



Infant Toddler Teacher
Quality Initiative
Task Force Policy Recommendations



2017

About the Infant Toddler Teacher Quality Initiative Task Force

The Infant Toddler Teacher Quality Initiative (ITTQI) Task Force was convened in spring 2016 through a partnership between the Robert R. McCormick Foundation and INCCRRA with support from key state agencies including the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development, Illinois Department of Human Services Bureau of Child Care and Development, and the Illinois State Board of Education. The task force was charged to *develop a comprehensive, statewide set of recommendations designed to ensure a well-qualified, infant/toddler teacher workforce will support achievement of Illinois substantive goals related to positive child and family outcomes as related to key federal and state initiatives ultimately improving the quality of services provided through strengthened infant/toddler teacher preparation.* This report is reflective of the collective work and vision of the task force.

Task Force Members

Lindsay Alvis Cochrane – McCormick Foundation

Stephanie Bernoteit – Illinois Board of Higher Education

Cerathel Burnett – Carole Robertson Center for Learning

Christi Chadwick – Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development

Anna Colaner – Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development

Johnna Darragh-Ernst – Heartland Community College

Debra Devaldivielso – Illinois Department of Children and Family Services

Lisa Downey – National Louis University

Maria Estlund – Illinois Action for Children

Claudia Fabian – Illinois Department of Human Services

Beth Knight – INCCRRA

Sarah LeMoine – Zero to Three

Catherine Main – University of Illinois Chicago

Paula McClain – Illinois Department of Children and Family Services

Carol Morris – Illinois Department of Children and Family Services

Lauri Morrison-Frichtl – Illinois Head Start Association

Cristina Pacione-Zayas – Erikson Institute

Mindy Schryer – Ounce of Prevention

Joni Scritchlow – INCCRRA

Teri Talan – McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership

Anne Wharff – Illinois Department of Human Services

Joellyn Whitehead – INCCRRA

Pam Wicking – Community Coordinated Child Care (4-C)

Deb Widenhofer – Baby TALK

Cynthia Zumwalt – Illinois State Board of Education

Research proves that early childhood sets a trajectory that influences health, economic, and social outcomes for individuals over a lifetime. We know a well-qualified, early childhood professional workforce is integral to improving child outcomes and providing high-quality care and education to our youngest citizens in Illinois.

Increasing evidence confirms that the first three years of a child's life have significant impact in terms of early cognition and language development, early childhood overall growth and development, and in social attachments that support positive social-emotional development. In fact, the National Association for the Education of Young Children includes standards for early childhood professionals: "If early childhood practitioners have higher levels of formal education and specialized training, they are much more likely in their work with young children and families to use the evidence-based practices and possess the ongoing professional commitment we know are necessary to make a positive difference in children's lives."¹

Illinois is committed to serving children and families through a comprehensive early childhood system and has long been recognized as a national leader in early childhood professional development systems work. Recognizing the critical importance of the infant/toddler workforce, an Infant Toddler Teacher Quality Initiative (ITTQI) Task Force was established in Spring of 2016 with representatives from state agencies, higher education, professional development state systems, key stakeholders and philanthropic partners facilitated by Zero to Three. INCCRRA partnered with the Robert R. McCormick Foundation to convene this ITTQI Task Force to engage in a review of statewide infant/toddler teacher workforce data, conduct a gap analysis, and establish recommendations that set a trajectory designed to increase the professional qualifications of the Illinois Infant Toddler Workforce. The ITTQI Task Force goal was to:

Develop a comprehensive, statewide set of recommendations designed to ensure a well-qualified, infant/toddler teacher workforce will support achievement of Illinois substantive goals related to positive child and family outcomes as related to key federal and state initiatives ultimately improving the quality of services provided through strengthened infant/toddler teacher preparation.

To achieve this goal, the ITTQI Task Force was established to:

- Review a compilation and analysis of educational attainment data of Illinois Infant Toddler Teachers, including comparisons with national data, relation to key state characteristics (e.g. geography), analyze current educational levels compared to desired educational attainment and a gap analysis.
- Analyze results of Infant Toddler Teacher surveys designed to capture underlying facts and data needed to substantiate or inform findings and develop recommendations.
- Engage and strengthen infant/toddler teacher education and preparation through analysis of current resource allocation and design recommendations for reallocation or new supports including targeting statewide continuous quality improvement efforts.
- Design recommendations to strengthen infant/toddler workforce teacher preparation and corresponding strategies for implementation.

The ITTQI Task Force was facilitated by Sarah LeMoine, Director of Early Childhood Workforce Innovations at the ZERO TO THREE, a national membership-based organization with a mission to ensure that all babies and toddlers have a strong start in life. The Institute of Medicine (IOM) and National Research Council (NRC) 2015 report *Transforming the workforce for children birth through age 8: A unifying foundation*² was used as an organizing structure to develop recommendations designed to strengthen Illinois infant/toddler teacher preparation and educational qualifications and to create corresponding strategies for implementation.

Background

A large body of research has proven that the first three years of a child's life are of critical importance. Compelling research also indicates that high quality early learning and development programs can have significant impact in preparing high-risk children for optimum outcomes in school and life. A key component of developing high quality programs is ensuring that infant/toddler early learning and development teachers have the necessary preparation, education, and training, to support children's optimal development. Illinois fully recognizes that resources allocated to strengthen teacher preparation and ongoing professional development for those who work with our youngest and most vulnerable children are investments which will pay large dividends.

The paid infant/toddler workforce in Illinois likely numbers more than 25,000 individuals. There are over 15,200 teachers and assistant teachers working in licensed child care centers (including Early Head Start programs) who work with infants and toddlers. There are also several thousand teaching staff working in license-exempt settings, including exempt center-based settings and school-based settings such as the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) Prevention Initiative program. In addition to these settings, more than 6,600 licensed family child care providers care for infants and toddlers. Along with these professionals who work with children in formal group settings, there are many others that work with infants, toddlers, and their families in program models such as home visiting and early intervention services.

The educational qualification requirements for professionals in formal early care and education settings vary greatly and contribute to a bifurcated system that plays out in a hierarchy of value placed on professional roles in different settings and inequitable compensation. In addition, none of the qualification requirements for these roles have a specific requirement for demonstrating competencies when working with infants and toddlers. As a result, the majority of these teachers and caregivers require additional infant/toddler-specific education and training in order to more effectively serve our youngest children.

In licensed child care settings, the Illinois infant/toddler workforce is less educated when compared to early care and education counterparts that work with preschool-age children. Illinois, like most states, requires minimal qualification requirements for this critically important workforce³:

- Early childhood teachers working in a licensed center need only have a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential or 6 semester hours in ECE with additional general education/experience as specified in licensing regulations.
- Early childhood assistants are required to have a high school diploma or GED.
- A licensed family child care provider is required to have a high school diploma or GED.

All of these providers must also complete at least 15 hours of training annually, much of which is unsubstantiated in terms of content and quality. There are no specifications in either qualification requirements or on-going training for content specifically dealing with infants and toddlers, other than SIDS and Shaken Baby Syndrome training.

