone calls, and emails; in-person and virtual meetings; office hours; and group workshops in ways that met their preferences and schedules.

Mentor roles varied by institution; examples of services provided include but are not limited to the following.

- Enrollment support and active assistance to apply for and access the ECACE scholarship.
- Monitoring of academic process, intervening, and providing assistance to access services.
- Tutoring for coursework and the content test required for teacher licensure.
- Opportunities to connect with faculty and peers to create a sense of community.
- Academic advising.
- Non-academic supports such as professional development in time management, resume development, financial management, opportunities to engage with industry professionals.
- Wellness and emotional supports, as many mentors reported high rates of stress for those going to school and working; mentors also reported high rates of burnout and mental health related challenges.

...the second thing I want to address is the importance of the ECE mentors. I cannot tell you how many times my mentor has sent me reminders to get something in and where to apply for the ECE scholarship, helped me get a loaner laptop, checked in for other ways that she can help me be successful. They are a need for the Early Childhood department to be successful. I would not have started classes to begin with without my mentor reaching out to me and letting me know this program was available. She has brought in new students that would've never went to college if she would not have made that effort.

- Student Testimony (Highland Community College)

Outreach and Engagement

Outreach and engagement with the incumbent workforce were conducted by both ECACE higher education navigators and institutions. Both groups worked to make connections with early childhood employers and to be responsive to their needs.

Between July 1, 2022, and December 31, 2023, institutions held 2,137 outreach events to engage employers and the workforce and reported 40,253 individuals participating in these events.⁹ Additionally, institutions reported connections with 11,382 employers and/or schools over that same period.¹⁰ Institutions have increased their outreach efforts over time, as last year, between July and December 2022, they held just under 500 events, engaged 7,800 participants, and connected with over 1,000 employers.

⁹ The number of individuals is **not** an unduplicated count.

¹⁰ The number of employers and schools is **not** an unduplicated count.

Table 7. Institutions' Outreach Events, Participants, and Connections with Employers, by Sector, July 2022 – December 2023

Sector	# Outreach Events	# Participants	# Connections with employers or schools
Community Colleges	1,233	28,756	10,191
Public Universities	383	8,223	575
Private, Non-Profit Institutions	521	3,274	616
Total	2,137	40,253	11,382

Between July 1, 2022, and December 31, 2023, navigators conducted outreach and provided extensive technical assistance to the incumbent workforce and early childhood providers. Specifically, navigators held 1,580 general information sessions and an additional 975 outreach meetings. Other outreach methods included mailing information materials (2,231 times), calling providers and workforce members (7,279 times), and sending emails (29,028 times).

Over the 18-month reporting period, navigators sent 39,950 emails to provide technical assistance (TA), held 2,877 in person meetings and another 1,874 virtual meetings, sent 617 texts and made 1,063 phone calls. This resulted in providing over 5,253 workforce members with technical assistance.¹¹ A total of 821 students were known to have been directly connected to institutions by a navigator. We know that more students benefited from connections, as navigators only began officially collecting and reporting this information as of the fall of 2023.

Table 8. Outreach Activities, Technical Assistance Provided, and Workforce Members Served by Navigators, July 2022 – December 2023

Category	Activity	Number
Outreach Activities	General Information Sessions	1,580
	Outreach Meetings	975
	Mailing Information Materials	2,231
	Phone Calls to Providers and Incumbent Workforce	7,279
	Sending Emails	29,028
	Interest Form Requests	4,914
Technical Assistance Provided	Emails	39,950
	In-Person Meetings	2,877
	Virtual Meetings	1,874
	Texts	617
	Phone Calls	1,063

Table 8, continued

Category	Activity	Number
Workforce Members Served	# Workforce Members Receiving TA	5,253
	# Students Connected to Institution by Navigator	821

¹¹ This information only started being collected in April 2023, so the true number of workforce members assisted is likely much higher.

Engagement With and Responsiveness to Employers

Nearly all institutions engaged with local early childhood providers for recruitment into their programs. Cognizant of employer demands, many institutions scheduled their outreach during times most convenient for them, including during staff meetings and nap and break times.

Additional ways of engaging with and being responsive to employer needs included the following.

- Collecting feedback from employers on industry trends, training, and hiring needs.
- Incorporating additional training on topics identified as areas of need by employers.
- Participating in local advisory boards or attending committee meetings related to early childhood topics to stay attuned to industry demands.
- Creating and engaging in collaborations across employers and technical assistance providers, workshops and curriculum counseling.
- Establishing and/or continuing advisory boards to solicit feedback on their curriculum

Finally, institutions served employers by helping fill their open positions. A few institutions integrated job preparation into their program, offering resume development, interview preparation, and sharing job openings with their students. Additionally, several institutions hosted job fairs with local employers to try to connect their students with those job openings.

Looking Ahead

While the Consortium and its institutions have accomplished much since the inception of ECACE, and especially over this reporting period, there is still more to do to remove barriers and increase opportunities to access degrees and credentials of the incumbent workforce, as laid out in legislation and identified by institutions and state agencies. The institutional grants and scholarships provided to students have had a huge impact on enrollment, persistence, and completion and institutions' ability to support students and remove barriers. Institutional grants expired in June 2024, and scholarship funds were significantly reduced, even with the state investment of \$5 million appropriated in the FY 2024-25 budget. Institutions and state agencies have been planning for how to best sustain the most important elements of the work, continue to accomplish the goals and activities set out in legislation, and continue to support and upskill the incumbent workforce.

Specifically, the Consortium is standing up communities of practice and working groups in AY 2024-25 and strategically thinking about a longer-term sustainability plan for how the Consortium will work together and accomplish the goals laid out in the Act. Similarly, institutions have developed individual sustainability plans to continue to support the incumbent workforce and remove barriers to their enrollment, persistence, and completion.

Conclusion

In this reporting period, the Consortium and its institutional members increased enrollment, persistence and completion of the early childhood workforce; adjusted program and course design to be more accessible to working adults; provided scholarships and debt relief to students to remove financial barriers to higher education; conducted outreach and engaged with early childhood employers to best meet their needs; and provided students supports to assist early childhood workforce members to persist and complete.

While AY 2024-25 will prove challenging with the end of institutional grants, the Consortium is making plans to continue supporting the incumbent early childhood workforce by maintaining student supports and program changes where possible, adjusting strategies such as recruitment messaging, collecting data to measure the progress and value of ECACE, and innovating additional strategies to make higher education more accessible for the early childhood workforce. Additionally, as the Consortium looks toward "Phase 2", it envisions additional collaborative, cross-consortium work to continue to network, learn, share, and create seamless pathways for working adults.

INTRODUCTION

The Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity (ECACE) was created by [Illinois Public Act 102-0174](#) with the purpose of upskilling the early childhood incumbent workforce to meet the demand for well-qualified early educators in the state.¹² The Consortium is made up of 62 higher education institutions, including community colleges, public universities, and private not-for-profit institutions, working together to remove barriers for early childhood workers to enroll, persist, and complete credentials and degrees. ECACE is administered by the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) and Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) in partnership with other state agencies and is also supported by an Advisory Committee of early childhood employers, advocates, state agency partners, and others. ECACE builds on previous Illinois initiatives to bring together higher education institutions to support the incumbent early childhood workforce through credential and degree attainment.

The early childhood workforce is made up primarily of women, many of whom are women of color. According to a 2020 report from the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (INCCRRA), about 96 percent of those working in licensed child care settings are women, and 47 percent of teaching staff in licensed child care settings identify as people of color (Whitehead, 2021). Many of these early childhood workers are balancing full-time employment, family needs, and other responsibilities that have historically made it difficult to pursue and complete postsecondary credentials. Additionally, low wages in the early childhood field serve as a barrier to accessing higher education. As of July 2023, median teacher wages in Illinois range from \$15.40-17.00/hour, depending on the region of the state (IDHS Division of Early Childhood, 2024). ECACE was created to address these barriers and upskill the early childhood workforce in Illinois.

The ECACE Act went into effect on July 28, 2021. From Academic Years (AY) 2022-24, IDHS allocated over \$200 million in federal child care funding to support ECACE activities. ECACE was “soft launched” in AY 2021-22, with ECACE Scholarship awards first made in March 2022. This report highlights enrollment of students in AY 2022-23, from fall 2022 through summer 2023 – the first full year of the Consortium; additionally, it highlights work accomplished by the Consortium between July 2022 and December 2023.

During this 18-month reporting period, ECACE achieved many notable things in service of upskilling early childhood incumbent workers in Illinois. Key work included the following.

During this 18-month reporting period, ECACE achieved many notable things in service of upskilling early childhood incumbent workers in Illinois. Key work included the following.

- **Enrollment, Persistence, and Completion:** Supported members of the incumbent workforce to enroll, persist, and complete. From baseline (AY 2019-20) to AY 2022-23, Consortium institutions saw a **56.5 percent increase in enrollment**. In just one year – the first full year of the Consortium (AY 2022-23) – Consortium institutions experienced a **33.9 percent increase** in workforce member enrollment. Nearly **73 percent (72.9 percent)** of incumbent members of the workforce persisted or completed during this time.
- **Financial Supports:** Removed financial barriers to higher education by distributing **\$76.4 million in scholarships to 4,694 recipients** as of July 2024 and removing **outstanding debt for 1,205** total students as of December 2023.
- **Program Design and Modality:** Redesigned early childhood post-secondary programs and courses to be **more accessible** to the early childhood incumbent workforce. This included offering more **flexible formats** and modalities, ensuring seamless transfer pathways, and recognizing prior learning.

¹² "'Incumbent workforce' means an individual or a group of individuals working or having worked in the early childhood industry, including family child care and center-based care settings, Preschool for All school-based settings, and HeadStart, that serves children from birth to age 5 and includes teachers, assistant teachers, directors, family child care providers, and assistants" (Illinois General Assembly, 2021).

- **Transfer Pathways:** Transferred over 2,053 students into four-year early childhood programs, over 30 percent of whom held an AAS degree.
- **Outreach and Engagement with the Workforce and Employers:** Conducted outreach through over 2,100 events with over 40,000 members of the incumbent workforce participating. Engagement with employers (11,382 reported connections) to be more responsive to their hiring, retention, and professional development needs.
- **Relationships:** Built stronger relationships within and across higher education institutions, strengthening the system to better serve incumbent workers.
- **Student Supports:** Offered holistic student supports, including mentors, coaches, and tutors that met with students over 50,000 times and provided guidance and assistance to enrolled early childhood students, navigators to recruit and direct students to institutions, and other academic and wraparound supports to ensure persistence and completion.

In addition to these accomplishments, ICCB and IBHE, along with the institutional members, overcame challenges and learned important lessons that can inform future work supporting early educators in higher education.

- **Mentors:** Mentors were critical in supporting students to be successful and to persist and complete.
- **Scholarship:** Scholarship funds were essential for many early childhood educators to affordably pursue higher education.
- **Time and Resources:** Significant time and staff resources were required to make changes within higher education institutions. Redesigning courses or implementing a new transfer policy required lengthy approval processes across one or more terms.
- **Collaboration:** Collaboration across internal institutional teams supported ECACE's success at the institution.
- **Institutional Teams:** Those institutions that built strong institutional teams reported more progress and more student support.

Looking ahead, the Consortium as a whole and its makeup of individual institutions are developing sustainability plans to continue to support the incumbent early childhood workforce since federal funding ended in June 2024. The General Assembly included \$5 million in scholarships for students in AY 2024-25, substantially less than the federal grant funding, and no funding was provided for institutions.

Report Contents, Requirements, and Methodology

The Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity (ECACE) 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” (Illinois General Assembly, 2021). This document includes all required reporting. It additionally provides a broader narrative of the work of ECACE, including outcomes, successes, and challenges.

This report is intended to cover successes, challenges, and outcomes for an 18-month period from July 1, 2022, through December 31, 2023. Enrollment, persistence, and completion data, however, is only for AY 2022-23. 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's (ISAC) ECACE Scholarship data, meetings, and other sources.

IBHE and ICCB engaged Afton Partners to help support the data analysis and writing of this annual report. Afton Partners analyzed six quarters of both quantitative and qualitative data from each of the institutions. Qualitative data was anonymized and entered into an artificial intelligence (AI) platform, AILYZE, to identify themes. Afton staff subsequently read through all raw data to validate themes and identify specific quotes and examples.

In addition, to report on incumbent workforce member enrollment and job status for enrolled students, 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.¹³ 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 students have been employed in licensed child care 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. For future reports, there are plans to potentially include additional information from ISBE on ECEC paraprofessionals working in school district settings.

Throughout the report, we show both the change from the “baseline year” (AY 2019–20) through AY 2022–23 and the change from the “soft launch” year of the Consortium (AY 2021–22) through AY 2022–23, which was the year the Consortium work fully launched. ECACE used AY 2019–20 as a baseline year for which to measure progress, even though most of the work of ECACE was implemented beginning in AY 2022–2023.¹⁴ While the ECACE Scholarship was partially awarded in AY 2021-22, AY 2022-23 was the first complete academic year that students could access the scholarship funds and in which students could access redesigned programs. AY 2019-20 was chosen as a baseline year because it was pre-pandemic and may be a better baseline for institutions to measure progress than during the pandemic, which challenged both institutions and students.

Figure 4. Timeline for the Consortium Launch and Baseline/Comparison Data



¹³ Data from Rockford University was not available at the time of this report.
¹⁴ AY 2021–2022 is considered a “soft launch” year for ECACE, as much of the year was used for planning. The first scholarships were awarded in March 2022, and institutions received grant funding to support student upskill in the Spring of 2022.

ECACE INFRASTRUCTURE

The ECACE Act established two bodies that, with the support of state agencies, provide the infrastructure for the ECACE Initiative: the Consortium and the Advisory Committee. Additionally, a Steering Committee made up of five state agencies – Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE), Illinois Community College Board (ICCB), Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), and Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC) – met bi-weekly and then bi-monthly starting in 2021 to advise on overall ECACE activities, plan for Advisory Committee meetings, and discuss shared workforce issues to promote increased alignment.¹⁵

Consortium

The legislative charge 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” (Illinois General Assembly, 2021).

Consortium members include all public universities and community colleges in the state that offer early childhood programs. Membership of private, not-for-profit universities is optional and encouraged. As of December 2023, there were 62 Consortium members: 41 community colleges, 11 public universities, and ten private non-profit institutions. IBHE and ICCB convene and provide administrative support to the Consortium, which met in-person three times between July 1, 2022, and December 31, 2023. Meeting materials can be found on the website: www.ecace.org.

Vision and Guiding Principles

The vision for the Consortium is for institutions to collectively and individually address opportunities and barriers for the early childhood workforce to access, persist, and complete credentials and degrees. Guiding Principles ground the work, inform how the Consortium operates, and shape how institutions interact with each other. More information can be found on the [website](#).

- Center student success;
- Share leadership;
- Behave as equals;
- Respect Consortium agreements while accommodating institutional differences; and
- Simplify student navigation.

Goal

The collective goal of the Consortium, as determined by the Board of Higher Education's Strategic Plan Educator Workforce subgroup, is to enroll 4,933 students that persist or complete an early childhood credential or degree by September 2024.

Working Groups

Working Groups were created to develop strategies, metrics, and implementation plans for discrete projects of the Consortium. In AY 2022, two working groups were convened: the first developed the Guiding Principles for the Consortium, the second developed a policy framework for institutions to provide higher education credit to those who have an active Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential, a requirement

¹⁵ The Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development was part of the original Steering Committee; the office sunset in September 2023.

of the legislation. Additional Working Groups are planned for AY 2023-24 related to Creative Course Delivery and Reporting (see more details in the [Looking Ahead](#) section).

Communities of Practice

Organized by topic, Communities of Practice were a place for institutions to share challenges, uplift best practices, and engage in collective problem solving. Several Communities of Practice have been formed since the start of ECACE, including ones on AAS Transfers, Curriculum Redesign, Debt Relief, and Mentoring (all described in the [Success and Progress of ECACE](#) section).

Advisory Committee

The ECACE Act originally charged five state agencies – IBHE, ICCB, ISBE, IDHS, and the Governor’s Office of Early Childhood Development – with jointly convening and co-chairing the Advisory Committee to provide guidance on the operation of the Consortium. The Advisory Committee fosters dialogue between statewide partners and ensures Consortium members recognize a myriad of perspectives – including employers, working adult students, advocates, and state agencies – as they develop policies and processes to support early childhood students at their institutions.¹⁶ The Advisory Committee has formally adopted the following responsibilities.

- Act as champions for the Consortium and purposes of PA 102-0174.
- Review reports submitted by the Consortium.
- Provide advice and recommendations to the lead agencies 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 care and education industry, higher education, and other stakeholders to share perspective to best support the work of the Consortium.
- Provide consultation and feedback to the state agencies charged with setting new metrics and goals for the Consortium after the close of the 2024-25 academic year.

The Advisory Committee’s member composition, as defined in the legislation, 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. The Advisory Committee’s unique membership brings together cross-sector stakeholders that provide different and representative perspectives to issues facing the field of early childhood. Members are appointed by legislatively designated co-chairs of the Committee, state agency members, or the chairperson of the Illinois Senate and House Higher Education Committees. The Advisory Committee met six times between July 1, 2022, and December 31, 2023.

¹⁶ GOECD closed in September 2023. Since then, the Advisory Committee has been co-chaired by representatives from the other four state agencies. As of July 2024, legislation was amended to remove the now defunct department as co-chair, replaced with a representative from the newly formed Department of Early Childhood.