After thoughtful review of available data and discussion of successful initiatives and trends in the field – both nationally and specific to Illinois – the Infant Toddler Teacher Quality Initiative (ITTQI) Task Force proposes the eight policy recommendations herein. Task Force members prioritized the first five key policy recommendations as being of greatest importance and focus for this report, though all eight recommendations are presented. The ITTQI Task Force membership was intentionally comprised of key stakeholders and representatives of state agencies, councils, and boards in Illinois that have authority to implement resulting recommendations. Task Force members were charged with carrying relevant recommendations forward to their affiliated groups and, where applicable, to place into policies and implement.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Increase the professional qualifications of and standards for the infant/toddler workforce by establishing and implementing minimum competency-based qualification requirements across all early care and education settings in Illinois.

Consistency in establishing minimum educational expectations *regardless of the age of the child* is critical. To do so, the “infant/toddler workforce” must first be clearly identified. The ITTQI Task Force suggests the primary infant/toddler workforce is comprised of all teachers and assistants/aides serving children birth to three working in all center- and school-based settings and licensed family child care homes. This is inclusive of Early Head Start programs. Early intervention specialists and home visitors are a secondary audience and often have specialized qualifications required for their work. As defined, the infant/toddler workforce must have a common base of early childhood knowledge with specialized, differentiated knowledge as evidenced by specific competencies for working with children birth to three. These foundational educational requirements must be implemented across all settings.

Recommended Implementation Strategies

- Embed the competency-based Gateways ECE and Infant Toddler Credentials in professional qualification requirements.
- Create realistic timelines, multiple pathways, and a variety of supports to assist the workforce in successfully meeting the competency-based requirements.
- Align professional development training with infant/toddler competencies.
- Expand opportunities for job-embedded professional development with peer coaching and mentoring.
- Increase access to infant/toddler coursework through institutions of higher education and build capacity for infant/toddler-specific practicum placement within high-quality settings.
- Maximize opportunities to place specific professional qualification requirements requiring infant/toddler competencies in RFP processes for new programs.
- Enhance licensing regulations to include specific requirements for teachers and assistant teachers serving infants and toddlers, such as a portion of the required in-service training being focused on children birth to three.
- Ensure compensation requiring similar teacher educational qualifications is consistent regardless of age range served. Suggested strategies to move toward this goal have recently been developed by the Illinois Early Learning Council’s Program Standards and Quality (PSQ) Committee through their Workforce Compensation Subcommittee⁴.
- Place all Gateways Credentials, including the Infant Toddler Credential, within the Great START wage supplement scale to support consistency in ECE regardless of ages served.

Rationale and Support

Illinois, as is consistent with data from across the nation, shows evidence that its infant/toddler teachers are less educated collectively than their counterparts who teach preschool (ages 3-4) children. This is intolerable given the wide range of research which supports the exact opposite: early learning and development begins at birth and must be supported by highly qualified teachers with the requisite specialized knowledge and education to effectively provide services to infants and toddlers, birth to three. The ITTQI Task Force recommends much needed, critical policy changes to advance the educational qualifications for all infant/toddler teachers and caregivers.

This recommendation aligns with the IOM and NRC *Transforming the workforce* report, which calls for a transition to a minimum bachelor's degree qualification requirement for all lead educators working with children birth through age 8. While the ITTQI Task Force did not specify the level of qualification needed, we strongly believe that the qualification requirements must be increased and consistently implemented across all ECE settings. Public school settings in Illinois require a bachelor's degree and Professional Educator Licensure (PEL) with an early childhood endorsement for teachers serving preschool-age children. Community-based organizations with funding from the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) Preschool for All program have the same requirement. Head Start programs require a minimum of 50% of their teachers to have a bachelor's degree in early childhood. Early Head Start (EHS) requires a minimum of a CDA and training or coursework in early childhood development *with a focus on infant and toddler development*. By August 1, 2018, Early Head Start will require the child development specialist for family child care to have a bachelor's degree in child development/early childhood and EHS Family Child Care providers to have a CDA (minimally) or bachelor's degree in early childhood⁵. The Illinois Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development (OECD) recognizes this discrepancy and has shared aspirational goals for the state which include a bachelor's degree for all early care and education teachers regardless of setting.

In addition to existing qualification requirements and Illinois' forward movement to establish consistency across settings, the IOM and NRC *Transforming the workforce* report provides a number of strong arguments in Chapter 12 (A Blueprint for Action) for an increase in qualification requirements that apply to the infant/toddler workforce, including:

- The science of child development necessitates professionals have a high level of complex knowledge and competencies. Unfortunately, current expectations for qualifications are based more on historical perceptions of value or limitations in resources rather than on the needs of children. "These expectations lag behind the science of child development and early learning, which shows clearly that the experiences of children in the earliest years – including their interactions with care and education professionals – have profound effects, building the foundation for lifelong development and learning." (p. 514)
- Disparate qualification requirement policies create a bifurcated job market within early care and education settings. The result is that individuals who are able to continue their education and acquire additional credentials often leave for better-compensated positions in other settings or leave to work with older children, such as in public schools. "This situation potentially perpetuates a cycle of disparity in the quality of the learning experiences of young children." (p. 514)

Promising Practices

Gateways to Opportunity Credentials

All Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) Gateways to Opportunity Credentials, in Administrative Rule, are moving toward a competency-based system in alignment with federal and state initiatives, research, and best practices. The Gateways Infant Toddler Credential realignment to become a competency-based credential was completed in January of 2017. Statewide implementation and embedding of these infant/toddler competencies within coursework that leads to the attainment of the Infant Toddler Credential (ITC) will occur within statewide higher education institutions by December of 2017. The ITC was designed in alignment with national credentials and standards and is cross-walked with the NAEYC Standards for Early Childhood Professional Preparation and with the Illinois Professional Teacher Standards. The national Child Development Associate (CDA) credential is recognized as a pathway toward achieving the ITC. The ITC content areas are also formally aligned with the new, national *ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies for Infant-Toddler Educators*⁶ (Dean, LeMoine, and Mayoral, 2016). The statewide training and professional development system will begin movement to a competency basis in 2017 with anticipated completion in 2018.

Recommendation 2: Enhance supported, accessible career pathways that guide professionals in strengthening their professional qualifications.

Central to this recommendation is the development and implementation of comprehensive pathways with multiyear timelines at the individual, institutional, and policy levels for transitioning to a bachelor's degree qualification requirement, with specialized knowledge and competencies, for all lead teachers/educators working with children from birth through age 8 (regardless of setting). Competencies should be utilized as the common language for career pathways and advancement and embedded within tools such as Illinois' early care and education career lattice in order to provide consistency, clarity, and transparency for professionals in the field. A critical component to this work is advancement of key state partnerships to identify models of Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) for the early care and education field.