GOALS AND OUTCOMES: ENROLLMENT, PERSISTENCE, AND COMPLETION

Key Findings

- **Enrollment of Incumbent Workforce Members:** From AY 2019-20 (baseline) to AY 2022-23, Consortium institutions saw a **56.5 percent increase in enrollment** from 2,960 to 4,632 in student incumbent workforce members in their EC programs.
- **Proportion of Incumbent Workforce Members:** The proportion of students who are members of the incumbent workforce **increased 40 percent in AY 2019-20 to 56.3 percent in AY 2022-23**. Substantial increases were also seen for both community colleges (44.1 percent to 57.1 percent) and four-year colleges and universities (36 percent to 55.4 percent).
- **African American Incumbent Workforce Members:** The enrollment of incumbent workers across all races increased from AY 2019-20 (baseline) to AY 2022-23, with **the greatest increases in enrollment of African American students (66.8 percent)**. African American incumbent students increased by 41.2 percent during the first full year of the Consortium, an increase from 633 to 894 students.
- **Latino Incumbent Workforce Members:** Strong gains were made by Latino students, with a **55.9 percent increase in enrollment** from baseline (AY 2019-20) of 849 to 1,324 and 22.3 percent increase during the first full year of the Consortium from 1,083 to 1,324.
- **Pell Grant Receipt:** The percentage of incumbent workforce members that received federal Pell grants experienced a slight uptick with approximately 42 percent in AY 2019-20 and 44 percent in AY 2022-23.
- **Adult Learners:** The proportion of adult learners (over age 25) who are incumbent workers decreased from 84.8 percent in AY 2019-20 to 64.0 percent in AY 2022-23. This trend is consistent at both community colleges and four-year institutions, with greater decreases at four-year institutions.
- **Persistence and Completion:** Nearly **73 percent (72.9 percent)** of incumbent members of the workforce persisted or completed from AY 2021-22 to AY 2022-23. Completion and impact of the initiative will continue to be closely monitored in future years as it will allow the needed timeframe for measurement (this is particularly critical in the four-year sector, in allowing four years for graduation).¹⁷

The ECACE Act requires the Consortium to report on enrollment and persistence and/or completion of the early childhood workforce at Consortium institutions. In addition, the Consortium is charged with reporting on background information about the early childhood workforce, including years worked and type of employer. Information in this section includes full Consortium enrollment from the baseline year of AY 2019-20 through AY 2022-23. ECACE uses AY 2019-20 as a baseline year for which to measure progress, even though most of the work of ECACE was implemented beginning in AY 2022-2023.¹⁸ This year was chosen because it was pre-pandemic and may be a better baseline for institutions to measure progress than during the pandemic, which challenged both institutions and students.

The impact on student enrollment and success due to the Consortium was fully measured in AY 2022-23, with colleges executing grant agreements in late Spring 2022. Beginning in AY 2022-23, colleges and universities redesigned and built their early childhood program infrastructure to engage in outreach and engagement efforts and wholly provide student financial and academic supports. Additionally, while the ECACE Scholarship was partially awarded in AY 2021-22, AY 2022-23 represented the first complete academic year that students could access the scholarship funds.

Enrollment Patterns for the EC Workforce Across All Consortium Member Institutions

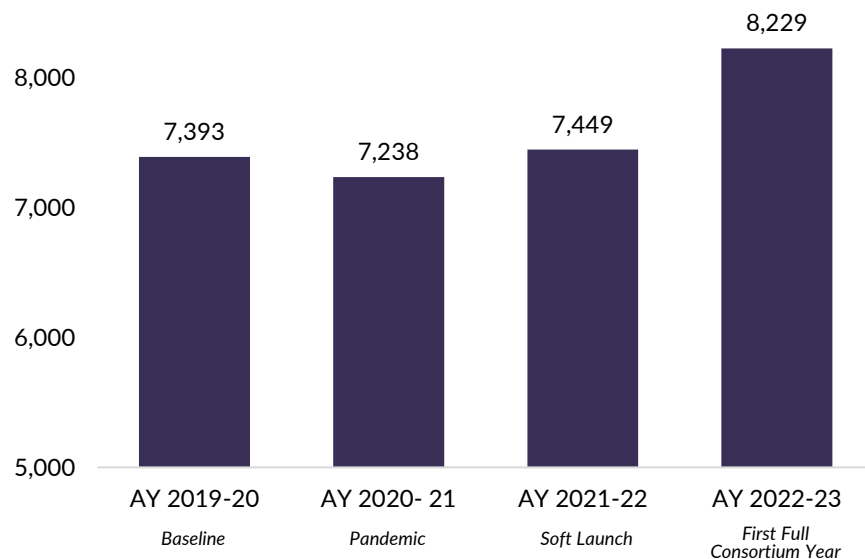
For context, we start with overall enrollment (incumbent and non-incumbent). Early childhood programs across Consortium institutions saw a 11.4 percent increase in overall enrollment from 7,393 in the baseline

¹⁷ Completion data was not available for AY 2022-2023 for several institutions at the time of the report and is therefore not included.

¹⁸ AY 2021-2022 is considered a “soft launch” year for ECACE, as much of the year was used for planning. The first scholarships were awarded in March 2022, and institutions received grant funding to support student upskill in the Spring of 2022.

year of AY 2019–20 through AY 2022–23. From AY 2021–22 to AY 2022–23, enrollment of all students in early childhood programs increased by 10.6 percent, from 7,449 to 8,229.

Figure 5. Overall Enrollment for Early Childhood Incumbent and Non-Incumbent Workers, AY19-20 to AY22-23 ¹⁹

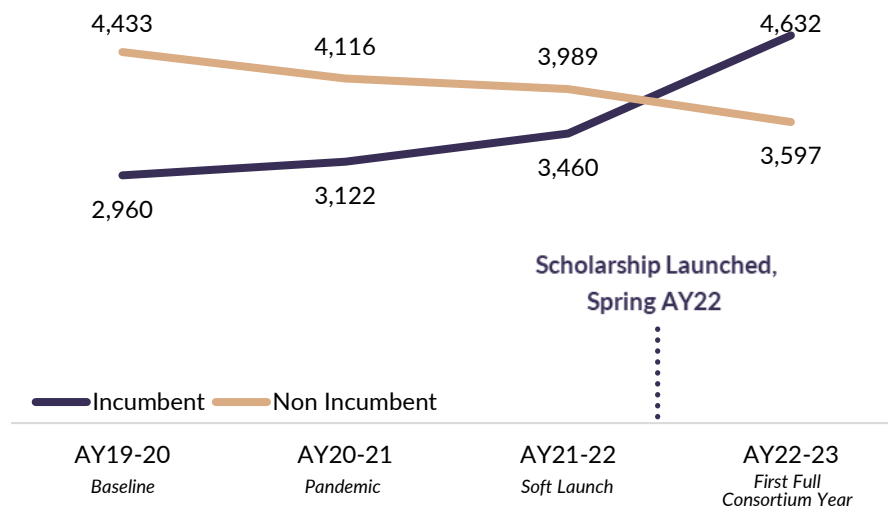


When looking at incumbent workforce members, the increases were even more substantial. From AY 2019-20 (baseline) to AY 2022-23, Consortium institutions saw a 56.5 percent increase in enrollment from 2,960 to 4,632 in incumbent workforce members. Interestingly, during this time, enrollment of non-incumbent workforce members decreased by 18.9 percent, from 4,433 to 3,597, a consistent downward trend from AY 2019-20.

In just one year, from AY 2021-22 to AY 2022-23, early childhood incumbent workforce members increased by 33.9 percent from 3,460 to 4,632. Importantly, AY 2022-23 was the first full year of the Consortium and the ECACE Scholarship.

¹⁹ Duplication and/or overlap of student records may exist when combining higher education sector datasets (via ICCB and IBHE) as students may concurrently enroll across sectors in the same academic year.

Figure 6. Incumbent and Non-incumbent Worker Enrollment in All Consortium Early Childhood Programs, AY19-20 to AY22-23

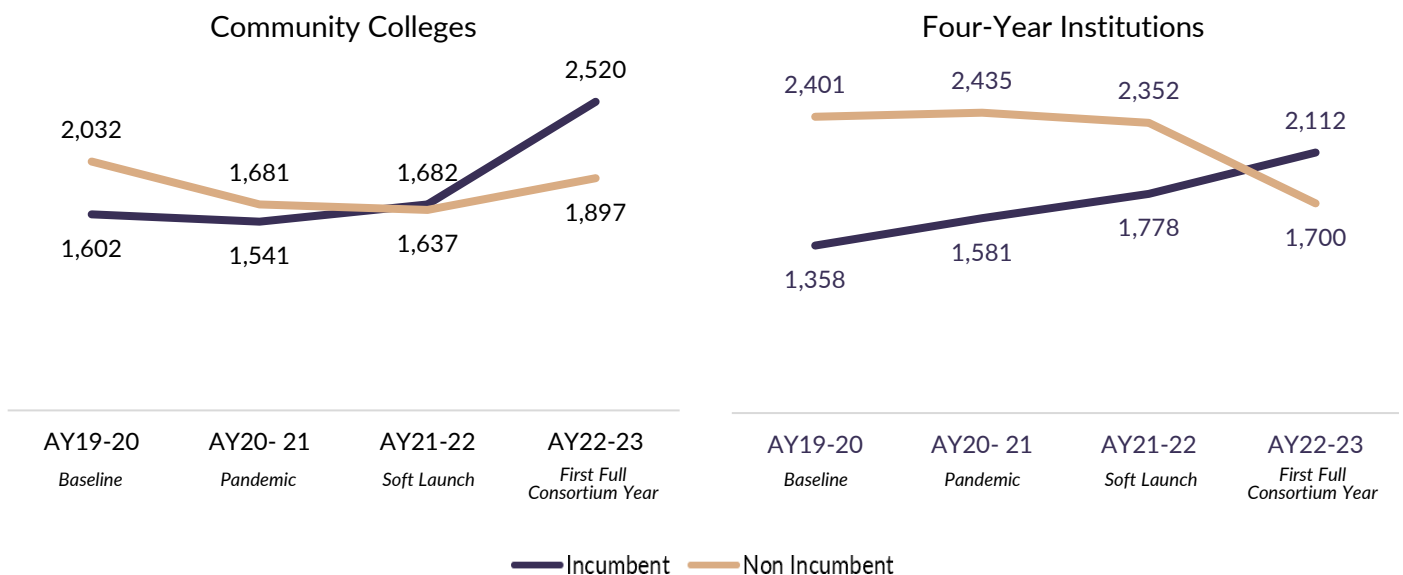


Incumbent Students at Community Colleges and Four-Year Institutions

Community colleges saw a substantial increase in incumbent enrollment, 57.3 percent from 1,602 in AY 2019-20 (baseline) to 2,520 in AY 2022-23 (first full year of the Consortium); non-incumbent enrollment declined 6.6 percent. In just the first full year of the Consortium, Community colleges experienced a 49.8 percent increase, from 1,682 to 2,520 in incumbent enrollment.

Four-year institutions saw a similar increase in enrollment of 55.5 percent from 1,358 in AY 2019-20 (baseline) to 2,112 in AY 2022-23. During this time, non-incumbent enrollment decreased significantly, by 29.2 percent. During just the first full year of the Consortium, incumbent enrollment in four-year early childhood programs increased by 18.8 percent, from 1,778 to 2,112.

Figure 7. Incumbent and Non-Incumbent Enrollment in EC Programs at Community Colleges and Four-Year Institutions, AY19-20 to AY22-23



Both community colleges and four-year institutions experienced a significant shift in the proportion of students that are part of the incumbent workforce, with incumbent workforce members increasing from 44.1 percent to 57.1 percent in community colleges and from 36.1 percent to 55.4 percent at four-year institutions from AY 2019-20 to AY 2022-23.

The most significant shift in enrollment composition happened during the first full year of the Consortium, with incumbent enrollment in community colleges increasing by 6.4 percentage points (from 50.7 to 57.1 percent for incumbent) and four-year institutions increasing by 12.3 percentage points (from 43.1 to 55.4 percent for incumbent).

Table 9. Proportion of Students Who are Incumbent Workforce Members, by Sector, AY19-20 to AY22-23

	AY19-20 Baseline	AY20-21 Pandemic	AY21-22 Soft Launch	AY22-23 First Full Consortium Year
Community Colleges	44.1%	47.8%	50.7%	57.1%
Four-Year	36.1%	39.4%	43.1%	55.4%
Overall	40.0%	43.1%	46.4%	56.3%

Race and Ethnicity of Incumbent Workforce Members

As shown on Table 10, the enrollment of incumbent workers across all races increased from AY 2019-20 (baseline) to AY 2022-23, with the greatest increases in enrollment of African American students (66.8 percent). African American incumbent students increased by 41.2 percent during the first full year of the Consortium, an increase from 633 to 894 students.

Strong gains were also made by Latino students, with a 55.9 percent increase in enrollment from baseline (AY 2019-20) of 849 to 1,324 and 22.3 percent increase during the first full year of the Consortium from 1,083 to 1,324.

*Table 10. Consortium Enrollment of Incumbent Members
of the Early Childhood Workforce, by Race/Ethnicity, AY19-20 to AY22-23*

Race/ Ethnicity	AY19-20 Baseline	AY20-21 Pandemic	AY21-22 Soft Launch	AY22-23 First Full Consortium Year	Percent Change AY19-20 to AY22-23	Percent Change AY21-22 to AY22-23
Asian	93	106	96	119	+28.0%	+24.0%
African American	536	571	633	894	+66.8%	+41.2%
Latino	849	987	1,083	1,324	+55.9%	+22.3%
White	1,287	1,278	1,452	2,007	+55.9%	+38.2%
More Than One Race	58	49	51	94	+62.1%	+84.3%
Other	137	131	145	194	+41.6%	+33.8%
Total	2,960	3,122	3,460	4,632	+56.5%	+33.9%

Community Colleges

Enrollment across race/ethnicity increased for incumbent workforce members at community colleges. As shown on Table 11, while the greatest increases were among White students (60.7 percent) from 721 to 1,159, community colleges enrolled significantly more African American students (56.4 percent) and Latino students (56.7 percent) since AY 2019-20.

During the first full year of the Consortium (AY 2022-23), enrollment increased by 50.9 percent for African American students, 43.2 percent for Latino students and 50.5 percent for White students. Notably, enrollment of Asian students increased by 36.4 percent, though the overall number of Asian incumbent workforce members enrolled is relatively small (75).

Table 11. Illinois Community College Enrollment of Incumbent Members of the Early Childhood Workforce, by Race/Ethnicity, AY19-20 to AY22-23

Race/ Ethnicity	AY19-20 Baseline	AY20-21 Pandemic	AY21-22 Soft Launch	AY22-23 First Full Consortium Year	Percent Change AY19-20 to AY22-23	Percent Change AY21-22 to AY22-23
Asian	72	71	55	75	+4.2%	+36.4%
African American	305	294	316	477	+56.4%	+50.9%
Latino	425	423	465	666	+56.7%	+43.2%
White	721	679	770	1,159	+60.7%	+50.5%
More Than One Race	29	25	24	63	+117.2%	+162.5%
Other	50	49	52	80	+60.0%	+53.8%
Total	1,602	1,541	1,682	2,520	+57.3%	+49.8%

Four-Year Institutions

Four-year institutions also saw enrollment increases of incumbent workforce members of all race/ethnicity, most notably increases in the enrollment of African American incumbent workforce members, whose enrollment increased by 80.5 percent to 417 since the baseline year and 31.5 percent since AY 2021-22. Enrollment of Latino incumbent members has steadily increased since baseline (55.2 percent) and enrollment increased 6.5 percent from 618 to 658 since AY 2021-22. See Table 12.

White incumbent members of the early childhood workforce saw enrollment increases as well, with a 49.8 percent increase since AY 2020. Notably, Asian student enrollment more than doubled since AY 2019-20 (109.5 percent), though the overall number of Asian incumbent workforce members enrolled is relatively small, increasing from 21 to 44 students.

Table 12. Four-Year Institution Enrollment of Incumbent Members of the Early Childhood Workforce, by Race/Ethnicity, AY19-20 to AY22-23

Race/ Ethnicity	AY19-20 Baseline	AY20-21 Pandemic	AY21-22 Soft Launch	AY22-23 First Full Consortium Year	Percent Change AY19-20 to AY22-23	Percent Change AY21-22 to AY22-23
Asian	21	35	41	44	+109.5%	+7.3%
African American	231	277	317	417	+80.5%	+31.5%
Latino	424	564	618	658	+55.2%	+6.5%
White	566	599	682	848	+49.8%	+24.3%
More Than One Race	29	24	27	31	+6.9%	+14.8%
Other	87	82	93	114	+31.0%	+22.6%
Total	1,358	1,581	1,778	2,112	+55.5%	+18.8%

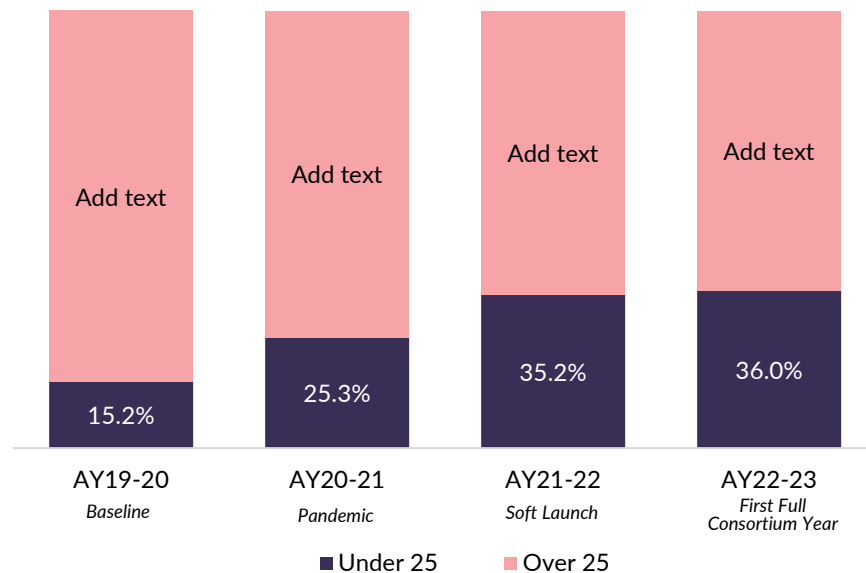
Pell Status

The percentage of incumbent workforce members that received federal Pell grants remained relatively consistent over time at approximately 42 percent in AY 2019-20 and 44 percent in AY 2022-23. At community colleges, the percentage of Pell eligible students increased from 40.1 percent to 42.9 percent in AY 2022-23. Pell recipients remained relatively stable at four-year institutions, with 44.8 percent eligible in AY 2019-20 and 45.4 percent eligible in AY 2022-23. This may indicate that the income levels across enrolled members of the incumbent workforce have remained relatively stable with increases in enrollment.

Adult Learners

Overall, enrollment of adult learners (age 25 and older) and non-adult learners (under age 25) increased from AY 2019-20; however, enrollment rates of those under 25 increased at a greater rate. As shown in Figure 8 below, the proportion of adult learners (over 25) who are incumbent workers decreased from 84.8 percent in AY 2019-20 to 64.0 percent in AY 2022-23.