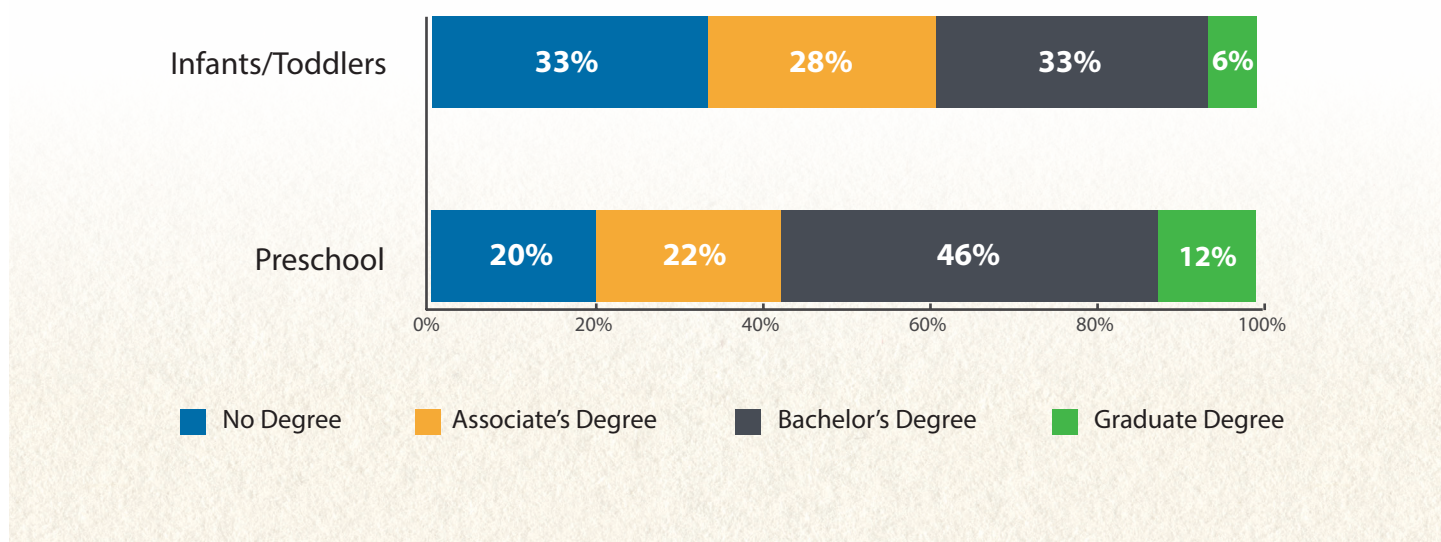
Recommended Implementation Strategies

- Clearly articulate and disseminate throughout the state the consistent core competencies and foundational knowledge required across all early care and education settings for teachers working with children birth through age 8, as well as differentiated knowledge and competencies for those working with infants and toddlers.
- Embed increased educational requirements within DCFS licensing standards so that teacher requirements are aligned across all settings.
- Specify timelines for attainment of credentials advancing to degrees for all teachers working in licensed settings – including both center based and family child care.
- Support partnerships among Illinois Community College Board and Illinois Board of Higher Education in conjunction with statewide institutions of higher education to develop models for PLA and offer credit for demonstrating existing competencies.
- Identify multiple pathways for career development and ensure advisors within secondary and post-secondary settings are knowledgeable of these pathways.
- Require professionals that access funds for early care and education scholarships be advised on and have an individual professional development plan that includes how attainment of coursework or credentials supports their career goals.
- Communicate early childhood career pathways to the public in a way that promotes a shared understanding of the qualification requirements. For example, in the nursing profession, the public has an understanding of the differences in qualifications of an LPN and an RN.
- Ensure that early childhood career pathways are inclusive of/represent infant and toddler careers as a distinct choice/career trajectory.

Rationale and Support

As Illinois increases educational qualification requirements that support (aspirational goal) attainment of a bachelor's degree for all lead educators working with children birth through age 8, multiple pathways must be developed to support the current workforce in advancing its educational levels. Consistent teacher qualification requirements must be implemented across all early care and education settings. Illinois infant/toddler teachers have lower levels of education as compared to their counterparts teaching preschoolers (Figure 2)⁷ and will require longer timelines and more supports to achieve degrees compared to those teaching preschoolers.

Figure 1: Educational Attainments of Licensed Child Care Center Teachers by Age Group Served



Improving articulation of coursework is a key goal in Illinois. Recent data indicates that more than half of the students attending 4 year institutions transfer from another institution. Former models where a student began at one institution and stayed through securement of a degree are less evident today. Utilization of a set of core competencies for the early care and workforce will secure transparency for the field by making it more evident what compilation of courses can lead to credentials, and ultimately degrees. A competency based career lattice makes next steps in career advancement more evident. It increases the capacity to mitigate gaps in required education for early care and education teachers. Additionally, when faculty at institutions of higher education develop curriculum/design coursework using competencies with congruence in assessments, courses more easily articulate between two year institutions, and between two- and four-year institutions. As evidenced in the chart above, there are a large number of infant/toddler teachers who will need to take coursework to advance their degrees. Ensuring minimal loss of credit, and minimizing the taking of coursework that does not transfer or provide movement on a career lattice, are key efforts needed to support educational advancement.

The Illinois Articulation Initiative (IAI) identifies and promotes collaborative efforts among the state's higher education institutions by identifying courses which have been submitted, reviewed, and approved for articulation/transfer. The IAI Education Panel for Early Childhood recently decided to embed competencies in course descriptors that articulate. This will further advance the movement to competencies across the state, and make it easier for the workforce to identify which courses to take/what will transfer between institutions.

The current movement of the Gateways Credentials toward competencies has surfaced clarity in the (now underway) redesign of an Illinois Early Care and Education Career Lattice. It is evident that building from one common set of core competencies (evidenced by the ECE Credential) provides a common foundation of knowledge for the field. From this foundational knowledge, additional, differentiated knowledge can be added depending upon role and career trajectories. For example, adding infant/toddler-specific competencies can lead to the attainment of an Infant Toddler Credential. Adding administrator competencies can lead to an Illinois Director Credential. Coaching and mentoring competencies added to the ECE Credential can lead to a Technical Assistance Credential. These specializations are defined by the additional competencies that must be added to the core/foundational knowledge specified in the ECE competency-based credential.

As Illinois developed core ECE competencies and redesigned credentials within the career lattice (including the infant/toddler credential), careful attention was paid to identifying knowledge and skills that were critical components of the ECE core, as well as knowledge and skills that were essential components of specialized credential areas. During the process of moving the infant/toddler credential to competencies, it was decided that moving some of the more general indicators that presently existed within the infant/toddler credential to the newly-designed competency-based ECE credential would serve to intensify and reinforce the focus of the ECE credential on the development and learning of young children, birth to age 3. The indicators remaining in the infant/toddler credential were identified as specifically essential and immediately applicable to the role of the infant/toddler practitioner. The process of enhancing the focus on infant and toddlers in the ECE core and intensifying the focus in the infant/toddler credential served to enhance the breadth of content focused on infant and toddlers in the core credential, and the depth of content within the infant/toddler credentials.

Promising Practices

Higher Education Partnerships

Advances in developing innovative pathways for the workforce to attain bachelor degrees was evidenced by the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge grant funding in Illinois. Partnerships between two- and four-year higher education institutions resulted in the design and development of a pathway toward a bachelor's degree for early childhood teachers with an Associate of Applied Science (AAS) in early childhood. The AAS has long been a degree in Illinois which could not articulate to a bachelor's degree. This new AAS to BA model will potentially help advance a significant number of teachers in the early care and education workforce. These types of partnerships and collaborative efforts that foster innovative strategies must continue to be advanced in order to support the infant/toddler teacher workforce.

Given the large number of infant/toddler teachers who are working in the field without a degree, developing a model for prior learning assessment is of critical importance. This is an area in which the Illinois Board of Higher Education and the Illinois Community College Board are focusing efforts. One community college in the state is currently advancing these efforts by using the ECE Credential competencies as the basis for a small PLA pilot whose results will inform future efforts. Ensuring development and eventual implementation of PLA throughout the state must continue to be a priority.



Recommendation 3: Strengthen data capacity and sharing on the infant/toddler workforce to inform state policy decisions and target resources and funding where needed to reach goals.

Building upon the commitment Illinois made in the Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Grant to establish the Gateways Registry as the primary repository for unified early childhood educator data, Illinois must collectively advance partnerships and data sharing agreements across all relevant state agencies/entities to ensure the Gateways Registry is fully inclusive of the infant/toddler workforce. Additionally, prioritize the collection, analysis, and reporting of data for the infant/toddler workforce as a distinct subgroup of early care and education workforce.

Recommended Implementation Strategies

- Inventory data elements collected about the infant/toddler workforce in data systems and work to align elements using the Common Education Data Standards (CEDS) as a framework.
- Develop goals for the infant/toddler workforce based on the recommendations in this report, establish benchmarks, and monitor progress over time.
- Engage a variety of partners to address research questions proposed by the Illinois Early Learning Council (ELC) with data that are available.
- Explore ways to incorporate workforce metrics within existing projects and dashboards at local and state levels.

Rationale and Support

Accurate information is paramount to our ability to make well-informed decisions about workforce development and professional learning supports and services for the infant/toddler workforce. Measurement of progress toward identified goals requires that baselines be established and that capacity exists to collect data that will support development of policies and programs needed to help reach those goals. The Illinois Early Learning Council (ELC) has established a research agenda⁸ to help articulate and prioritize the needs that will inform research and policy development efforts. This agenda includes ten key areas of inquiry, one of which is dedicated to the early care and education workforce. While the scope of the research agenda was intended to cover the broader range of early care and education, all of its key research questions can be examined with a lens specific to the infant/toddler workforce.

Recommendation 13 in the IOM and NRC *Transforming the workforce* report calls for establishment of “...data systems for systematically gathering information on the workforce across professional roles and settings... This information should include demographics, qualifications, experience, income, and participation in professional learning.” Congruent to this recommendation, Illinois has already taken many important steps toward establishing a comprehensive early childhood workforce repository through the Gateways to Opportunity Registry.

Promising Practices

The Gateways to Opportunity Registry – a Comprehensive Early Childhood Workforce Repository

Illinois has taken many important steps toward establishing a comprehensive early childhood workforce repository through the Gateways to Opportunity Registry. In September 2012, the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services enacted a rule change that requires all staff in licensed child care centers and all licensed family child care providers to establish and maintain current membership in the Gateways Registry. In addition, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) amended their Early Childhood Block Grant rules to require that non-certified teacher aides who work with children in state-funded preschool programs also establish and maintain a Gateways Registry profile. Finally, the Governor’s Office of Early Childhood Development required that effective September 2014, all home visitors and home visitor supervisors funded by the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program (MIECHV) join the Gateways Registry.

There are several other efforts underway to ensure that the Gateways Registry is fully utilized as a comprehensive repository for infant/toddler workforce data. First, ISBE has already committed, through the RTT-ELC grant funding, to work on a data integration project with INCCRRA to ensure that certified teachers working with children birth through age 8 receive profiles in the Gateways Registry. Second, ISBE has included in its FY17 RFP for Prevention Initiative (PI) programs (funded through ISBE's Early Childhood Block Grant to serve children birth to age 3) the requirement that all PI staff maintain membership in the Gateways Registry. Finally, to comply with the federal 2014 CCDBG Reauthorization Act, the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) is requiring that all licensed and license-exempt providers who care for children paid through the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) complete a set of pre-service/orientation training requirements. Completion of these requirements will be tracked and verified through the Gateways Registry. While staff in licensed programs are already in the Registry due to DCFS regulations, this will ensure that staff in approximately 740 license-exempt centers will be included in the Registry as well as several thousands of license-exempt home-based providers.

Public/Private Partnership Supports Creation of Infant/Toddler Workforce Briefs

Through a partnership with the McCormick Foundation, INCCRRA was able to conduct a deeper analysis of Gateways Registry data specific to the infant/toddler workforce and to gather survey data the professional development needs and gaps for that segment of the workforce. This resulted in development of two data briefs that answer fundamental questions such as those included the Early Learning Council's research agenda section on the early care and education workforce, but with a focused lens on those who work directly with our state's youngest children. These analyses served as a solid data foundation to drive the work of the Infant Toddler Teacher Quality Initiative Task Force in the development of recommendations included herein.



Recommendation 4: Improve coordination of state early childhood systems and funding to support increased qualifications of and commensurate compensation parity for the infant/toddler workforce.

Prioritization of a collective, intentional approach to adequately funding the necessary supports needed for a qualified and well-compensated infant/toddler workforce is essential. Maximizing cross-sector professional development efforts – including higher education and training – will create comprehensive, cost-effective pathways available to professionals in all settings and ensures shared knowledge and a level playing field to the greatest extent possible.

Recommended Implementation Strategies

- Gain agreement from all early childhood partners and systems that as new money becomes available to the state, a portion of those funds will be used to move toward compensation parity for the infant/toddler workforce specifically, and as a field comprehensively.
- Consider ways that funds targeted for professional development can be packaged to address compensation as part of the overall package, rather than simply an add-on.

Rationale and Support

Compensation parity is an issue not only across like roles in early childhood settings (e.g., child care centers, school-based preschool, and Head Start) but also across like roles dependent on what age range of children are served (e.g. infant/toddler teachers in centers make less than preschool teachers in centers).

Early childhood professionals who work with infants and toddlers make less than their colleagues in the same roles and settings, even with the same level of education. Licensed center teachers with a bachelor's degree make \$1.00 per hour less if they work with children birth to three than if they work with preschoolers. As discussed in the IOM and NRC *Transforming the workforce report*, these discrepancies in compensation can lead to “informal (but powerful) hierarchies” that place some professionals in a lower status than others. This impacts the not only the workplace environment but also hinders respect and collaboration between professionals that share a common purpose to support children and their families.

Promising Practices

Early Head Start – Child Care Partnerships

The federal Early Head Start – Child Care Partnerships, through the Administration for Children & Families, were created to support states in expanding high quality early learning and development opportunities for infants and toddlers. One of the goals of this initiative was to close gaps in standards and resources between Early Head Start and child care⁹. The Administration for Children & Families, including the Office of Head Start and Office of Child Care, provided funds sufficient to establish comparable program standards and compensation. In particular, all teachers in partnership sites were required to meet the same qualifications required for Early Head Start teachers: a minimum of a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential and training (or coursework) in early childhood development with a focus on infant and toddler development¹⁰.