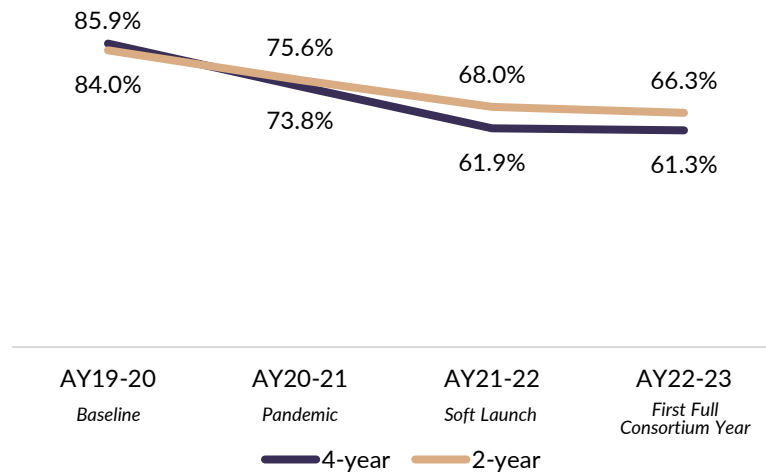
Figure 8. Proportion of Adult Learners, Incumbent Workforce Members at Consortium Institutions, AY19-20 to AY22-23



This trend is consistent at both community colleges and four-year institutions, with greater decreases at four-year institutions. As shown in Figure 9, for both sectors, the sharpest decline in adult learners who were incumbent workforce members happened from AY 2019-20 (baseline) to AY 2020-21 and AY 2021-22. This may be the result of the pandemic; potentially more older working adults had increased responsibilities, such as children and families, and these responsibilities became a barrier to enrollment during the pandemic.

From AY 2021-22 to AY 2022-23, the proportion of adult learners at community colleges and four-year institutions remained relatively consistent (68.0 percent to 66.3 percent and 61.9 percent to 61.3 percent respectively), even as enrollment increased.

Figure 9. Proportion of Adult Learners in the Incumbent Workforce at Two- and Four-Year Institutions, AY19-20 to AY22-23

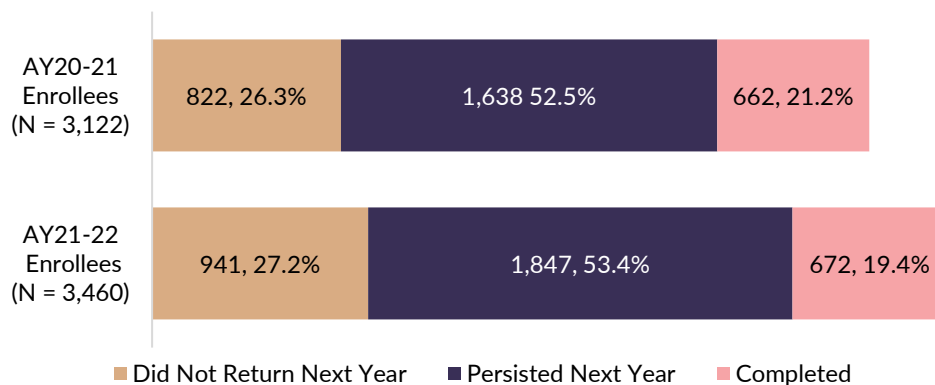


Persistence and Completion of Incumbent Workforce Members

Persistence and completion are important measures for the Consortium to ensure students are making timely progress toward upskilling credentials. Figure 10 depicts the workforce members enrolled in one academic year and whether they 1) completed a degree or credential; 2) returned/persisted the next year, or 3) did not return the next year. The combined rate of students enrolled in AY 2020-21 who completed or persisted in AY 2021-22 was 73.7 percent (21.2 percent completing and 52.5 percent persisting); the combined rate from AY 2021-22 to AY 2022-23 was to 72.8 percent (19.4 percent completing and 53.4 percent persisting).

It is not surprising that numbers stayed relatively consistent year to year, considering the timing of when grants were provided (late Spring 2022) and mentors hired (generally Fall 2022-Spring 2023). With the hiring of mentors and increased support provided students during AY 2022-23, we anticipate seeing increased persistence rates from AY 2022-23 to AY 2023-24. Completion rates, which take a longer time horizon to measure success, will continue to be tracked into AY 2023-24 and thereafter. It is anticipated that completion rates will display similar upticks in performance like enrollment and persistence in AY 2023-24.

Figure 10. Outcomes for Incumbent Members of the EC Workforce Enrolled in AY20-21 and AY21-22 at All Consortium Member Institutions



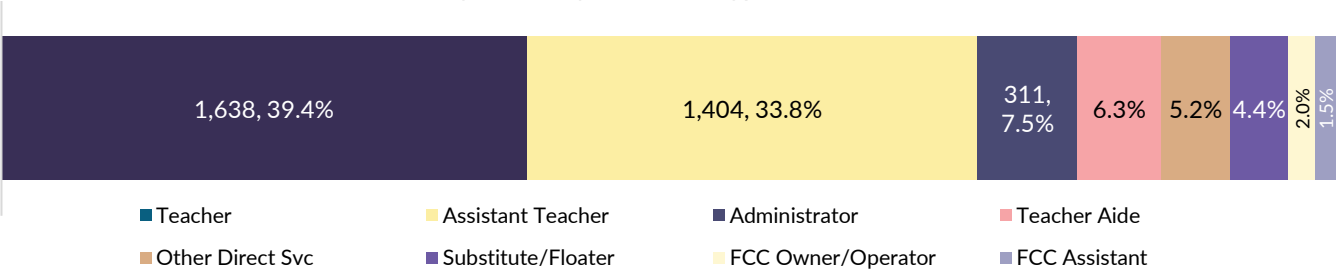
Employment Information for EC Workforce Members at Consortium College and Universities

To better understand the students the Consortium serves, this report analyzes the employment experience of the enrolled EC incumbent workforce members.

Position Type: Most Recent Position

As demonstrated in Figure 11, teachers and assistant teachers comprise the two largest groups of students, accounting for 73.2 percent (of incumbent workforce members at Consortium institutions). Slightly more students reported being teachers (1,638) than assistant teachers (1,404). The next largest groups include administrators (7.5 percent), teacher aides (6.3 percent), other direct service positions (5.2 percent), and substitute/floaters (4.4 percent).

Figure 11. Distribution of Overall Enrolled EC Workforce Population by Gateways Position Type (N=4,158)



Note: The total sample size was 4,221, however, 63 people enrolled fell into positions of unknown, other indirect, other, youth development practitioner, and school age site coordinator, but due to such small numbers, they were excluded from the figure.

Teachers and assistant teachers comprise most incumbent members at both community colleges (39.3 percent and 37.2 percent, respectively) and four-year institutions (39. 6 percent and 29.6 percent, respectively). Interestingly, the next largest group at four-year institutions were teacher aides (8.2 percent); whereas at community colleges, it was directors (8.3 percent).

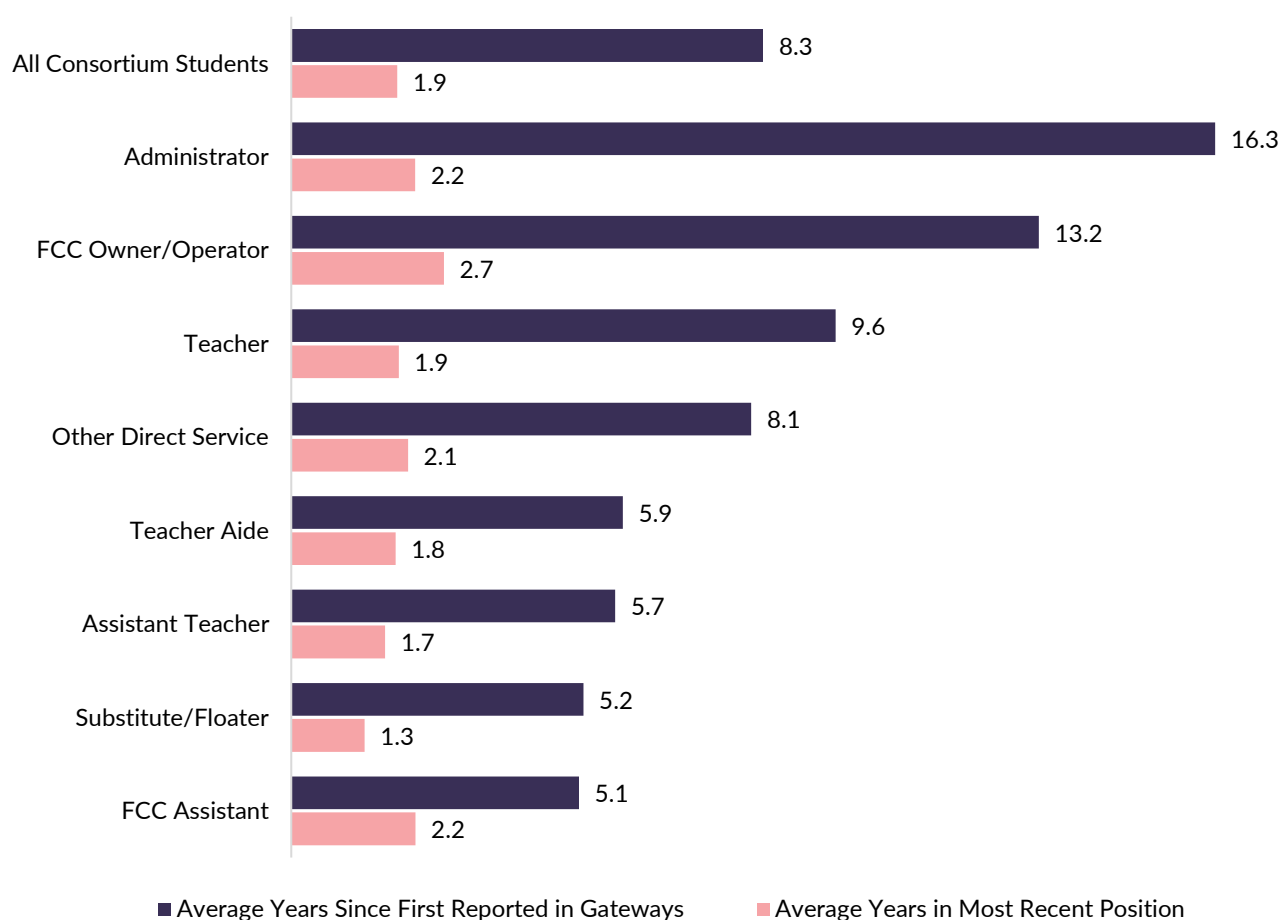
See [Appendix F](#) for a breakdown of enrolled incumbent workers by position and by community colleges and four-year institutions.

Job Tenure

As demonstrated in Figure 12, students who were members of the EC workforce averaged 8.3 years in the field overall (as measured by their first position in the Gateways Registry) and 1.9 years in their most recent position.²⁰ The data also shows that tenure in recent positions and in the field for Consortium students varies substantially by position, with those in administrative and ownership positions having the longest tenure in the field. Of note, “years in most recent position” is somewhat low across positions, indicating relatively frequent turnover; it’s unclear if workforce members are moving into new roles with their current employer or finding employment with another provider.

²⁰ First job reported in Gateways is being used as a proxy for time in the field. However, it should be noted that this data is self-reported and that entering information in the Gateways Registry was not required until 2012 and operationalization of the mandate took several years. Therefore, this may underestimate tenure in the field.

Figure 12. Average Job Tenure in the Field for EC Workforce Members at Consortium Institutions (N=4,158)



Note: The total sample size was 4,221, however, 63 people enrolled fell into positions of unknown, other indirect, other, youth development practitioner, and school-age site coordinator; due to such small numbers, they were excluded from the figure.

When looking at employment tenure by sector, the trends are similar. However, workforce members at four-year institutions tend to have more years in the field overall (10.5) than those at community colleges (6.6). Administrators had the most time in the field across sectors; the amount of time varied between two-year institutions (12.3 years) and four-year institutions (22.6 years). This seems to mirror data indicating that early childhood workforce members tend to increase their education more slowly over time than traditional students. Data from the Gateways Registry indicates that older workforce members are much more likely to hold a bachelor's degree than younger members.²¹

Time in current position was highest for family child care owners/operators averaging 2.8 years for those enrolled in community colleges and 2.6 years for those enrolled at four-year institutions. See [Appendix F](#) for more information about average job tenure by position and by sector.

Employer Type/Job Setting

The vast majority of EC workforce members who were Consortium students (86.3 percent) worked in child care settings in their most recent job. As shown in Table 13, an additional 4.4 percent worked in family child care settings, and 9.2 percent fell into the "other" category, which included those with a not applicable, missing

²¹ Whitehead, J. (2021). Illinois' Early Childhood Workforce 2020 Report. Bloomington, IL: INCCRRA. https://www.inccrra.org/images/datareports/Illinois_Early_Childhood_Education_Workforce_2020_Report.pdf

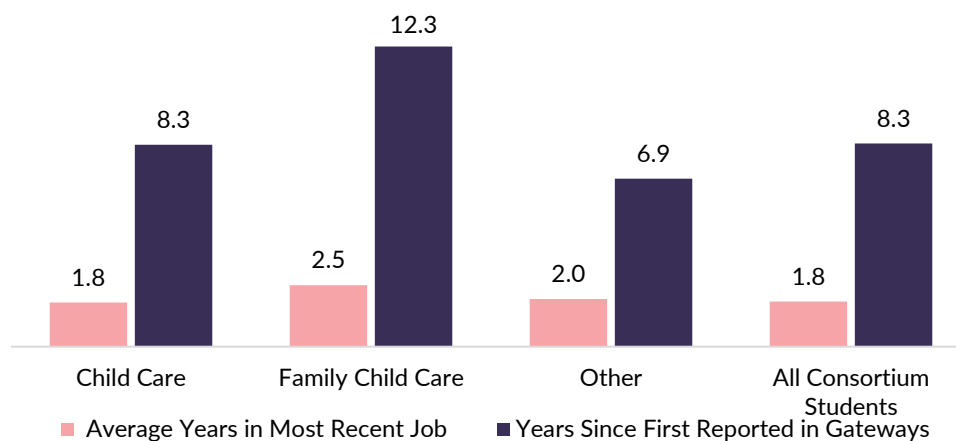
employer type, or in school-based settings in the Gateways Registry. This trend was similar across both community colleges and four-year institutions, though community colleges had a larger percent working in child care (88.2 percent) and less in “other” settings (7.2 percent); while four-year institutions drew slightly less from child care (83.9 percent) and more from “other” settings (11.8 percent).

Table 13. Distribution of EC Workforce Members from Consortium Institutions by Employer Type and Sector (N=4,221)

	Community Colleges		Four-Year Institutions		All Consortium Institutions	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Child Care	2,054	88.2%	1,593	83.9%	3,647	86.3%
Family Child Care	106	4.6%	80	4.3%	186	4.4%
Other	168	7.2%	220	11.8%	388	9.3%
Total	2328		1893		4221	

Although they comprised the smallest group (186, 4.4 percent), students working in family child care had a longer average experience in the field (12.3 years) and in their most recent job (2.5 years) compared to those in child care settings, as depicted in Figure 13. Members of the child care workforce (3,617) averaged 8.3 years in the field and 1.8 years in their current position.

Figure 13. Job Tenure by Employer Type for EC Workforce Members from Consortium Institutions (N=4,221)



The same holds true when looking at employer type by sector. The average tenure in the field was greatest for those working in family child care enrolled in community colleges (10.2 years) and four-year institutions (15 years). Those working in family child care also on average served the most time in their recent position for those enrolled in community colleges (2.5 years) and four-year institutions (2.6 years).

SUCCESS AND PROGRESS OF ECACE

The Consortium has made great strides in removing barriers for the incumbent early childhood workforce members to access, persist, and complete their higher education journeys. Institutions have focused on adjusting their programming to increase access; removing financial barriers to enroll, persist, and complete; collaborating within and across institutions; providing academic and wrap-around supports to students; and engaging in outreach with employers and the incumbent workforce.

Program Changes to Increase Access

To fulfill legislative requirements, Consortium members adjusted their early childhood programs and curriculum to make them more accessible and to address the needs of the incumbent workforce. Many of these changes have been at the individual institution level and a few notable changes have been Consortium-wide. These innovations have included offering new course modalities, creating new courses and programs, developing additional pathways for student advancement in EC, awarding credit for prior learning, allowing students to access courses outside their home institution (course sharing), and adapting student teaching and practicums.

Course Modalities

Many institutions have adjusted the way they offer courses to better fit the schedules and preferences of working adults. This has included the creation of new online course, full online degrees, and more evening and weekend course options.

Because of the early childhood workforce shortage in the state, some EC providers reported not being able to afford their staff taking time away from work to attend courses, even virtually, so evening and both synchronous and asynchronous online courses have been good options for both the incumbent workforce and their employers. Olivet Nazarene and Blackburn College worked with faculty outside the early childhood department to ensure students were able to access general education courses online. Illinois State University hired instructional designers to develop online interactive modules that ensure consistent learner experience and high student engagement. Some institutions (St. Augustine, Waubesa Community College, Harper College and others) have adopted Hy-flex technology, which allows students to choose whether to attend a class in person or virtually at a scheduled time. Harper College has reported high student satisfaction with the Hy-flex option. In 2024, ICCB and IBHE plan to provide additional supports to institutions on offering Hy-flex options, as outlined later in the [Looking Ahead](#) section.

While some students prefer and benefit from online, asynchronous courses, many prefer and also benefit from in-person time with peers and teachers to get feedback and ask questions. To address both needs, institutions got creative, offering classes onsite at a provider location to a cohort of their staff, online synchronous courses, in person office hours (online, at the institution, or even in the community), online discussion sessions, and hybrid in-person and online courses. For example, the College of Lake County offered a “Bring the Learning to You” cohort at a local Goddard Center, offering classes during lunch and naptimes onsite for their staff. Joliet Junior College launched a “Grow Your Own” (GYO) program in 2023 with a cohort of high-school graduates, combining part time work in the field with part time on-campus classes, facilitating strong cohort bonding and a successful transition to college and the workforce. National Louis University offered café-style meetings for students to support their completion of competency-based coursework and retention in the program. These creative strategies allowed students to network, build a supportive community, and often provide peer mentoring to one another.