Compensation Parity Report

A joint partnership between the Professional Development Advisory Council and the Illinois Early Learning Council resulted in the development of an in-depth report for Illinois on compensation parity. Published in January of 2016, the report outlines specific strategies the state could undertake to close the gap in compensation between teachers and caregivers in different early childhood settings. Data analysis and corresponding recommendations were inclusive of the infant/toddler workforce.

Recommendation 5: Build an infant/toddler workforce that reflects the diversity of young children in Illinois and has the competencies to effectively support multi-language learners.

Intentional recruiting and engagement strategies must be implemented to build cultural and language diversity in the infant/toddler early childhood teacher preparation pipeline to mirror the rich diversity in Illinois families. In addition, professional development supports targeted toward increasing multi-language competence for the current infant/toddler workforce must be advanced.

Recommended Implementation Strategies

- Strengthen teacher preparation in areas of dual language acquisition and development including field experiences and practicums which support skill sets in working with multilingual, multicultural children and families.
- Examine system and institutional barriers that make it difficult to attract a workforce reflective of the diversity and bilingualism of young children in Illinois.
- Shift from a deficit model to a strengths-based model, being more explicit regarding the value of cultural connection and need to increase the number of dual-language teachers.
- Create multiple pathways in both professional preparation programs in higher education and through continuing professional development (community-based and on-site) to address barriers that exist.
- Ensure that competencies that promote and support multi-language learners embedded within the current Illinois credentialing system are reviewed regularly to incorporate new research and promising practices for infant/toddler teacher preparation programs.
- Embed requirements related to building multi-language competence in renewal and/or training requirements for the current infant/toddler workforce to increase knowledge/capacity.
- Develop coursework at the associate degree level that comprises a bilingual/ESL credential or certificate to effectively teach multilingual, multicultural children.
- Focus pipeline efforts on recruiting students who have passed the bilingual language test and/or have attained the High School Seal of Biliteracy to consider early childhood career and provide intentional supports for entering teacher preparation programs at higher education institutions.

Rationale and Support

Illinois demographics clearly indicate rich diversity in young children and their families. Approximately 1 out of every 4 of children in Illinois speak a language other than English at home¹¹. Therefore, a significant number of our young children are simultaneously learning two or more languages during early childhood. The US Departments of Health and Human Services and Education released a policy statement in June of 2016 indicating that supporting bilingualism from the earliest years enriches cognitive skill sets. Foundational language acquisition occurs from birth to three. Dual language acquisition is a strength which requires a well-prepared early care and education workforce to provide adequate supports to ensure children are prepared to succeed.

The Illinois infant/toddler workforce, although more diverse than its preschool teacher counterparts, does not yet mirror this rich diversity or bilingualism. Broadly speaking, Gateways Registry data reveal that assistant teachers in licensed centers are more racially diverse than teachers (Figure 3)¹² and are also more likely to be bilingual (Figure 4)¹³.

Figure 2: Race/Ethnicity Reported by Licensed Center Teachers and Assistant Teachers

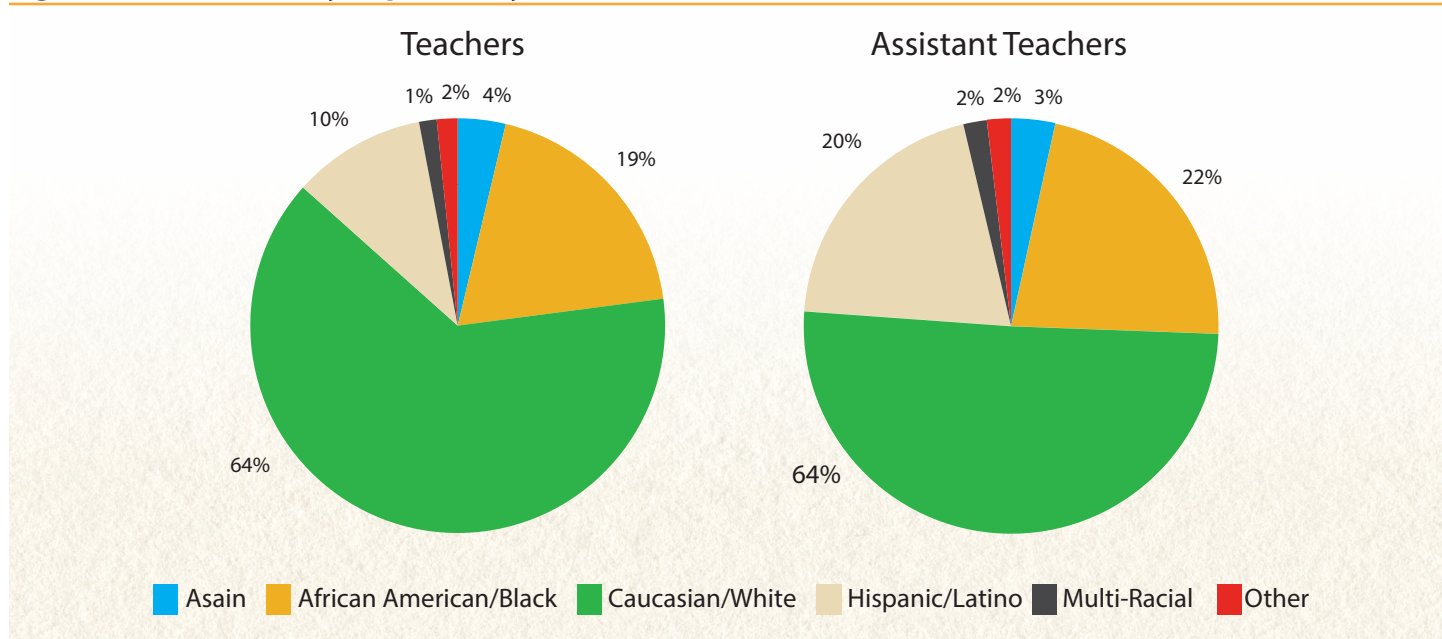
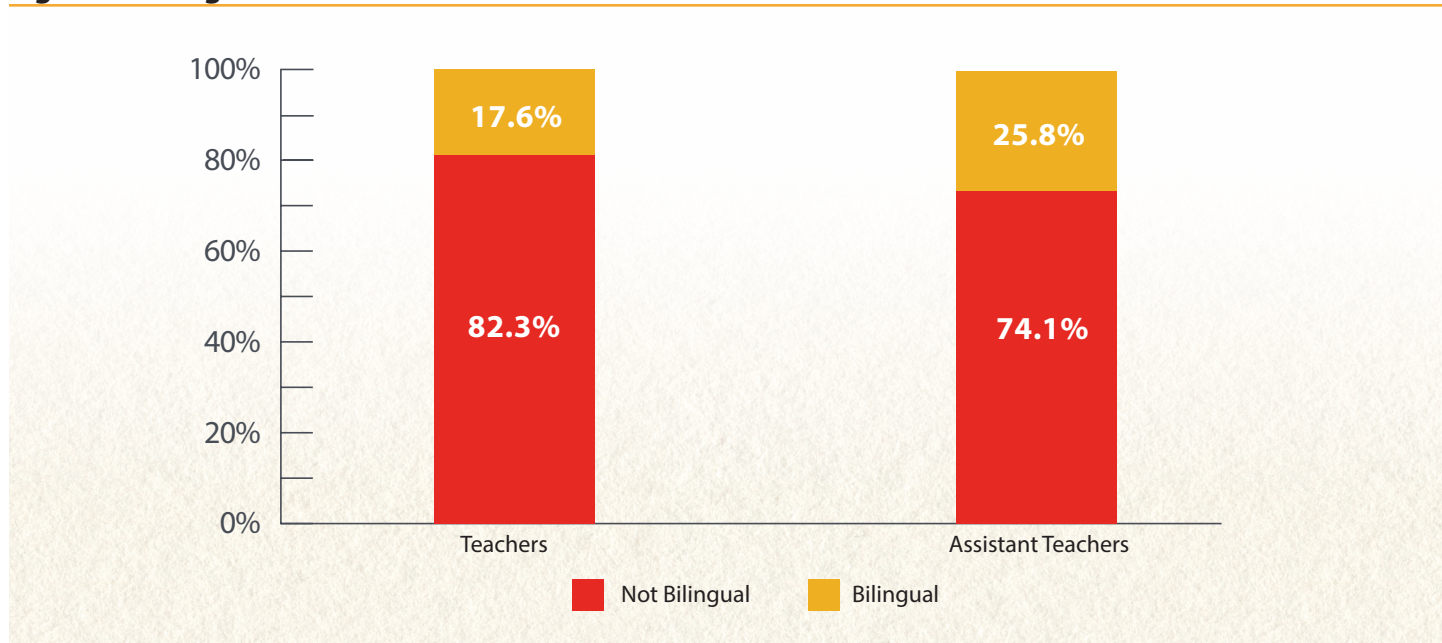


Figure 3: Bilingualism of Licensed Center Teachers and Assistant Teachers



Increasing the diversity of early care and education teachers is one way of ensuring culturally responsive methods are incorporated.

ZERO TO THREE's *Cross-Sector Core Competencies for the Prenatal to Age 5 Field*¹⁴ state that infant/toddler teachers must incorporate a strength-based model in their approach to cultural assets, including support for dual-/multi-language learner, in their work with children and their families. In order to effectively support infants and toddlers in their development, caregivers and educators must have a broad base of knowledge about the role culture has in shaping a child's beliefs, behaviors, and values. They need to interact respectfully with families and colleagues from a variety of cultural and ethnic backgrounds and take into account individual family preferences.

Promising Practices

Bilingual/ESL Coursework at Community College Level

Opportunity exists to develop coursework at the community (two-year) college level that can articulate towards an ISBE Bilingual/ESL endorsement at the Baccalaureate level. Expanding coursework at the community college level will provide broader and more cost effective access to the skill sets needed to support children's language and literacy development for early childhood teachers.

An essential infrastructure support assisting students in attaining their ISBE/Bilingual ESL endorsement at the Baccalaureate level is the work of the ECE panel of the Illinois Articulation Initiative. This committee will be developing a core language course that includes a strong focus on supporting young children who are multilingual, and establishing a submission process for institutions of higher education.



Recommendation 6: Increase the infant- and toddler-related professional qualifications of early childhood leaders, including advocacy expectations.

This includes the definition and alignment of leadership expectations within the context of infant/toddler professional qualifications and also the promotion of the role and value of advocacy for the workforce.

Recommended Implementation Strategies

- Build on the successful parent mentor work occurring in the state and tap into parents and professionals that may want to explore leadership in infant/toddler settings.
- Cultivate awareness of the science of brain development within the first years of life and the important role 0-3 plays within the continuum of learning as part of leader preparation initiatives.
- Elevate awareness around effective infant/toddler programs, models, and practice to enhance public perception of the importance of high quality care and education experiences.
- Build on models of leaders and teachers learning together.

Rationale and Support

Leaders play a critical role in messaging and communication; however, it is not being suggested that they can by themselves change public understanding or will. Inclusion of advocacy expectations as part of this recommendation is suggested as a stepping stone towards investment in leaders that can and do impact public perception.

Early care and education program leaders (including elementary school principals, center directors, and other administrators) play an important role in influencing the quality of early learning experiences for the children in their organizations. When early care and education program leaders understand the importance of birth to three and demonstrate infant/toddler competencies, it permeates throughout the program vis-à-vis effective implementation and policy. They can better identify staff that have the appropriate experience and competencies to work with babies and toddlers, and can better support staff within the work environment.

Recommendation 8 in the IOM and NRC *Transforming the workforce* report calls for policies and standards related to professional learning of early childhood leaders be grounded in foundational knowledge and competencies needed to support high-quality practices for child development and learning within their organizations. The rationale behind this recommendation points to the myriad ways in which these leaders influence early learning programs, including:

- Responsibility for hiring practices and evaluating teachers and caregivers.
- Selecting or having a major influence over the content and activities for staff continuing professional development.
- Facilitation of collaboration between various professionals to improve continuity of care for children as they transition among settings and also services within the community.

Promising Practice

Job-Embedded Professional Development in High Quality Infant/Toddler Child Care Programs

Through Lead Learn Excel¹⁵, job-embedded professional development was found to be effective with the highest quality infant toddler child care programs. They were the programs best able to manage the challenges of providing coverage so teaching teams have protected time to plan and examine practice together, and know that the infants and toddlers in their care are cared for by trusted people who know the children. They also helped discover ways that this could be accomplished for all programs.

Some sites struggled with protected time for collaboration, and found alternative ways to meet together during quiet times when there was more staff available to provide internal coverage, but not necessarily time to get completely away from the classroom. These sites made gains in their effective planning for intentional explorations and connections with families.

Through an understanding of the organizational conditions that promote high levels of relational trust, leaders planned strategically to increase the knowledge and skills of the infant toddler practitioners. They developed strategies for creating professional development plans with the teachers to continue on the path towards continuous learning and improvement.

In one large child care center with several infant toddler classrooms, the instructional leader took a larger leadership role to prepare the teaching teams for the Award of Excellence in Infant Toddler Services (through the ExceleRate Illinois Quality Recognition and Improvement System). She worked with the larger administrative staff to find ways to preserve time for team infant and toddler classroom meetings, and began to witness the growth in these teachers as they began to discuss family interests for the children and focus on individual children's interests.

In another center, the instructional leaders in the infant toddler programs continue to use the data from their last ITERS and CLASS assessments as they continuously work towards higher quality. Rather than see it as a punitive assessment, they know that as they examine the data they can more effectively coalesce the staff towards higher quality indicators.



Recommendation 7: Increase the current infant/toddler workforce's access to role-specific, evidence-based training and higher education coursework and programs.

This includes strengthening the continuum of targeted infant/toddler professional development, both through community-based training and higher education. A variety of options for infant/toddler training and coursework should be promoted to increase access, including face-to-face, online, cohort, and hybrid models.