As of September 2023, institutions offered courses across the following formats: daytime in-person, evenings or weekends in person, online (both synchronously and asynchronously, and hybrid (see Table 14).

Table 14. Percentage of Institutions Offering Various Course Modalities to the Incumbent Workforce, by Sector, Fall 2022–Fall 2023

Sector	In Person	In Person Evening or Weekend	Online Asynchronous	Online Synchronous	Hybrid
Community Colleges	85%	71%	88%	59%	N/A ²²
Public Universities	92%	54%	92%	77%	46%
Private Institutions	80%	60%	80%	50%	70%
All Institutions	86%	66%	88%	61%	N/A

To help students secure their degrees faster and/or provide an opportunity for a more intensive focus on fewer courses, some institutions offered accelerated courses (previously 16 weeks), and several began offering more courses over the summer. For example, at Highland Community College, an EC online course was added to the summer schedule after seven plus students enrolled in the spring and a capstone course is now offered in the summer so students can graduate in the fall. The University of Illinois Urbana Champaign now offers a two-and-a-half-year online program for students to earn their bachelor's degree in early childhood, with coursework online and in eight- and 16-week formats to meet the demands of working professionals. Some institutions found that their students struggled with all eight-week courses and found the accelerated pace too fast. To address this, some institutions are offering both 16- and eight-week courses and some are shifting back to 16-week courses, when that seems to better fit their students' needs.

New Courses and Programs

Several institutions started offering new courses or programs to fill gaps and meet student and provider needs. Institutions such as College of DuPage, College of Lake County, Harper College, Oakton College, National Louis University, and Western Illinois University translated courses into Spanish, reflecting both a need in the student population and a need for Spanish speaking educators in the state. Additionally, a few institutions began offering apprenticeships for students. For example, Heartland Community College, City Colleges of Chicago, and Black Hawk College participated in the Illinois Early Childhood Apprenticeship Pilot, using ECACE funding to support the development of Level 3 and 4 performance-based assessments using GoPros and iPads to enable live observation and virtual evaluation. Roosevelt University and Northeastern Illinois University implemented residency models that aligned course work with students' professional experience and allowed them to complete field work on the job and student teaching in a paid placement with a selected mentor teacher.

Quite a few institutions supported students to have more hands-on experience with instruction and materials at the institution during and prior to practicum experiences. For example, several institutions, including Roosevelt University, South Suburban Community College, and Illinois Valley Community College, developed demonstration classrooms, allowing students to engage with developmentally appropriate materials.

Pathways for Student Advancement

Through ECACE, there are now additional pathways for students to advance in their education, most notably through the seamless transfer of the Associate of Applied Science (AAS) degree into four-year institutions. Additional pathways include credit for prior learning, course sharing, and adapted field experiences.

²² At least three community college institutions qualitatively reported offering hybrid courses. This choice was not an option in two-year institutional reporting forms.

ECACE provides a pathway for individuals with an applied associate degree (AAS) degree to seamlessly advance to a baccalaureate degree program. Historically, the AAS was designed to be a terminal degree leading directly to employment. More recently, research has highlighted the benefit that teachers with higher degrees have on young children’s development and education, sparking a national push for early childhood teachers to pursue their bachelor’s degrees.²³ Section 130-10 of the ECACE Act requires Consortium four-year institutions transfer the AAS degree in its entirety, ensuring that all general education and professional coursework in the AAS Early Childhood major be 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 (Illinois General Assembly, 2021). This legislation is an innovative approach to guaranteeing credit mobility for AAS transfer students.

In the first year of the Consortium, all Consortium four-year institutions developed at least one pathway to support students transferring with an AAS degree. These pathways typically applied the AAS early childhood coursework to the bachelor’s program, either as meeting specific course requirements or as electives. Many universities restructured general education requirements to instead accept elective early childhood courses from the AAS degree. Some four-year institutions modified their early childhood programs to create a better alignment with the AAS. Chicago State University, for example, dropped a required human development course to stay within the credit hour cap. Roosevelt University created separate primary and pre-primary methods courses to facilitate better transfer of community college courses.²⁴ University of Illinois Urbana Champaign and National Louis University redesigned their programs to build upon the Gateways to Opportunity (Gateways) Level 4 competencies (equivalent to the associate degree) and focus solely on providing coursework needed to move from the Gateways Level 4 to Gateways Level 5 (bachelor’s degree) and professional educator license (PEL). This ensured students were not duplicating content for competencies already earned.

From July 1, 2022, to December 31, 2023, four-year Consortium institutions reported transferring in 650 students with an AAS degree, representing 31.7 percent of early childhood transfer students. National Louis University, a private, urban institution, enrolled 42.2 percent of the AAS transfers, and Illinois State University accounted for 14.1 percent. Incumbent worker students enrolling in Consortium four-year institutions also transferred AA and AS degrees (28.7 percent and 3.7 percent, respectively). A significant percentage, 23.7 percent of the transfer students, had at least 60 credits but no degree.

Table 15. Four Year Institutions’ EC Transfer Students, by Degree

Degree	Number of Transfer Students	Percentage of Transfer Students
AAS	650	31.7%
AA	589	28.7%
AS	75	3.7%
60+ credits	486	23.7%
Other	253	12.3%
Total	2,053	100%

Even as the ECACE Act guaranteed smooth transfer of the AAS, the varieties of educational background and experience students brought to Consortium programs required greater flexibility in designing learning

²³ Institute of Medicine and National Research Council. 2015. *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/19401>.

²⁴ Most early childhood community college courses in Illinois focus on children birth to five; whereas four-year programs provide preparation for teaching birth through 2nd grade, to meeting teacher licensure requirements.

pathways for students than anticipated. As innovative and student focused as the programmatic changes made for the AAS transfers were, there were still instances where students' prior learning through previous coursework and work experience was not fully recognized. Students transferring other degrees, or course work but no degree, require more personalized advising and program plans.

Credit for Prior Learning

An important part of the ECACE legislation is for both two- and four-year institutions to recognize the previous skills and abilities that students bring to their post-secondary education. A 2020 study from Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) and the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) notes that students who were awarded credit for prior learning were 22 percent more likely to complete a post-secondary credential (Klein-Collins, et al., 2020).

To address this legislative intent, some institutions have explored using competency-based or competency-aligned approaches. Competency-based programs are agnostic to where the concepts and skills have been attained, as long as they are demonstrated. As such, focusing on competency-aligned programming may allow students to demonstrate what they have already learned – either in their workplace or through prior education – and take fewer courses to earn their degree.

All institutions in the Consortium have aligned their programs to the Gateways to Opportunity competencies, which can facilitate transfer among institutions and the ability to provide credit for prior learning. Most Consortium institutions have participated in competency-based curriculum and assessment development projects sponsored by the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (INCCRRA). Quite a few, including Rend Lake College, Kishwaukee College, Western Illinois University, and College of Lake County, and others, implemented programs to pilot competency-based approaches through prior learning assessments.

Several community colleges, including Lewis and Clark Community College, Heartland Community College, and others, have adopted competency-based approaches. Heartland moved towards a more competency-based system using applied assessments to create individualized and tailored learning pathways for students to complete their degrees. Several four-year institutions, such as National Louis University and University of Illinois Urbana Champaign, used the Gateways competency levels as determiners of where transfer students are placed in their program.

Many of the Consortium's community colleges, including John A. Logan College, implemented prior learning assessment policies. In addition, community college early childhood and CDA programs in the Consortium aligned course outcomes with Gateways Competencies and NAEYC accreditation standards (examples include Rock Valley College, Truman College, and Spoon River College). Many of the four-year institutions have policies in place for accepting credit for prior learning; but others, like Greenville University, created a policy at least initially to serve early childhood students. As of October 2023, 17 of the 21 four-year institutions offered or planned to offer credit for prior learning, and 16 institutions modularized courses or planned to modularize courses, often as a means of providing credit for prior learning. Modularizing courses entails breaking the course down into smaller chunks, with each chunk aligned with one or two of the competencies or learning objectives addressed in the course. Governors State University, for example, is modularizing their early childhood courses this way, creating one-credit hour courses focused on specific competencies under the umbrella of a three-credit hour course. Modularized programs provide greater flexibility in tailoring learning pathways to students' prior learning, both through coursework transferred and job experience.

Curriculum Redesign | Community of Practice

To support the development of individualized pathways for students, IBHE hosted a Community of Practice (CoP) for four-year institutions to explore related redesign strategies. The CoP kicked off in May 2023 and IBHE held a retreat in Bloomington, IL in June. Through the summer and fall of 2023, the CoP focused on four strategies: credit for prior learning in courses and on the job; redesign of courses into smaller units (modules); variable credit hours assigned to modularized courses; and competency-based education. The CoP hosted small group sessions on each of these approaches, as well as large group discussion to share best practices and learn from guest speakers.

Child Development Associate

One of the most notable ways the Consortium awarded credit for prior learning was through the Child Development Associate (CDA) policy, adopted in 2022 (Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity, 2022). The CDA is a national credential that recognizes foundational competencies acquired through work experience and training as demonstrated through an assessment, observation, and portfolio. With the early childhood workforce shortage in Illinois, stakeholders have reported an increase in students choosing the CDA pathway as a timely and affordable alternative to becoming “teacher qualified.”²⁵ Most CDA credits have been offered through the community colleges, as these institutions are where many incumbent workforce members (re)start their educational journeys, ensuring they have the foundational competencies in place before seeking advanced degrees and certifications.

The adopted policy awards six semester hours of meaningful early childhood credit to active CDA holders without contingencies. In other words, students are not required to be reassessed to receive the credit. Institutions were required to implement credit for the Preschool CDA as of January 31, 2023, and the Infant Toddler CDA as of January 31, 2024. As of December 31, 2023, and as illustrated in Table 16, a total of 349 students had received credit for the CDA.

Table 16. Number of Students Receiving Credit for CDA, by Sector

Sector	# of students receiving credit for CDA
Community Colleges	321
Public Universities	6
Private, Non-Profit Institutions	22
Total	349

Course Sharing

The ECACE Act states that the Consortium shall cooperate in “providing course offerings across institutions, within regions, for students who do not have a course available at their home institution.”²⁶ While course sharing will continue to be a focus of future work, as outlined in the [Looking Ahead](#) section below, there are some efforts underway currently. Through Illinois Community Colleges Online, many two-year institutions have been sharing online courses for their entire student populations, including EC students, for several years.

²⁵ Someone with a CDA meets the qualifications for being the teacher in a licensed child care center.

²⁶ “Not available” may mean the course is not offered during a term, at a time, or in a format that works best for the student.”

Illinois Community Colleges Online

Illinois Community Colleges Online (ILCCO) is a membership organization available to all Illinois community college districts. The statewide system, called the Online Course Exchange (OCE), allows community college students access to online courses at other schools when the course is unavailable online at the student's home institution. The purpose of ILCCO is to promote quality online learning and provide supplemental learning opportunities to students through online course sharing. The work of ILCCO supports the goals of the ECACE Act in that it provides more equitable access to courses through online learning and course sharing.

As of March 2024, 1,683 ILCCO courses, primarily from the General Education Core Curriculum (GECC), were being offered at 28 colleges (up from about 1,600 ILCCO courses at 20 colleges in March of 2023).²⁷ In addition, as encouraged by their participation in the Consortium, 133 ECACE course sections (up from 79 in March of 2023), were made accessible through ILCCO this year by 22 Consortium schools (up from 14 institutions in March of 2023). Waubensee Community College is notable for having its entire early childhood program available through ILCCO. Additionally, John A. Logan College added many of their courses to ILCCO to help get their students caught up on courses and on track to complete their degrees.

Supervised Field Experiences

All Consortium institutions include supervised field experience as part of their degree programs, allowing students to gain hands-on experience to supplement their academic coursework. Guided by the goals of ECACE, institutions made improvements to their field experience requirements to better meet the needs of the incumbent workforce.

Several four-year institutions reported working closely with students to determine the best location for their student teaching. Often, it was easiest for incumbent workforce students to complete these at their current places of employment (provided their employers met ISBE standards²⁸), which provided a practical way for working students to balance education and employment. Several institutions, including University of Illinois Chicago, Governors State University, and Chicago State University provided credit for prior employment towards the required clinical field experience hours. As of December 2023, all 21 four-year institutions allowed students to complete at least some of their clinical experiences at their workplace; for some, this was a new change since the start of ECACE. For example, Illinois State University modified their student teaching protocols to provide greater flexibility to students. Students currently employed in a preschool setting had the option of doing eight weeks of on-the-job student teaching and eight weeks of student teaching in a kindergarten through second grade setting or doing three days a week of student teaching at their workplace and two days a week in a K-2 setting. Governors State University, which started allowing students to complete student teaching at their current places of employment, noted how valuable this change was in helping students persist and complete but acknowledged the difficulty faculty had in traveling to different workplaces to observe student teaching. To offset this challenge, the institution hired onsite staff who were trained to complete student teacher observations.

Similarly, several two-year institutions revamped their practicum experiences, including offering the opportunity for students to complete the requirements at their current employer. Harper College noted that this shift improved their students' completion rate, prevented income loss, and enhanced their partnerships

²⁷ It is only possible to pull a point-in-time report of ILCCO courses, so this data is from March 2024 which is outside of the reporting period (July 1, 2022 to December 31, 2023).

²⁸ Section 25.620 of the Illinois Administrative Code says that student teaching must be done under the active supervision of a cooperating teacher who is licensed and qualified to teach in the area, has three years of teaching experience, has received a proficient or above performance rating in the most recent evaluation, and is directly engaged in teaching subject matter and conducting learning activities in the area of student teaching. For early childhood students completing student teaching in a community-based early childhood setting, charter school, or non-public school, the cooperating teacher may hold a Gateways Level 5 credential while meeting other requirements (Illinois Administrative Code, 2022).

with childcare facilities through instructor site visits. The College of DuPage offered a wage supplement for students who were currently working and would lose pay due to their practicum requirements. Lake Land College created a child care lab where students can complete their practicums on site at the institution. A couple of institutions reduced the required number of practicum hours for students in an acknowledgement of the skills gained through prior work experience. Through these adjustments to supervised field experiences, Consortium institutions have worked to expose students to different, valuable work experiences (e.g., various types of environments, age groups, etc.) that will benefit them in their future careers while also acknowledging their current experience and removing barriers to degree completion.

Collaboration Within and Across Institutions

The Consortium has strengthened relationships across higher education institutions in Illinois. In a 2023 survey, 94 percent of institutional respondents believed the Consortium had increased collaboration across Illinois' higher education landscape. Institutions have developed new articulation agreements between two- and four-year partners. For example, DePaul University has been conducting outreach with local community college partners to develop articulation agreements for students with the AAS and laying out a specific pathway for them at DePaul. They have a new agreement with Oakton Community College and, as of December 2023, were in the process of developing at least three others. Southern Illinois University Edwardsville offers courses on the Lewis and Clark campus. Northern Illinois University has developed transfer agreements with feeder community colleges. Its agreement with McHenry Community College is notable in that the learning pathway leading to the professional educator license (PEL), offers credit for prior learning, and includes coursework for both the English as a Second Language and Early Childhood Special Education approvals. Additionally, some four-year institutions engaged in partnership with two-year institutions, such as Olivet Nazarene and Kankakee Community College, to recruit students for transfer, and a few institutions co-hosted recruitment and career fair events together.

One of the most valuable parts of the ECACE experience has been the chance to connect with other institutions and faculty and learn what is working elsewhere.

*- Anonymous
Institution #1*

(ECACE) brought colleges and universities together at all levels within them – faculty and administrators – to focus on our workforce's professional education needs. (It also) brought state agencies and other stakeholders together with the abovementioned, for the abovementioned purposes. In my 35 years in IL, this has NEVER happened – what an accomplishment!

- Anonymous Institution #2

ECACE also strengthened relationships *within* institutions. By participating in the Consortium, institutional representatives were charged with convening an institutional team at their campus. Institutional teams often include a mentor, department head, early childhood faculty, financial aid officer, and more. In a 2023 survey, one institution shared: “Our institution has come together for early childhood. Each area involved in our institutional team is aware of guidelines and able to direct students effectively. We are all moving in the same direction!” and “We have become more connected across programs and nimbler to address consortium requirements and student needs.” The survey also found a positive correlation between the frequency of institutional team meetings and perceived progress towards removing barriers to accessibility, persistence, and completion for the incumbent early childhood workforce.

Financial Supports

A key component of ECACE is recognizing and addressing the expense of higher education and the financial burdens it places on students in this field. From AY 2022-24, IDHS allocated over \$200 million in federal child care funding to support ECACE. A significant portion of these funds were used to relieve students' financial burdens through the funding of scholarships for the incumbent workforce and the paying down of debts previously owed to higher education institutions.

ECACE Scholarship Program

In November of 2021, ISAC partnered with IBHE and ICCB to launch one of the Consortium's first initiatives, the ECACE Scholarship Program. Individuals working in early childhood often face low wages and have financial needs that exceed their earnings. The ECACE Scholarship was intended to mitigate the often-prohibitive costs of higher education that extend beyond tuition and fees to include expenses such as books and supplies, housing, transportation, and more. Despite Consortium programs being designed to deliver courses at convenient times and locations, workforce members may need to reduce their working hours to participate in classes and field experiences, study, and manage other education-related matters.

Because of the ECE Scholarship I have earned, I am one semester away from my 2nd degree, I earned a substantial raise at work, and got promoted to the center Director. NONE of this would have been possible if this grant was not available. It is because of this grant that I also have enrolled in ISU for the fall to pursue my B.A in ECE. This grant has changed the trajectory of my life and has impacted my family's life tremendously. Because of this grant I can continue to grow and advance in a field that I absolutely enjoy. My current and future students at my center deserve to have the best educators in their classroom. This grant is making that possible.

– Student Testimony, Joliet Junior College

During AY 2022-23, the ECACE Scholarship covered up to the full cost of attendance (COA) for members of the incumbent early childhood workforce pursuing an undergraduate degree or certificate in the field at Consortium member institutions, after accounting for other federal scholarships and grants.²⁹ In AY 2023-24, the scholarship was expanded to also include graduate students. Scholarship recipients had to be currently working or have previously 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 were expected to continue working in the field or return to it after they completed their program of study, taking on roles such as teachers, directors, or similar positions within Illinois. The ECACE Scholarship was administered on a rolling basis, allowing students to apply and enroll throughout the year.