Recommended Implementation Strategies

- Create targeted professional development opportunities specific to the needs of the infant/toddler workforce.
- Align existing community-based training supports to new initiatives as they are developed in order to minimize the amount of new training that professionals are required to attend in order to meet the requirements for the new initiative.
- Conduct an analysis of competencies covered within existing higher education infant/toddler coursework to determine where gaps exist.
- Consider how prior learning assessment and assessment of competencies could be an option for higher education institutions to provide that service for the infant/toddler workforce in situations where a specific coursework track for infant/toddler would be challenging.
- Encourage formation of community or regional workforce teams that will communicate and share needs and trends that can be addressed through training or coursework. These teams could include professional development providers (Child Care Resource and Referral, Association for the Education of Young Children (AEYC)), provider networks, and institutions of higher education.
- Work to increase the availability of multi-session training series geared toward infant/toddler teaching staff.

Rationale and Support

Community-based training and coursework through higher education institutions are both valuable sources of professional preparation and ongoing professional development for the infant/toddler workforce. Both should be supported in order to meet the unique career development goals of the workforce and provide a continuum of professional learning opportunities.

The State of Illinois has established a goal that by 2021, 80% of all children and 65% of children with high needs are ready for kindergarten. Given the foundation for learning that is established in the early years and the critical role that infant/toddler caregivers and teachers plan on supporting that foundation, it is essential that the workforce not only be well-prepared but have access to high quality ongoing learning opportunities, both through community-based training and higher education coursework. It is also important to consider the role-specific needs of the workforce in addressing access to both training and coursework.

This recommendation is supported in two distinct references within the IOM and NRC *Transforming the workforce* report:

- Recommendation 5: Develop and enhance programs in higher education for care and education professionals.
 - Recommendation 5b: Institutions of higher education should work...to facilitate cross-institutional relationships that bolster the quality, availability, and accessibility of programs...
- Recommendation 6: Support the consistent quality and coherence of professional learning supports during ongoing practice for professionals working with children from birth through age 8.

Promising Practice

Illinois Infant Toddler Teacher Quality Initiative

In partnership with the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development, Chicago Department of Family Support Services (DFSS), and the McCormick Foundation, INCCRRA designed and tested two models to promote attainment of the Gateways to Opportunity Infant Toddler Credential. Both models were tested with cohorts in the City of Chicago to identify effective practices that could be replicated statewide. Marketing efforts for this project specifically targeted infant toddler teachers *with degrees* working in the Department of Family Support Services (DFSS) and Chicago Public Schools (CPS).

One model was focused on attainment of college coursework within cohort groups. Cohort participants received individual analysis of coursework to identify areas where additional coursework was needed in order to attain the credential. Cohorts were held at six different institutions of higher education, including Harold Washington College, National Louis University, Harper College, Roosevelt University, Chicago State University, and Truman College. These colleges were chosen through an RFP process which included reduced tuition costs and were covered by grant funds. INCCRRA used creative strategies to procure textbooks at no cost to the participants. This work resulted in 109 infant/toddler teachers receiving their Infant Toddler Credential.

The other model developed was a three session training series with a focus on infant/toddler health and safety, child development, and building relationships. Each full-day training session included a reflection component to be completed before the next session to reinforce content and support a continuum of learning. Participants were supported by DFSS through paid time off to attend the training. Additionally, participants who completed all three sessions received a stipend. Each session also earned the participants points toward their Infant Toddler Credential. This model was also very successful, with more than 600 participants in total, of which 202 either earned or were able to apply for their Infant Toddler Credential.

Peer Learning Opportunities Valued for Continuous Quality Improvement

Program leaders of infant and toddler programs that participated in Lead Learn Excel found that they themselves needed a group to talk with about the changing needs of infants, toddlers, and families, as well as cultural practices that support individual children and their families. Learning together by sharing stories of success, and identifying common challenges was one of the best experiences during trainings and peer learning opportunities. As an example, the high standards for the ExceleRate Illinois Award of Excellence in Infant Toddler Services were seen as too far a stretch for many of the centers that participated in Lead Learn Excel. Rather than discount and dismiss the criteria, many of the instructional leaders took this as a way to review and increase their capacity to meet individually with teachers, teacher assistants and other staff in infant toddler programs to find ways to continue their education to build knowledge and grow in the career of birth to three.

Recommendation 8: Advance coordination between and among early childhood sectors and systems that support infants, toddlers, and their families by aligning and leveraging opportunities for shared professional preparation and development, ongoing support, and resources.

Through the lens of the whole child, thoughtfully consider and coordinate the necessary supports and opportunities for the infant/toddler workforce, considering the broadest range of partners in those efforts.

Recommended Implementation Strategies

- Adopt a shared set of core competencies for all professionals who work with infants, toddlers, and their families.
- Seek opportunities for shared professional development across sectors to encourage a mutual appreciation and understanding of roles and perspectives.
- Identify successful models already in place and communicate those stories more broadly.
- Increase access to Infant/Toddler Child Care Specialists and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultants.
- Create intentional partnerships across all sectors that serve infants and toddlers (e.g., early intervention, home visiting, licensed and license-exempt setting, early head start, prevention initiative, etc.).
- Incorporate infant/toddler needs and resources as a distinct focus within community systems building work, crossing education, health, social services, and other related fields.

Rationale and Support

Essential to the work of providing consistent support to infants, toddlers, and their families is the ability of professionals in early care and education settings to work in collaboration with professionals in other ECE settings and also in related settings such as health and social services. The IOM and NRC *Transforming the workforce* report also raises the valuable role program leaders play in this coordination: “By sharing information, planning together, and introducing shared professional learning for their staff, a cross-sector cohort of leaders can play an important role in facilitating the communication and collaboration necessary to improve both vertical continuity within the care and education sector and horizontal continuity with other sectors, such as health and social services.” (pg. 341)

In order to promote this type of interprofessional practice and collaboration, it is vital that there be a common set of competencies that all professionals who work with infants, toddlers, and their families have, regardless of sector or setting. Recommendation 9 in the IOM and NRC *Transforming the workforce* report includes language which specifically calls for:

- Leaders and policy makers at state and local levels to develop strategies to strengthen collaboration among professionals and systems across professional roles and settings in ECE.
- Leaders in ECE to facilitate greater availability of child mental health professionals to assist ECE professionals with consultation and referrals for services.
- Leaders and decision makers in health, mental health, and social services to review standards, practices, and systems for professional learning to incorporate fundamental knowledge in child development and competencies to collaborate with ECE professionals.

Promising Practice

Early Intervention Regional Leadership Teams

The federal Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) implemented a new initiative for all its Part C grantees to ensure “results driven accountability” and called it the State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP). This plan reflects OSEP’s new vision. It was implemented as an additional indicator within states’ Annual Performance Report that focuses specifically on improving outcomes for children involved in the early intervention (EI) system. The SSIP is a multi-year plan. The Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) Bureau of Early Intervention has completed phases I and II of the plan, which involved examining the current status of the system and planning for change and evaluation. The next several years focus on implementation and adjustment of the plan with an anticipated completion date of April 3, 2017.