I am entering my Senior year as an Early Childhood Education Major at Lewis University and attending full-time classes in the accelerated program while working full-time. I have been working in early childhood as a Paraprofessional for 13 years with hopes, dreams, and aspirations of returning to school. Life as a working single parent brought financial challenges and a lack of time to return to the in-person college environment for me. The offering of the ECACE Scholarship and acceptance into Lewis Universities' Online Accelerated Education Program allowed me to strive toward my dreams. I am enthusiastic about sharing the education I have obtained at Lewis University by impacting the lives of families and children for many years to come.

– Student Testimony, Lewis University

²⁹ Students attending participating private, not-for-profit institutions were eligible to receive a scholarship amount that did not exceed the cost of the most expensive early childhood program at an Illinois public university.

Scholarship Outcomes

Whereas most sections of the report focus on work through December 2023, this section on the ECACE Scholarship covers the full 2023-24 academic year, since data was readily available.

For AY 2023-24, about \$76.4 million in ECACE Scholarship funds were distributed to nearly 4,700 members of the incumbent workforce, 89 percent of whom were women. During this time period, 41 percent of scholarship recipients attended community colleges, 35 percent attended private, nonprofit institutions, and 24 percent attended public universities. This is a large increase from AY 2022-23, in which \$29.6 million in scholarship funds were distributed to about 2,100 members of the incumbent workforce and from AY 2021-22 (the first year of the scholarship) where only \$5.7 million in scholarship funds were distributed to about 400 members of the incumbent workforce.

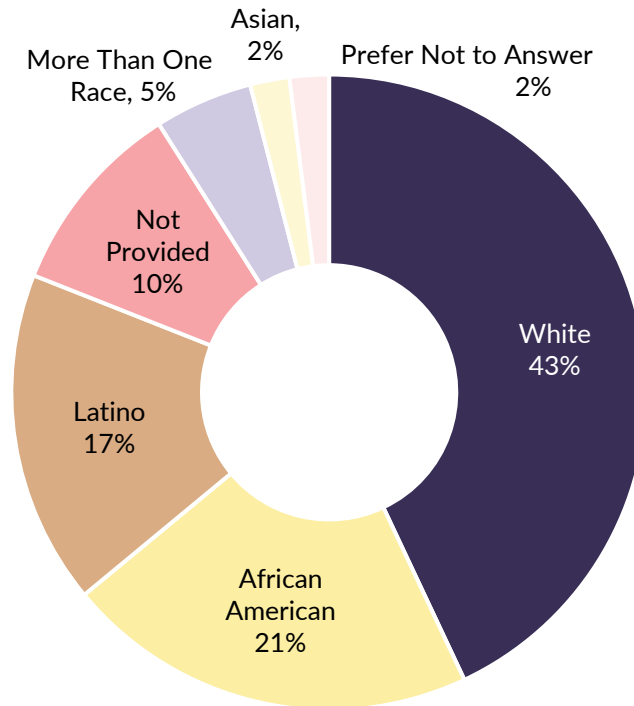
Table 17. Scholarship Data by Sector, AY23-24

Sector	Applications	Recipients	Total Awards	Average Award per Student	Institutions with Scholarship Students
Community Colleges	3,105	1,930	\$18,991,428	\$6,116	41 of 41 Institutions
Public Universities	1,450	1,142	\$26,021,054	\$17,946	11 of 11 Institutions
Private, Non-Profit Institutions	2,079	1,622	\$31,399,956	\$19,359	10 of 10 Institutions
Total	6,634	4,694	\$76,412,438	\$16,279	62 of 62 Institutions

Recipient Demographics

For AY 2023-24, 45 percent of scholarship recipients were persons of color. Of these recipients, 43 percent identified as White, 21 percent Black or African American, 17 percent Hispanic or Latino, 2 percent Asian, 5 percent more than one race or ethnicity, and 12 percent either preferred not to answer or did not provide a response. The racial makeup of scholarship recipients was relatively similar to that of Illinois early childhood workforce members in licensed child care centers overall, as reported in 2021. One notable difference: 43 percent of scholarship recipients identify as White; whereas 54 percent of early childhood classroom staff and directors in licensed child care centers identify as White (Whitehead, 2021).

Figure 14: Scholarship Recipients, by Race/Ethnicity, AY23-24



The ECACE scholarship effectively supported students with high financial need. Seventy-six percent of scholarship students had a federal expected family contribution (EFC) of under \$10,000, and forty-three percent of recipients had an EFC of \$0.³⁰ Among the remaining scholarship recipients, 12 percent had an EFC between \$10,000-\$19,999, 5 percent had an EFC ranging from \$20,000-\$29,999, and 7 percent had an EFC of \$30,000 or more.

ECACE scholarship recipients were older than traditional college students, with 50 percent over the age of 30, compared to national data from 2021, where only 23 percent of undergraduate students were over 30 years old (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). However, compared to the licensed early childhood workforce in Illinois, ECACE Scholarship recipients tend to be somewhat younger. Thirty-two percent of ECACE recipients are under 25 years old, whereas, as of 2020, only 22 percent of directors, teachers, and assistants were under 25 years of age.³¹ This is in line with the data from a 2020 Workforce Report that indicates that older members of the EC workforce are more likely to hold a degree than their younger counterparts (and therefore may be less likely to be seeking an additional degree.)

Geographical and Institutional Breakdown

Scholarships were awarded at every Consortium institution in AY2022-23; 36 percent of recipients were from the collar county area, 21 percent were from Chicago, and 43 percent were from all other areas of the state. About 30 percent of all recipients, and a little more than 30 percent of all funds disbursed, were at three four-year institutions: National Louis University, Illinois State University, and St. Augustine College.

³⁰ The EFC is determined by the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and represents the amount that a student and their family would be expected to contribute toward the student's education. This calculation is based on factors such as the student's or family's income, assets, and benefits. A lower EFC signifies a greater financial need.

³¹ This data is for teachers, assistant teachers, and directors in licensed child care settings. Unfortunately, the age categories available for the licensed workforce do not exactly align to the scholarship data (Whitehead, 2021).

Tuition and Net Price Data to Demonstrate Cost of Attendance

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” (Illinois General Assembly, 2021). These reporting requirements are intended to better understand the out-of-pocket costs, including but not limited to tuition and fees, that incumbent EC workforce members face and the degree to which they may be accumulating debt to support their education. In AY 2021-22, the Consortium attained this data primarily through a survey of Consortium institutions about their scholarship recipients, using recipients as a proxy for the incumbent workforce. For AY 2022-23, the Consortium was unable to collect this data due to challenges related to the FAFSA application at Consortium institutions. Below is what the Consortium is able to report.

Because the scholarship provided funding up to the full cost of attendance for incumbent members attending community colleges and public four-year institutions, and because of the size and availability of the scholarship funding, it may be assumed that many, if not most, incumbent workforce members at public institutions did not take loans and had a net price of \$0.³²

At private institutions, the scholarship was capped at the cost of attendance for full-time students at the most expensive *public* four-year institution – \$33,558 in AY 2022-23. Students at some private Consortium institutions may have had a gap between their scholarship funding and the cost of attendance, particularly if they were enrolled full-time. Six of the 10 private, non-profit institutions had tuition rates lower than the scholarship cap, and two of ten had a cost of attendance lower than the cap (National Center for Education Statistics, 2024).

The average amount of ECACE Scholarship dollars awarded to private, nonprofit institutions was \$18,360. Given that many scholarship students (46 percent) attended only part-time, and some institutions reported supplementing scholarship funding with institutional grants, tuition discounts, and alternative scholarships, the out-of-pocket costs for ECACE Scholarship recipients in private institutions were likely significantly reduced and may have been minimal. And, at minimum, most if not all private students’ tuition and fees were covered.

Information gathered from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) demonstrates costs students might have incurred **without the scholarship**, using best available data. Table 18 shows, on average and by sector, tuition and fees, the cost of attendance (COA), net price, and student loans incurred by full-time students at Consortium colleges and universities.

Without the ECACE Scholarship, full-time incumbent students would have had an average net price, or out of pocket cost, between approximately \$6,200 and \$22,000.

³² Average net price is generated by subtracting the average amount of federal, state/local government, or institutional grant and scholarship aid from the total cost of attendance. Total cost of attendance is the sum of published tuition and required fees (lower of in-district or in-state for public institutions), books and supplies, and the weighted average for room and board and other expenses (National Center for Education Statistics, 2024).

Table 18. Estimated Average Cost for Full-Time Students without Scholarship, by Sector

Sector	Average Tuition & Fees for Full-Time Students, AY22-23	Average Cost of Attendance for Full-Time Students, AY22-23 *	Average Net Price for Students Awarded Grant or Scholarship Aid, AY22-23	Average Loan for Full-time First-time Students, AY22-23
Community Colleges	\$4,413.02	\$17,967.68	\$6,194.02	\$4,864.15
Public Universities	\$13,446.45	\$29,794.73	\$13,968.73	\$6,522.45
Private, Nonprofit Institutions	\$29,820.90	\$45,321.50	\$21,676.30	\$7,040.20
Consortium Institutions	\$10,113.77	\$24,477.94	\$10,070.55	\$5,530.85

Source: National Center for Education Statistics, 2022, 2023

*Data in the table represents cost of attendance for full-time students living off campus, without family, in-district/in-state.

Debt Relief

Students' unpaid balances owed to an institution may prevent them from completing their degree or credential and advancing their careers. To address this, institutions were encouraged to use ECACE grant funds to eliminate outstanding account balances and financial holds for returning or transferring students. From July 1, 2022, through December 31, 2023, 1,205 total students were awarded debt relief; 965 of those students attended community colleges, 197 attended private four-year institutions, and 43 attended public universities.

Some institutions experienced challenges in eliminating students' financial holds, particularly if those holds were at another institution. Due to issues related to privacy, it was difficult for institutions to get invoices from other institutions. Often students were unsure how much they owed and with whom to work at their former institution. It was not uncommon for mentors or faculty to spend hours determining a way for institutions to work together to address the debt. Several institutions reported that some students' debt had already been sent to a collection agency. In other cases, students were uncomfortable accepting the debt relief due to the taxes they would have to pay on what would be considered income. Others reported spending significant time researching rules related to financial aid and whether debt relief funding would be applied to the maximum allowable institutional aid.

Many institutions reported difficulty identifying students who needed debt relief, as students may have been embarrassed to step forward or did not realize that the relief was available. To mitigate against this, institutions conducted active outreach to market debt relief options and identify students who needed this support. In some cases, direct outreach had low response rates; those who used the debt relief to encourage students to return to school often found that students' contact information had changed or that workforce members were worried that the offer to relieve their debt was a fraudulent scheme.

Institutions had to coordinate across multiple departments to develop new processes to identify students and award debt relief, noting how important it was to assemble the right team to do so effectively. Over time and with support from ICCB and IBHE, including a community of practice held for four-year institutions (detailed below), some of these challenges were resolved. This can be seen as the number of students receiving debt relief grew significantly from 54 total students in Q1 of AY 2021-22 to 331 total students in Q2 of AY 2022-23.

Debt Relief Community of Practice

In January 2024, four-year institutions were offered the opportunity to eliminate student debt for former students to reduce financial burden, address account balances and holds that might now or in the future prevent enrollment and eliminate institutional debt that might prevent students from entering or remaining in the early childhood field. If capacity permitted, institutions were asked to implement a viable in-house process to utilize ECACE funds to alleviate this debt.

Institutions contacted students individually to assess eligibility and acquire consent to participate. IBHE consulted with institutions that had implemented similar debt relief programs for other federal grants, such as the Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) Funds, to glean lessons from similar programs.

To support the sharing of effective practices, IBHE organized a second Community of Practice for institutions. They received guidance and shared their practices for collecting information on outstanding debt, contacting students and assessing student eligibility, and creating implementation plans and administrative processes.

Betty owned her own in-home daycare and has 4 foster children. Betty and her daughter will graduate from Lake Land College next spring only because of debt relief and tuition reimbursements provided through the grant. Both Betty and Cheyenne came to my office to personally thank me and both cried tears of joy. Betty had considered giving up due to financial hardships but decided it was worth it to persist. They have plans to open daycare center in Effingham after graduation. Betty is working on the courses to be 'director qualified'. NONE of this would have happened without the debt relief provided.

– Student Testimony, Lake Land College

Providing Academic and Wrap-Around Supports

Consortium institutions provided academic and holistic support 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 mentioned, some members of the early childhood workforce face challenges returning to school, particularly as the workforce comprises primarily women who are often balancing full-time employment, family needs, and other responsibilities. These working adults may have been out of school for long periods and needed to refresh skills such as academic writing, math, and time management. In addition, institutions reported that early childhood students working and attending school frequently reported extraordinary stress and burnout.

Institutions supported incumbent worker students to persist and complete in many ways, including providing targeted academic advising and access to full campus resources, such as health care and tutoring. However, the main way institutions provided additional support for early childhood students was through their grant-funded mentor positions.

As a result of the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, several institutions (like many employers nationwide) had initial challenges hiring a mentor. This caused some delays in recruiting and developing partnerships with communities and navigators. Both two- and four-year institutions had to have other staff, including faculty and grant administrators, serve in the mentor role until they could find someone. Hiring increased over time, and most mentors were in place by summer 2023.

Role of the Mentor

In many institutions, mentors were the first point of contact for the early childhood students and provided individualized holistic and academic supports to ensure they succeeded. Mentors helped students navigate to services on campus such as financial aid, tutoring, health and mental health services, disability services, and academic advising. A major role of the mentor was to coordinate across campus departments and with outside partners to advocate for their ECACE students. This often included being in contact with the financial aid office and/or ISAC to ensure students received their scholarship or other funding necessary to continue; being in touch with faculty to identify students who are struggling in class; and being in regular contact with navigators to support recruitment and help students transition onto campus.

Student Support: Individual And Group Meetings

Mentors were encouraged to take a proactive role in serving students, including meeting with them regularly throughout the year. From July 1, 2022, through December 31, 2023, mentors met with Consortium students more than 50,000 times to provide technical assistance, support, and coaching. Mentors met with each student at least twice per quarter, though the average across all institutions was about five meetings per student per quarter. One institution reported that mentors provided deeper and more frequent support than an academic advisor, as their caseload was smaller. Though caseload size seemed to vary based on size of program, the average was 83 students per full time staff with a range from one to 316 in Fall of 2023.

Mentors engaged with students in a variety of ways – text messaging, phone calls, and emails; in-person and virtual meetings; office hours; and group workshops – to engage students in ways that met their preferences and schedules. Roosevelt University and Southern Illinois University Carbondale offered opportunities for mentors to meet with and coach students onsite at their places of work to support ease of access.

In one-on-one meetings, mentors provided a wide range of support including assisting students with scholarship applications, providing academic guidance, offering time management and organization support, making connections to needed resources, and offering study strategies. In smaller programs, mentors were also the academic advisors, identifying course requirements, the degree that should be pursued (i.e., AAS, AA, BA with PEL or a non-licensure option), selecting courses, providing transfer advice, job search and career options, and more.

Mentors worked closely with faculty to monitor student progress and intervene if there were concerns. Many institutions reported being strategic in how they targeted students for additional support. At one institution faculty reached out to the mentor when the student was struggling to ask them to provide extra support; another institution developed a tiered system of identifying students who had been historically underserved and marginalized for targeted interventions. Several institutions' mentors regularly tracked data on student progress and provided extra support when they were close to graduation, experienced academic setbacks, or required additional academic supports at key points during their educational journeys. Waubesa Community College's mentor used the college's academic alert system to provide students with praise for their academic successes and assistance with faculty feedback on academic assignments. Rockford University also used academic alerts to identify students who needed support, and the mentor created individualized success plans detailing the work to be completed and the timeline for completion for those students.

Mentors at both two and four-year institutions offered optional or mandatory group sessions that provided students with opportunities for peer networking, mentoring, and support. These sessions often had an academic focus. Mentors at the College of DuPage, College of Lake County, and Harper College organized study groups. University of Illinois Urbana Champaign offered a biweekly study hall that incorporated intensive academic skill building. Olivet Nazarene's mentor hosted optional "Collaboration and Support" sessions in the

My mentor, if I hadn't had her last year, I wouldn't have made it through.

*- Student Testimony,
Governors State University*

evening that included tutoring and Saturday sessions to help students apply for credit for prior learning. Lincoln Land Community College's mentor hosted "Café Nights" where students could ask questions, be encouraged, receive tutoring, and get information about completing credential paperwork. National Louis University created virtual "coffee houses" to promote a sense of community among online students while connecting them with faculty mentors for academic support, a strategy which was adopted by many of the other four-year institutions. Preparation for the early childhood content test, a requirement for teacher licensure, was also a common group option at the four-year institutions.

Holistic Support

Working adult students must balance their commitment to completing their education with the demands of their jobs and often, the needs of their families. For many of these students, these competing commitments can result in a level of stress that can impede their successful progress towards earning their degree. Many institutions noted the important role mentors played in providing emotional support and encouragement for their students.

Mentors also used group sessions to address holistic issues such as time management, wellness strategies, resume/interview etiquette, and panels with industry professionals. Moraine Valley Community College's mentors hosted workshops focused on resume-building and interview preparation. Eastern Illinois University's mentors, focusing on developing peer relationships, encouraged students to join the local early childhood organization. Illinois State University's mentor coordinated and hosted the "ECE Elevate" series of optional workshops that promoted student development in areas such as life balance, wellness, financial planning and community. The workshops were offered monthly on Saturday mornings. St. Augustine offered workshops for students that promoted wellness and mental health and addressed burnout. Chicago State University and DePaul University hired mentors who had expertise in social-emotional needs to help address specific challenges related to student stress and burnout.

Several institutions created support materials, generally online, to provide additional support for students. Monthly newsletters with information about the program and pertinent dates and deadlines were common. Western Illinois University's mentors created videos to help students navigate university systems. Governors State University's mentor and faculty created a repository of videos and other digital materials on their LMS that could be accessed by students and faculty. These materials covered a wide range of topics, including financial aid resources, tools for navigating student support offices, time management skills, lesson planning, content test preparation, plus recordings of guest speakers on a number of early childhood course-related topics.

Many institutions offered students resources to support their success in the program including laptops, books, and gas cards. Some of the four-year institutions (for example, Northeastern Illinois University) established funding pools that students could access to cover unanticipated costs like emergency childcare. One institution's mentor provided referrals to community resources for housing, food assistance, and other basic needs.

...the second thing I want to address is the importance of the ECE mentors. I cannot tell you how many times my mentor has sent me reminders to get something in and where to apply for the ECE scholarship, helped me get a loaner laptop, checked in for other ways that she can help me be successful. They are a need for the Early Childhood department to be successful. I would not have started classes to begin with without my mentor reaching out to me and letting me know this program was available. She has brought in new students that would've never went to college if she would not have made that effort.

– Student Testimony (Highland Community College)

Other Duties

In most institutions, the mentor was also a recruiter, working with navigators, attending transfer fairs, visiting schools and childcare centers to recruit students, and developing outreach relationships. Mentors also hosted virtual, on campus, and on worksite information sessions for prospective students. In addition to supporting students, many mentors played a big role in data collection and reporting, as required by legislation, as well as outreach and recruitment. Though the primary focus for mentors was incumbent students, many institutions' mentors served other early childhood students as well.

Mentorship Community of Practice

Mentors from both two- and four-year institutions self-organized into a community of practice to share learnings. Additionally, IBHE offered a formal Mentorship Community of Practice in response to a survey of mentors/coaches who indicated their desire to share practices and learn from each other. In addition to an orientation in August 2022, three virtual meetings were held in AY23 and AY24. The meetings addressed the issues and concerns of the mentors and gave participants the opportunity to share ideas and best practices. Topics included: ECACE scholarship and financial aid; connecting with Navigators; student recruitment; and strategies for supporting student retention and persistence. In addition to these virtual sessions, mentors had scheduled times to discuss concerns and share strategies.

Outreach and Engagement

Outreach and engagement with the incumbent workforce were conducted by both ECACE higher education navigators and institutions. Both groups worked to make connections with early childhood employers and to be responsive to their needs.

Navigators

ECACE Higher Education Navigators occupy an important community-facing role designed to recruit and connect incumbent early childhood workforce members to Consortium institutions. During the time of the report, more than 30 navigators were employed within regionally based Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (CCR&Rs) across the state. Navigators' responsibilities included engaging in outreach to workforce members and employers and providing personalized technical assistance for workforce members to access higher education.

Between July 1, 2022, and December 31, 2023, navigators conducted outreach and provided extensive customer service to the incumbent workforce and early childhood providers. Specifically, navigators held 1,580 general information sessions and an additional 975 outreach meetings. Other outreach methods included mailing information materials (2,231 times), calling providers and workforce members (7,279 times), and sending emails (29,028 times). To support broad outreach, the State developed an electronic interest form for workforce members to request engagement with a navigator. Hosted by INCCRRA and posted on various websites, including those of INCCRRA, ISAC, and ECACE, navigators received 4,914 interest form requests from members of the incumbent workforce.

Navigators also provided technical assistance to providers and workforce members to help them navigate ECACE and the higher education system. Over the 18-month reporting period, navigators sent 39,950 emails to provide technical assistance, held 2,877 in person meetings and another 1,874 virtual meetings, sent 617 texts and made 1,063 phone calls. This resulted in providing over 5,253 workforce members with technical

assistance.³³ A total of 821 students were known to have been directly connected to institutions by a navigator. We know that more students benefited from connections, as navigators only began officially collecting and reporting this information as of the fall of 2023.

Table 19. Outreach Activities, Technical Assistance Provided, and Workforce Members Served by Navigators, July 2022 – December 2023

Category	Activity	Number
Outreach Activities	General Information Sessions	1,580
	Outreach Meetings	975
	Mailing Information Materials	2,231
	Phone Calls to Providers and Incumbent Workforce	7,279
	Sending Emails	29,028
	Interest Form Requests	4,914
Technical Assistance Provided	Emails	39,950
	In-Person Meetings	2,877
	Virtual Meetings	1,874
	Texts	617
	Phone Calls	1,063
Workforce Members Served	# Workforce Members Receiving TA	5,253
	# Students Connected to Institution by Navigator	821

As navigators built relationships with institutions and employers, both types of partners came to rely on them for support. As noted in the first annual ECACE report, some employers worried that upskilling staff might lead to higher turnover; as navigators continued to build trust in their communities, some of those same employers began to see the value of supporting professional development among their staff through ECACE. Employers introduced navigators to their staff and encouraged staff to work with them to pursue higher education.

Navigators also worked in partnership with many institutions to connect traditionally hard-to-reach populations with higher education. For example, College of Lake County and Harper College worked with navigators to increase enrollment among Spanish-speaking early childhood workforce members, and Elgin Community College partnered with navigators to increase enrollment among family child care providers.

Institutional Outreach

Institutions additionally conducted outreach to employers and the incumbent workforce. Between July 1, 2022, and December 31, 2023, institutions held 2,137 outreach events to engage employers and the workforce and reported 40,253 individuals participating in these events.³⁴ Additionally, institutions reported connections with 11,382 employers and/or schools over that same period.³⁵ Institutions have increased their outreach efforts over time, as last year, between July and December 2022, they held just under 500 events, engaged 7,800 participants, and connected with over 1,000 employers.

³³ This information only started being collected in April 2023, so the true number of workforce members assisted is likely much higher.

³⁴ The number of individuals is **not** an unduplicated count.

³⁵ The number of employers and schools is **not** an unduplicated count.

Table 20. Outreach Events, Participants, and Connections with Employers, by Sector, July 2022 – December 2023

Sector	# Outreach Events	# Participants	# Connections with employers or schools
Community Colleges	1,233	28,756	10,191
Public Universities	383	8,223	575
Private, Non-Profit Institutions	521	3,274	616
Total	2,137	40,253	11,382

Nearly all institutions reported engaging in outreach to local child care providers through emails, phone calls, texts, zoom meetings, and site visits. Physical visits to child care providers were reported as one of the most effective ways to target the incumbent workforce for enrollment in ECACE, in addition to word of mouth.

Institutional staff attended relevant local events such as job fairs and networking events to promote ECACE and their early childhood program. Many also attended institution-wide open houses and promoted their EC programs specifically. In some cases, institutions hosted early childhood specific open houses or events. For example, Prairie State College hosted an EC Symposium with 167 registered participants that resulted in several enrollments. Western Illinois University, Black Hawk College, and the local navigator partnered to offer an ECACE recruiting event. Some institutions engaged in broader outreach to the public through visits to churches and libraries. For example, Eastern Illinois University offered a series of literacy workshops at their local library for early childhood professionals, students, and parents, and Kaskaskia created theme bins for students to take back to their centers to use to teach lessons.

To support recruitment efforts, many institutions created ECACE promotional materials such as flyers, email marketing campaigns, videos, and ads (radio, billboard, newspaper). Many of these materials included personal student stories, highlighted strengths of the ECACE program, and detailed how ECACE helps remove barriers to higher education for working adults – namely through the scholarship, mentor supports, and accessible courses. Many institutions shared information about ECACE and their institution’s early childhood program in relevant Facebook groups and other online platforms, including their institution’s website and social media pages.

Institutions also focused their strategic engagement on specific populations – namely reaching out to family and in-home providers. Institutions offering programming in Spanish specifically targeted bilingual or Spanish-speaking educators. Several institutions conducted outreach to high school students which, while not the target population of ECACE (e.g., the incumbent workforce), does add qualified early educators to the field overall. Institutions had varying capacity to carry out these recruitment activities. City Colleges of Chicago hired recruiters to engage in outreach activities and coach prospective students through the application process. Smaller institutions with less staff relied heavily on navigators to carry out recruitment efforts.

Institutions reported varying relationships with navigators. Some institutions built strong relationships with navigators from the start – such as Danville Area Community College, Southwestern Illinois College, and Western Illinois University – connecting with them regularly to share marketing materials, align on recruitment plans and share updates about program changes. Other institutions reported confusion about the delineation of responsibility for recruitment between navigators and institutions. IBHE and ICCB provided technical assistance to clarify roles between navigators and institutions and shared best practices about how institutions and navigators can work together. For example, institutions coordinating with navigators frequently seemed to be an effective way of avoiding duplication of efforts and ensuring prospective students received sufficient support and consistent messaging. This partnership also helped navigators better understand institutions’ program features and reported being better able to promote the program.

Engagement With and Responsiveness to Employers

ECACE was created to address the shortage of qualified early childhood educators across the state. It follows that to address that shortage, higher education institutions need to be in communication with and responsive to early childhood providers and their hiring, upskilling, and professional development needs.

Nearly all institutions engaged with local early childhood providers for recruitment into their programs. Cognizant of employer demands, many institutions scheduled their outreach during times most convenient for them, including staff meetings and nap and break times

Many institutions collected feedback from employers on industry trends, training, and hiring needs. Prairie State College conducted surveys and feedback sessions on industry trends to adjust their curriculum and programming. One institution received feedback from their employer partners that their staff needed more classroom management skills, which led to new programming being developed to address that topic. Some institutional staff sat on local advisory boards or attended committee meetings related to early childhood topics to stay attuned to industry demands. Sauk Valley Community College received feedback from local employers at their early childhood advisory council and attended local early childhood focused chamber of commerce meetings. Southern Illinois University Carbondale (SIUC) created the Collaborative Academy - a partnership among SIUC, community colleges, their regional Star Net Illinois office, and local agencies to provide professional development and upskill the incumbent workforce. Some institutions' faculty were truly integrated into the early childhood community, making regular contact with local employer partners in a mutually beneficial relationship. For example, some faculty from DePaul University supported local centers and schools through pro-bono workshops and curriculum counseling. University of Illinois Chicago established a program advisory board to solicit feedback on their curriculum and implemented a feasibility study for launching a bachelor's degree program in EC with licensure, interviewing multiple employers to determine if demand existed. Parkland, Rend Lake, and Spoon River Colleges additionally developed close employer-institutional faculty relationships.

The programs that you have provided via the ECACE program have been instrumental in helping our staff grow and prosper as individuals and better themselves not only personally, but into amazing teachers. These are opportunities that would not be possible for some, as it is hard enough to find the time for them to attend class, but to find enough money to pay for the classes. Some of our staff who are now attending the classes at JJC are so grateful for all of the opportunities they have because of the classes they have been able to take. I have one staff member who is now finishing her associates and on her way to learning more. She loves children and this is where her heart is and it is possible for her to learn and grow with you and the mentors that are provided.

- Early Childhood Employer Testimony, Joliet Junior College

Some institutions reported their responsiveness to the incumbent workforce as benefiting the employers as well. By offering courses in hybrid, online, and evening/weekend formats, students were able to pursue their education while continuing to work. Richland Community College offered hybrid courses at a local employer's site immediately after the workday to accommodate the student's schedule. College of Lake County provided courses directly at a child care center that had a cohort of staff with the desire to enroll. A few institutions made connections with local employers to serve as internship sites, providing the employers with staff and the students with invaluable work experience. Additionally, several institutions hosted job fairs with local employers to try to connect their students with those job openings.

FUNDING AND BUDGET FOR ECACE

The ECACE Act requires an annual report of the Consortium budget including the use of federal funds and member contributions, including financial, physical, or in-kind contributions, provided to the Consortium. Additionally, included are details about the grant funding provided by ICCB and IBHE to fulfill Consortium activities over the reporting period.

Consortium Budget

When the ECACE Act was signed, Governor JB Pritzker announced funding to establish the Consortium, aimed at supporting higher education in creating continuous pathways for working adults and upskilling the early childhood incumbent workforce over three years (AY 2021-22 to AY 2023-24). The Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) allocated over \$200 million in federal childcare funding to support this initiative. The majority of this funding, over \$197 million, was distributed to IBHE, ICCB, and ISAC to administer ECACE.

The purpose of funds going to IBHE and ICCB was to convene and support the Consortium and Advisory Committee, “backbone” the initiative, and provide grants and support to higher education institutions and navigators. ICCB and IBHE provided grant funding, which includes both a base amount and per-student funding, to all Consortium institutions to fulfill the intentions and requirements of the ECACE Act. Additionally, IBHE offered Early Childhood Faculty Preparation grants to four universities to prepare diverse graduate students to become faculty for early childhood higher education programs. The purpose of the funds going to ISAC was to administer and distribute the ECACE scholarship, and the purpose of funds spent by IDHS was to hire and support regional navigators.

Table 21. Consortium Budget, by Agency, as of December 31, 2023

Agency	Original 3-Year Budget	AY2122 Expenses	AY22-23 Expenses	AY23-24 Projected Spending ³⁶	TOTAL Projected 3-Year Expenses
IBHE	\$39,599,971	\$319,372	\$7,681,089	\$19,845,315	\$27,845,776
ICCB	\$37,998,524	\$576,365	\$10,442,589	\$21,653,480	\$32,672,434
ISAC	\$120,000,000	\$6,162,053	\$33,001,012	\$53,196,893	\$92,359,958
IDHS	\$6,000,000	\$583,000	\$2,600,000	\$2,800,000	\$5,983,000
Total	\$203,598,495.00	\$7,640,790.43	\$53,724,689.76	\$97,495,688.20	\$158,861,168

Consortium Member Contributions

The ECACE Consortium, a body of 62 institutions, requires significant resources to support its administration. As such, institutions are required to report on “member contributions, including financial, physical, or in-kind contributions, provided to the Consortium.” Large contributions were not anticipated given the substantial grants received by institutions, the reduced timeframe institutions had to spend the grant money (e.g. two years versus three years), and initial challenges with the reporting structure.

Seventeen different institutions reported contributing funds between AY 2021-22 and AY 2023-24. In AY 2022-23, eight community colleges reported contributing a total of \$382,117, and seven four-year institutions (four private and three public) reported contributing a total of \$108,641.³⁷ A large majority of total contributions, 83 percent, went towards personnel. Institutions’ total contributions ranged from \$292

³⁶ Estimated spending as of December 31, 2023. Actual spending will vary and will be reported in the third annual report.

³⁷ Several institutions were only able to report over the full academic year rather than quarter, so data is from AY 2022-23 and AY 2023-24.

to \$275,470. Morton College contributed \$275,470, representing about 72 percent of two-year institution contributions.

Grants to Community Colleges and Universities

ICCB and IBHE provided grant funding to all Consortium institutions to address the intention and requirements of the ECACE Act. In addition, IBHE provided Early Childhood Faculty Preparation grants to four-year universities to prepare diverse students at the graduate level to become faculty for early childhood higher education programs.

Institutional Grants

Community colleges and universities were provided with grants comprised of both base funding and supplementary per-student funding based on institutional goals. The purpose of the institutional grants was to provide three years of funding (AY 2021-22, AY 2022-23, AY 2023-24³⁸) for institutions to:

- Support the development of a long-term, sustainable infrastructure tailored to meet 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.

The most common use of funding by institutions was for personnel – creating new positions and subsidizing time for current positions to work on ECACE-related activities, including program development, mentoring, and community outreach. Institutions also used grant funds towards debt relief, upgrades to classrooms (i.e., technology, lab spaces, furniture), tutoring, content test preparation, supporting students' professional development through conferences, and instructional supplies.

Appendices A and B include the original amount granted to both two- and four-year institutions. These amounts have fluctuated significantly since the original grant award with some institutions requesting additional funding and others de-obligating funds. Next year's annual report will include the final spending amounts.

Early Childhood Faculty Preparation Grants

Four Illinois higher education institutions established programs to specifically address the need for post baccalaureate-level early childhood prepared instructors/adjunct professors in Illinois utilizing the Early Childhood Faculty Preparation Grant (ECFP). The goal of the ECFP Grant was to increase the racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity of the ECE faculty pipeline. The programs were expected to be rich in diversity and use coordinators or mentors to provide a single point of contact and resources to candidates.

Illinois State University, University of Illinois Chicago, Lewis University, and National Louis University were selected via a competitive bid process for their uniquely designed programs to support those currently teaching and/or working with children ages birth to kindergarten to shift their teaching pedagogy to meet the needs of adult learners. The 88 candidates (66 percent who self-identify as diverse)³⁹ enrolled in these specially designed programs to earn a master's degree and/or an early childhood teaching endorsement that prepares them to teach in a community college, four-year institution, or high school and, in turn, prepare future early childhood educators.

³⁸ Institutions were not awarded their funding until late AY 2021-22.

³⁹ Institutions each determined how they defined diverse, through their grant proposals and their student selection process.

The courses offered at the University of Illinois Chicago, Illinois State University, and National Louis University were designed to meet the specific needs of early childhood professionals teaching in diverse communities and schools. Core courses included curriculum, learning theories, assessment, research methods, and diversity/multicultural education. Additional courses provided instruction in teacher preparation, teaching multilingual learners, and community engagement.

Each program included a unique focus on pedagogy – including preparing teachers for collegiate instruction:

- Candidates at the University Illinois Chicago earned a certificate in “The Foundations of College Instruction.”
- Illinois State University offered quarterly opportunities for the cohort to meet in person for a learning experience in either Bloomington or Chicago.
- National Louis University had their cohort attend the Early Childhood Leadership Connections Conference in Wheeling, which provided opportunities to collectively reflect on professional learning.

Lewis University took a different approach to preparing faculty; they provided a program to support high school teachers from high-need and/or diverse schools to teach community college/high school dual credit coursework in early childhood. Upon completion of the program, the high school teachers are qualified to provide high school coursework as dual credit coursework, enabling high school students to receive community college credit hours.

Each of these unique programs, through intentional coursework and the support of mentors, supported a diverse pipeline of early childhood faculty in Illinois.



LOOKING AHEAD

While the Consortium and its institutions have accomplished much since the inception of ECACE, and especially over this reporting period, there is still more to do to remove barriers and increase opportunities to access degrees and credentials of the incumbent workforce, as laid out in legislation and identified by institutions and state agencies. The institutional grants and scholarships provided to students have had a huge impact on enrollment, persistence, and completion and institutions' ability to support students and remove barriers. Institutional grants expired in June 2024, and scholarship funds were significantly reduced, even with the state investment of \$5 million appropriated in the FY 2024-25 budget. Institutions and state agencies have been planning for how to best sustain the most important elements of the work, continue to accomplish the goals and activities set out in legislation, and continue to support and upskill the incumbent workforce.

Specifically, the Consortium is standing up communities of practice and working groups in AY 2024-25 and strategically thinking about a longer-term sustainability plan for how the Consortium will work together and accomplish the goals laid out in the Act. Similarly, institutions have developed individual sustainability plans to continue to support the incumbent workforce and remove barriers to their enrollment, persistence, and completion.

Communities of Practice and Working Groups

There are several Communities of Practice and Working Groups planned for AY 2024-25, tackling some of the most pressing issues for Consortium institutions.

Course Sharing/Hy-Flex Community of Practice

With an eye toward equity and in accordance with the ECACE Act, which encourages the streamlining of pathways to increase student access to upskilling, credentialing, and licensing, the Consortium will continue to support online learning professional development training and best practices. Specifically, the Consortium will leverage the experience of ILCCO leaders across the state to encourage Consortium institutions to develop course share agreements amongst each other. Through virtual webinars and lunch and learns, ECACE will provide Consortium members with the opportunity to learn more about using Hy-Flex models and the ILCCO system. The Consortium will facilitate introductions between early childhood faculty and their institutional online education director and course design team to help connect faculty to best practices in Hy-flex learning and multi course modalities.

Creative Course Delivery Working Group

Additionally, a Creative Course Delivery Working Group was convened to address the requirements in the ECACE Act that the members of the Consortium cooperate in providing streamlined paths for students to attain degrees, certificates, Gateways Credentials and licensure endorsements in early childhood and provide course offerings in formats that are available to any student enrolled in a member institution when a particular course is not available at the student's home institution.

Working group members represent community colleges and private and public four-year colleges and universities. Specifically, the group discussed approaches to identify student and programmatic needs where creative collaborations could provide streamlined and student-centered experiences to strengthen and enhance programs. Guest speakers were invited to describe course sharing models, taking into account the impact on students and the participating institutions.

Reporting Working Group

A Reporting Working Group, made up of diverse representation from Consortium institutions, including community colleges, public universities, and four-year provide non-profit institutions, advised on a plan to address continued, required reporting requirements in a way that both elevates the great work of institutions and seeks to minimize time and effort. With the expiration of federal grant funding in summer 2024, most institutions have reduced staff capacity. Considering how to streamline reporting requirements while continuing to raise up the successes and lessons of ECACE is paramount.

ECACE Recruitment and Marketing

As shown in the FY 2023-24 Mid-Year Report, the State engaged in multiple outreach strategies to provide employers and potential students with information about the opportunities and resources provided through ECACE. This outreach included the distribution of a new ECACE Scholarship flyer, appearances in INCCRRA newsletters, and an interagency social media campaign. In the fall of 2023, ISAC also created an updated informational video on the ECACE Scholarship to reflect the expanded eligibility criteria for AY 2023-24.

Beginning in October 2023, state agencies worked with a communications firm on a broader ECACE marketing campaign. In partnership with the firm, an interagency committee developed advertisements to appear across radio, social media, audio and television streaming services, and other websites. The campaign was created with two goals: 1) Inform the early childhood workforce of the benefits of continuing their education and how ECACE can streamline the process; and 2) Educate stakeholders about the positive impact the Consortium has made, and how continued support will benefit early childhood. The campaign was launched in April 2024 and will be described in detail in the next report.

Consortium Sustainability

IBHE and ICCB will work with a consulting partner, Afton Partners, to conduct an assessment of institutions and state agency leaders and develop recommendations for the sustainability of the Consortium body. They queried institutions' interest, capacity, priorities, and supports needed, as well as state leaders' priorities and vision to develop recommendations. Recommendations will be detailed in the next report and will focus on the following:

- The vision of ECACE and the Consortium;
- Governance of the Consortium and potential shared leadership between state agencies and institutions;
- Advisory Committee focus;
- Types of institutional engagement in Consortium work;
- Future topics of focus for the next one-three years; and
- Meeting cadence.

To develop these recommendations, IBHE, ICCB, and Afton Partners considered both the reduced future capacity of institutions and the continued need to support the incumbent workforce in attaining credentials and degrees.

Institution Sustainability

In 2024, institutions developed in-depth plans for how they intend to sustain components of ECACE in AY 2024-25. These included plans for financial aid, student supports, recruiting and enrolling students, program structure and access, AAS and other transfer pathways, outreach and partnerships, data sharing and reporting, and participation in the Consortium.

At Consortium meetings, institutions have discussed what they can do to maintain what's been built through ECACE. Some themes include:

- Institutions' ability to maintain their course delivery methods (i.e. flexible schedules, Spanish courses, variety of modalities to accommodate student needs)
- Holistic supports (i.e. mentors, advising, "high touch" with students)
- Pathways (i.e. CDA, prior learning assessments, helping students to transfer)
- Funding (i.e. seeking external resources and grants), and more.

Institutions have also repeatedly expressed concern for their capacity to support students without institutional funding. In particular, institutions are concerned about the loss of mentors, reduction of scholarship funds, and reduced staff time to redesign programs or courses, support students, attend meetings, and report on ECACE work.



CONCLUSION

The Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity (ECACE) was established by legislation 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” (Illinois General Assembly, 2021).

In this reporting period, the Consortium and its institutional members increased enrollment, persistence and completion of the early childhood workforce; adjusted program and course design to be more accessible to working adults; provided scholarships and debt relief to students to remove financial barriers to higher education; conducted outreach and engaged with early childhood employers to best meet their needs; and provided students supports to assist early childhood workforce members to persist and complete.

While AY 2024-25 will prove challenging with the end of institutional grants, the Consortium is making plans to continue supporting the incumbent early childhood workforce by maintaining student supports and program changes where possible, adjusting strategies such as recruitment messaging, collecting data to measure the progress and value of ECACE, and innovating additional strategies to make higher education more accessible for the early childhood workforce. Additionally, as the Consortium looks toward “Phase 2”, it envisions additional collaborative, cross-consortium work to continue to network, learn, share, and create seamless pathways for working adults.



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APPENDIX A. CONSORTIUM MEMBERS

ECACE Institutions and their Consortium Representatives as of Academic Year 2022-23:

Amy Maxeiner
Black Hawk College

Michelle Weghorst
Illinois Central College

Kalith Smith
Lincoln Land Community College

Cindy Rice
Blackburn College

Robert Conn
Illinois Eastern Community College

Elizabeth Gmitter
Malcolm X College

Lavada Taylor
Chicago State University

Linda Ruhe Marsh
Illinois State University

Dawn Katz
McHenry County College

Jean Zaar
College of DuPage

Tammy Landgraf
Illinois Valley Community College

Ryen Nagle
Moraine Valley Community College

Diane Schael
College of Lake County

Stephanie Hartford
John A. Logan College

Michael Rose
Morton College

Penny McConnell
Danville Area Community College

April Darringer
John Wood Community College

Lisa Downey
National Louis University

Marie Donovan
DePaul University

Melissa Szymczak
Joliet Junior College

Tom Phillion
Northeastern Illinois University

Laretta Henderson
Eastern Illinois University

Joy Towner
Judson University

Laurie Elish-Piper
Northern Illinois University

Peggy Heinrich
Elgin Community College

Paul Carlson
Kankakee Community College

Marc Battista
Oakton Community College

Shannon Dermer
Governors State University

Traci Masau
Kaskaskia College

Brandon Nichols
Olive Harvey College

Laura Schaub
Greenville University

Shandria Holmes
Kennedy King College

Lance Kilpatrick
Olivet Nazarene University

Theresa Carlton
Harold Washington College

Judson Curry
Kishwaukee College

Nancy Sutton
Parkland College

Kathleen Nikolai
Harper College

Tanille Ulm
Lake Land College

Elighie Wilson
Prairie State College

Johnna Darragh-Ernst
Heartland College

Randy Gallaher
Lewis & Clark Community College

Kim Wilkerson
Rend Lake College

Melissa Johnson
Highland Community College

Rebecca Pruitt
Lewis University

Patricia Aumann
Richard Daley College

Megan Broderick
Richland Community College

Amanda Smith
Rock Valley College

Kimberlee Wagner
Rockford University

Jin-ah Kim
Roosevelt University

Jon Mandrell
Sauk Valley Community College

Anna Helwig
South Suburban College

Stacy Thompson
*Southern Illinois University
Carbondale*

Natasha Flowers
*Southern Illinois University
Edwardsville*

Carolyn Beal
Southwestern Illinois College

Robert Kensinger
*Spoon River College
(joined fall 2023)*

Shekeita Webb
St. Augustine College

Suan Campos
Triton College

Kate Connor
Truman College

Kathryn Bouchard Chval
University of Illinois Chicago

Anne Pradzinski
*University of Illinois
Urbana-Champaign*

Sharon Garcia
Waubensee Community College

Eric Sheffield
Western Illinois University



APPENDIX B. ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS, AS OF 12/31/23

Co-Chairs

Brian Durham
*Illinois Community
College Board*

Jason Helfer
*Illinois State Board
of Education*

VACANT
*Governor's Office of Early Childhood
Development*

Ginger Ostro
*Illinois Board
of Higher Education*

Trish Rooney
*Illinois Department
of Human Services*

Members

VACANT
*Senate Higher Education
Committee*

Alicia Geddis
Danville School District 118

Meredith Palmer
Richland College

Dale Fowler
*Senate Higher Education
Committee*

Francis Godwyll
Illinois State University

Joi Patterson
Governors State University

Maurice A West, II
*House Higher Education
Committee*

Rochelle Golliday
Cuddle Care, Inc.

Avis Proctor
Harper College

Michael Marron
*House Higher Education
Committee*

Ashley Harms
Amity Child Care Center

Jim Reed
*Illinois Community College
Trustee Association*

Jill Andrews
Kiddie Kollege

Michael Kim
Illinois Action for Children

Martina Rocha
Together for Children Network

Carolyn Beal
Southwestern Illinois College

Kimberly Mann
*Illinois Department of Children
and Family Services*

Stephanie Schmitz-Bechteler
*Illinois Student
Assistance Commission*

Jennifer Buchter
Eastern Illinois University

Leslie Mckinily
*Chicago Public Schools,
District 299*

Joni Scritchlow
INCCRRA

Kate Connor
Truman College

Lauri Morrison-Frichtl
IL Head Start Association

Mike Shackelford
Brownstone CUSD 201

Lisa Downey
National Louis University

Stephanie Neuman
Kountry Kids Learning Center

Tom Phillion
Northeastern Illinois University

Laurie Elish-Piper
Northern Illinois University

Susan Orozco
*East Aurora School,
District 131*

Ken Trzaska
*Community College Presidents
Council and Lewis & Clark
Community College*

Emnet Geberhiiwet Ward
*Eyes on the Future Child
Development Center*

Evelyn Osorio
*Service Employees
International Union*

Rebecca Vonderlack-Navarro
Latino Policy Forum

APPENDIX C. IBHE ORIGINAL INSTITUTIONAL GRANT AWARDS

Funding amounts listed below are budgeted amounts for institutions for ECACE and ECFP grants. This does not represent final spending amounts. This will be published next year.

Table C-1. ECACE Funding for Four-Year Institutions, FY21-22 through FY23-24

Institution	Total
Blackburn College	\$311,602.00
Chicago State University	\$1,031,409.69
DePaul University	\$874,582.00
Eastern Illinois University	\$874,582.00
Governors State University	\$1,135,961.93
Greenville University	\$311,601.01
Illinois State University	\$1,758,964.91
Lewis University	\$899,720.42
National Louis University	\$1,758,965.00
Northeastern Illinois University	\$721,938.00
Northern Illinois University	\$1,706,688.60
Olivet Nazarene University	\$874,581.00
Rockford University	\$311,604.00
Roosevelt University	\$1,135,961.00
Southern Illinois University Carbondale	\$937,313.00
Southern Illinois University Edwardsville	\$890,941.85
St. Augustine College	\$1,015,727.00
St. Xavier University ⁴⁰	\$3,604.62
University of Illinois Chicago	\$1,162,066.58
University of Illinois Urbana Champaign	\$947,768.06
Western Illinois University	\$952,995.00
Total	\$19,618,577.67

Table C-2. Early Childhood Faculty Preparation Grants

Institution	Total
Illinois State University	\$800,753.00
Lewis University	\$358,390.00
National Louis University	\$1,191,511.00
University of Illinois Chicago	\$1,027,989.00
Total	\$3,378,643.00

⁴⁰ St. Xavier left the Consortium in November 2022. This was the amount actually spent during their time in the Consortium.

APPENDIX D. ICCB ORIGINAL INSTITUTIONAL GRANT AWARDS

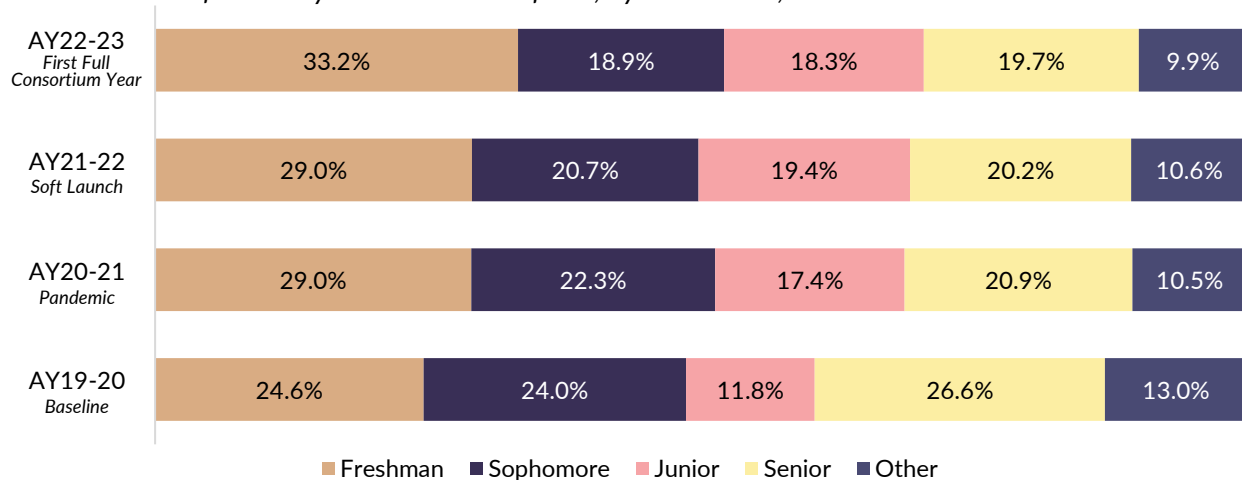
Table D-1. ECACE Funding for Illinois Community Colleges, FY21-22 through FY23-24

Community College	Total Program Allocation (FY 22-24)	Community College	Total Program Allocation (FY 22-24)
Black Hawk	\$767,955.68	John A. Logan	\$608,131.68
Carl Sandburg (ILCCO Only)	\$60,416.68	John Wood	\$616,693.68
CCC Harold Washington	\$685,189.68	Joliet Junior	\$930,633.68
CCC Harry S Truman	\$930,633.68	Kankakee	\$662,357.68
CCC Kennedy-King	\$676,627.68	Kaskaskia	\$693,751.68
CCC Malcolm X	\$830,743.68	Kishwaukee	\$582,445.68
CCC Olive-Harvey	\$702,313.68	Lake Land	\$696,605.68
CCC Richard J. Daley	\$716,583.68	Lewis and Clark	\$779,371.68
CCC Wilbur Wright (ILCCO Only)	\$60,416.68	Lincoln Land	\$648,087.68
College of DuPage	\$2,004,163.68	McHenry County	\$864,991.68
College of Lake County	\$950,611.68	Moraine Valley	\$876,407.68
Danville Area	\$636,671.68	Morton	\$1,347,530.68
Elgin	\$1,279,034.68	Oakton	\$1,955,645.68
Harper	\$1,318,990.68	Parkland	\$630,963.68
Heartland	\$705,167.68	Prairie State	\$716,583.68
Highland	\$622,401.68	Rend Lake	\$593,861.68
IECC Frontier (ILCCO Only)	\$60,416.68	Richland	\$616,693.68
IECC Lincoln Trail (ILCCO Only)	\$60,416.68	Rock Valley	\$773,663.68
IECC Olney Central (ILCCO Only)	\$60,416.68	Sauk Valley	\$596,715.68
IECC Wabash Valley	\$588,153.68	Shawnee (ILCCO Only)	\$60,416.68
Illinois Central	\$733,707.68	South Suburban	\$847,867.68
Illinois Valley	\$659,503.68	Southeastern Illinois (ILCCO Only)	\$60,416.68
		Southwestern Illinois	\$1,307,574.68
		Spoon River	\$605,277.68
		Triton	\$799,349.68
		Waubonsee	\$864,991.68

APPENDIX E. CLASS LEVEL DISTRIBUTION AND DEGREE SEEKING INFORMATION

Class levels, as shown in Figure E-1, consist of Freshmen, Sophomores, Juniors, and Seniors at all of the institutions. The Other classification included students with a bachelor's or associate degree enrolled in a community college or enrolled in a bridge adult education credit-bearing program. From AY 2019-20 to AY 2022-23, the percentage of seniors decreased from 26.6 percent to 19.7 percent. However, the percentage of upper classmen remained relatively stable, with 38.4 percent in AY 2019-20 and 38 percent in AY 2022-23. The percentage of freshmen increased from 24.6 percent to 33.2 percent, reflecting an influx of new students recruited through ECACE.

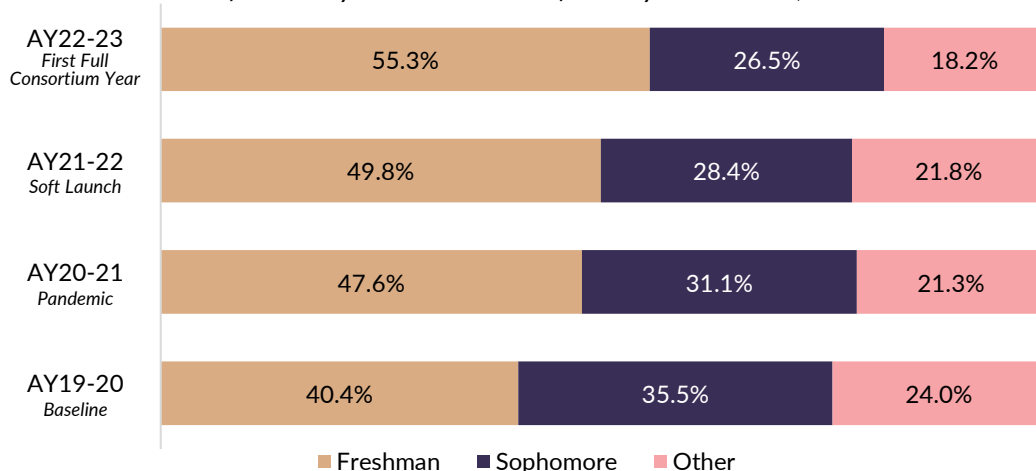
Figure E-1. Distribution of Enrollment of Incumbent Members of the Early Childhood Workforce, by Class Level, AY19-20 to AY22-23



Community Colleges

The proportion of Freshmen shifted fairly substantially – by 11.9 percentage points from AY 2019-20 (43.4 percent) to AY 2022-23 (55.3 percent) for incumbent early childhood workers enrolling in Illinois community colleges. This likely reflects an increase in newly enrolled students recruited through the ECACE initiative and scholarship. Conversely, enrollment of Sophomores decreased from 34.7 percent to 26.5 percent in the same time period.

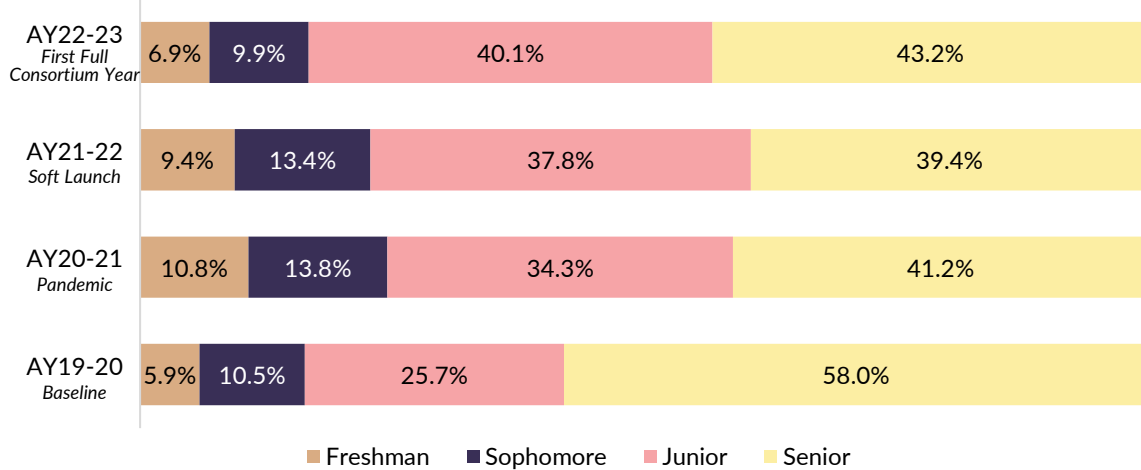
Figure E-2. Distribution of Community College Enrollment of Incumbent Members of the Early Childhood Workforce by Class Level, AY19-20 to AY22-23



Four-year Institutions

While enrollment increased for all class levels at four-year institutions, the proportion of those at various levels shifted from AY 2019-20 to AY 2022-23. The percentage of Seniors decreased from 58.0 percent to 43.2 percent, while the percentage of Juniors increased from 25.7 percent to 40.1 percent. However, the overall percent of upperclassmen remained relatively stable, with 83.7 percent in AY 2019-20 and 83.3 percent in AY 2022-23.

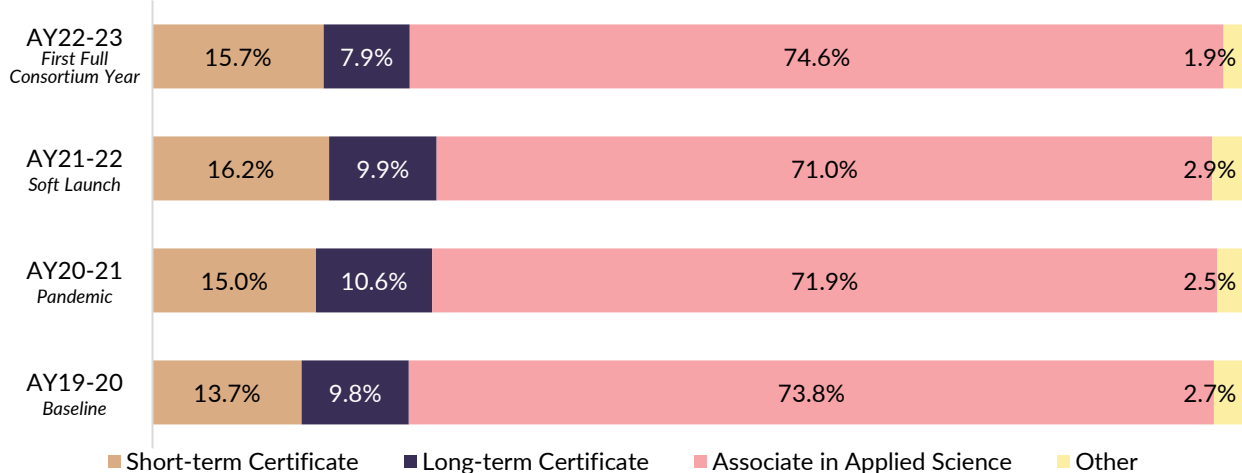
Figure E-3. Distribution of Four-Year Institution Enrollment of Incumbent Members of the Early Childhood Workforce by Class Level, AY19-20 to AY22-23



Degree vs. Certificate Seeking at Community Colleges

As shown in Figure E-4, the number of incumbent members of the early childhood workforce in Illinois community colleges for AY 2022-23 were primarily enrolled Associate in Applied Science (AAS) programs (74.6 percent; N = 1,879) followed by Short-Term Certificate programs (15.7 percent; N = 395), Long-Term Certificate programs (7.9 percent; N = 199), and Other programs (1.9 percent; N = 89). Examining distribution of students in certificate and degree types, it remained fairly constant with Short-Term Certificates having slight growth proportionally compared to Associate in Applied Science programs and Long-Term Certificate programs.

Figure E-4. Distribution of Illinois Community College Enrollment of Incumbent Members of the Early Childhood Workforce by Certificate and Degree Type, AY19-20 to AY22-23



APPENDIX F. EMPLOYMENT INFORMATION FOR ENROLLED STUDENTS

Appendix F includes employment information for those incumbent workforce members enrolled at community colleges and four-year institutions, disaggregated by sector.

Teachers and assistant teachers comprise most incumbent members at both community colleges (39.3 percent and 37.2 percent respectively) and four-year institutions (39.6 percent and 29.6 percent respectively). Interestingly, the next largest group at four-year institutions were teacher aides (8.2 percent); whereas at community colleges, it was directors (8.3 percent).

Table F-1. Distribution of Overall Enrolled EC Workforce Population by Sector and Gateways Position Type, AY22-23 (N=4,158)

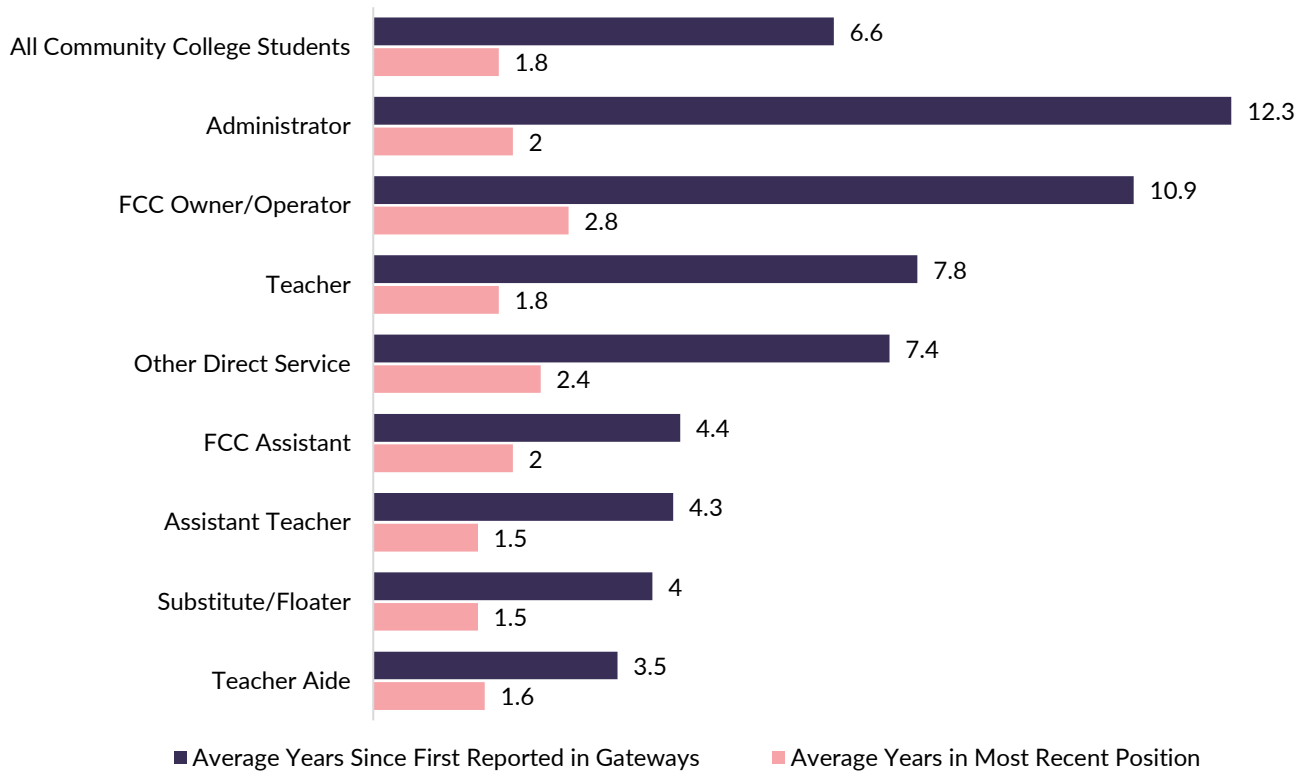
	Community Colleges		Four-Year Institutions	
	#	%	#	%
Teacher	899	39.3%	739	39.6%
Assistant Teacher	851	37.2%	553	29.6%
Administrator	189	8.3%	122	6.5%
Teacher Aide	106	4.6%	154	8.2%
Other Direct Service	89	3.9%	127	6.8%
Substitute/Floater	72	3.1%	109	5.8%
FCC Owner/Operator	43	1.9%	41	2.2%
FCC Assistant	41	1.8%	23	1.2%
Total	2,290		1,868	

Note: The total sample size was 4,221 (2,328 and 1,893 from community colleges and four-year institutions respectively), however, 63 people enrolled (38 from community colleges and 25 from four-year institutions) fell into positions of unknown, other indirect, other, youth development practitioner, and school-age site coordinator, but due to such small numbers, they were excluded from the table.

Figure F-1 and Figure F-2 include information about enrolled workforce members' length of time in their most recent position and length of time in the field (as calculated using the years since the first position was reported in the Gateways Registry).

The average number of years in the most recent position for all enrolled incumbent workforce members at community colleges was 1.8 years, and the average number of years since the first reported position was 6.6 years. However, the average tenure in the field varied greatly across roles. As illustrated in Figure F-1, administrators had the longest average tenure in the field of 12.3 years, with 2 years in their most recent position. Family child care owners, totaling 43 individuals, had an average of 2.8 years in their most recent position and an average of 10.9 years since their first reported position within the Gateways registry. Teachers had an average tenure of 1.8 years in their most recent position and 7.8 years overall, while assistant teachers had an average of 1.5 years and 4.3 years overall.

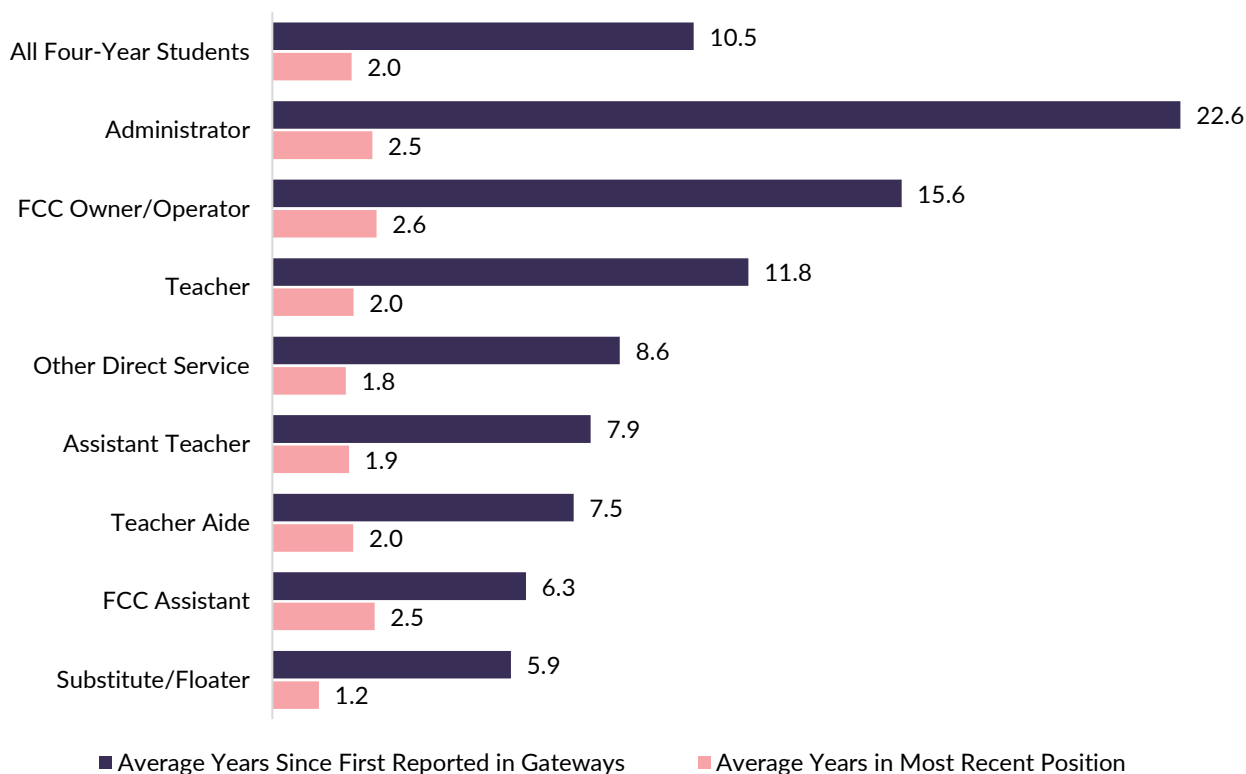
Figure F-1. Job Tenure for ECACE Cohort Members from Illinois Community Colleges, by Position (N=2,290)



Note: 38 people enrolled fell into the positions of unknown, other indirect, other, youth development practitioner, and school-age site coordinator, but due to such small numbers, they were excluded from the figure.

Enrolled workforce members at four-year institutions had an average of 2 years in their most recent position and 10.5 years in the field. Job tenure at four-year institutions varied notably by position. Administrators had the longest total early childhood tenure at 22.6 years with an average of 2.5 years of time in their most recent position. Family child care owners followed with 15.6 years and an average of 2.6 years in service. Teachers, which comprised the largest group at 739, had an average tenure of 2.0 years in their most recent position and an average of 11.8 years in the field. Assistant teachers stood at 7.9 years in tenure with 1.9 years average time in their most recent position.

Figure F-2. Job Tenure for ECACE Cohort Members from Four-Year Institutions, by Position (N=1,868)

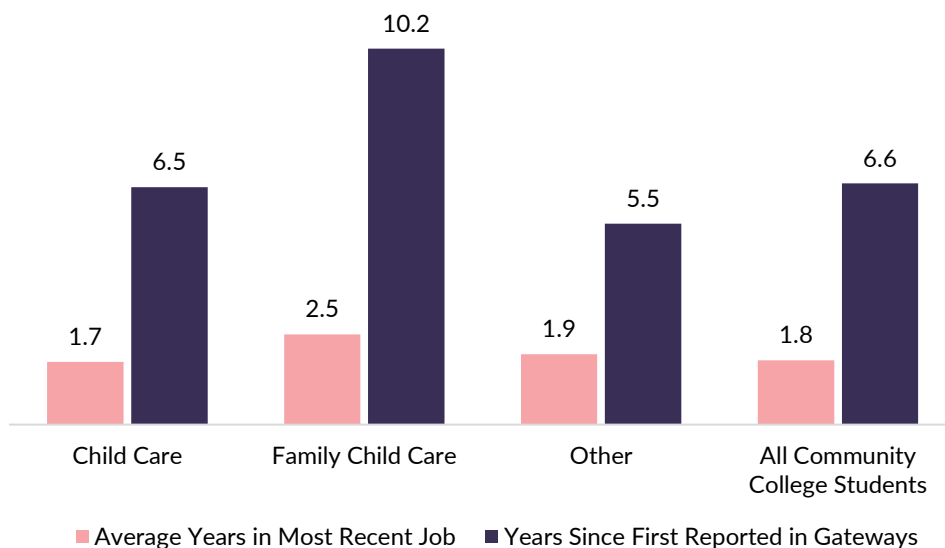


Note: 25 people enrolled fell into the positions of unknown, other indirect, other, youth development practitioner, and school-age site coordinator, but due to such small numbers, they were excluded from the figure.

Figure F-3 and Figure F-4 include information about enrolled workforce members' length of time in their most recent position and length of time in the field (as calculated using the years since the first position was reported in the Gateways Registry) by their employer type.

Average tenure in the field was greatest for those working in family child care enrolled in community colleges (10.2 years). Those working in family child care also on average served the most time in their recent position for those enrolled in community colleges (2.5 years).

Figure F-3. Job Tenure by Employer Type for EC Workforce Members at Community Colleges (N=2,328)



Average tenure in the field was greatest for those working in family child care enrolled in four-year institutions (15 years). Those working in family child care also on average served the most time in their recent position (2.6 years).

Figure F-4. Job Tenure by Employer Type for EC Workforce Members at Four-Year Institutions (N=1,893)