While the ultimate goal is to improve the entire EI system in Illinois, IDHS decided to begin with pilot work in three Innovation Zones (Aurora, E. St. Louis and Williamson County), to have time to examine the effectiveness of the activities, and then have additional time to scale up effective practices.

IDHS decided on the State-identified Measurable Result (SiMR), **“To increase the percentage of infants and toddlers with disabilities who demonstrate greater than expected progress in the acquisition and use of knowledge and skills in our pilot areas by 0.9% by 2018”**; engaged a large, diverse and representative group of stakeholders (families, providers, staff, community partners, Bureau and EI partners staff); and determined that the improvement strategies were going to build on a foundation of regional leadership teams. These teams are described in Illinois’ Part C State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) Phase II¹⁶:

These leadership teams will utilize existing personnel from the local CFCs as well as state-level partners from the Bureau, the Early Intervention Training Program (EITP), the Monitoring Program, and the Early Intervention Clearinghouse. The leadership teams will receive training, technical assistance, and support from their state-level partners and will then use this knowledge and their own knowledge to support their local early intervention teams (parents, interventionists, and service coordinators) in the use of evidence-based and recommended practices.

Leadership teams have been put into place in the pilot areas with a goal to ensure fidelity of implementation of evidence-based practices that lead to positive outcomes by:

- Leading system change.
- Promoting and modeling high quality practices.
- Becoming a resource to the local CFC and peers.
- Being recognized as system leaders.

These leadership teams will develop their own action plans and begin implementation of planned activities that will be evaluated and measured to ensure forward process toward achieving the State-identified Measurable Result (SiMR).

Consortium for Community Systems Development

Born out of Illinois' Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge initiative, the Consortium for Community Systems Development (CCSD)¹⁷ is leading efforts to strengthen and systemize local early childhood collaborations across the state. Local collaborations seek to engage diverse stakeholders, including child care, early intervention, home visiting, school districts, and health practitioners, to strategically address the complex needs of young children in their communities. Led by Illinois Action for Children (in partnership with the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development), CCSD supports early childhood collaborations through training, technical assistance, and various other resources housed on the Partner Plan Act website (<http://partnerplanact.org>). Illinois Action for Children's Partner Plan Act listserv provides a monthly newsletter, blogs, and other resources to support and strengthen local collaborations that are leading systems building efforts.

Natural Partners – Supporting Families in Early Intervention & Child Care

Illinois' Early Intervention Training Program (EITP) developed a training, video, and fact sheet resources in response to the increase in the number of children in early intervention that are receiving services in child care settings. With the data showing that up to 50% of early intervention services taking place in child care centers, EITP recognized an opportunity to support collaboration and strong working relationships between early intervention specialists and early childhood professionals.

The training, entitled "Natural Partners: Supporting Families in Early Intervention & Child Care" is an introductory level training that allows early intervention and child care providers to problem solve ways to collaborate and engage with all partners. Participants receive Early Intervention Credential credit and also credit through the Gateways to Opportunity Registry.

Through a collaboration with the University of Illinois Office of Public Engagement, Illinois Department of Human Services, and Shatterglass Studios, EITP created a video called "Early Intervention and Child Care: Natural Partners in Natural Environments"¹⁸ to support partnerships between early intervention and child care providers. This video is an introduction for child care providers and highlights the benefits of partnerships with EI for both child and family. Supplemental resources for child care providers include a booklet that describes how the EI system works within Illinois and a handout with an overview of what to expect during an EI visit and how child care providers support EI. A companion resource is a handout targeted toward EI providers about ways they can involve child care providers in services and considerations for visits to child care settings¹⁹.



Conclusion

Research clearly shows that the first three years of a child's life are of great importance in establishing a trajectory that will influence their health, economic, and social outcomes over their lifetime. Of critical importance are the teachers and caregivers who work with these young children on a daily basis. The qualifications and competence of this infant/toddler workforce are a key contributor to the high quality early care and education experiences that best prepare children for school and life.

While Illinois has a large infant/toddler workforce, the overall educational qualification requirements for these professionals vary greatly among the various early care and education settings, and some positions require very little specific education or demonstrated competence for working with children 0-3. With an increased focus on infants and toddlers in both federal and state initiatives, the Infant Toddler Teacher Quality Initiative (ITTQI) Task Force was convened to develop recommendations that would help to ensure that Illinois' infant/toddler teacher workforce would be well-qualified and able to support achievement of Illinois' goals related to positive child and family outcomes. After reviewing available data and discussing successful initiatives and trends in the field, the ITTQI Task Force proposes the following eight policy recommendations and will carry them to the appropriate state agencies, councils, and boards in Illinois with authority needed for implementation.

Recommendation 1: Increase the professional qualifications of and standards for the infant/toddler workforce by establishing and implementing minimum competency-based qualification requirements across all early care and education settings in Illinois.

Recommendation 2: Enhance supported, accessible career pathways that guide professionals in strengthening their professional qualifications.

Recommendation 3: Strengthen data capacity and sharing on the infant/toddler workforce to inform state policy decisions and target resources and funding where needed to reach goals.

Recommendation 4: Improve coordination of state early childhood systems and funding to support increased qualifications of and commensurate compensation parity for the infant/toddler workforce.

Recommendation 5: Build an infant/toddler workforce that reflects the diversity of young children in Illinois and has the competencies to effectively support multi-language learners.

Recommendation 6: Increase the infant- and toddler-related professional qualifications of early childhood leaders, including advocacy expectations.

Recommendation 7: Increase the current infant/toddler workforce's access to role-specific, evidence-based training and higher education coursework and programs.

Recommendation 8: Advance coordination between and among early childhood sectors and systems that support infants, toddlers, and their families by aligning and leveraging opportunities for shared professional preparation and development, ongoing support, and resources.

Notes and References

¹ <http://www.naeyc.org/highered/standards>

² Institute of Medicine (IOM) and National Research Council (NRC). (2015). *Transforming the workforce for children birth through age 8: A unifying foundation*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

³ While other settings and program types (e.g., Early Head Start) may have higher qualification requirements for staff working with infants and toddlers, the example provided for licensed child care settings illustrates the minimal set of standards needed to care for infants and toddlers.

⁴ Illinois Early Learning Council Program Standards and Quality Committee: Workforce Compensation Subcommittee. (2015). *Achieving Compensation Parity: Illinois' Goal for the Field of Early Childhood Care and Education*. Unpublished manuscript.

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⁹ https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ecd/ehs_cc_partnership_grant_powerpoint.pdf

¹⁰ Head Start Act Section 645A(h)

¹¹ <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/81-children-who-speak-a-language-other-than-english-at-home>

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¹⁴ ZERO TO THREE. (2015). *Cross-sector core competencies for the prenatal to age 5 field*. Washington, DC and Los Angeles, CA: ZERO TO THREE and First 5 LA.

¹⁵ <http://www.theounce.org/what-we-do/LLE/professional-development-LLE>

¹⁶ Illinois Department of Human Services. (2016). *Illinois Part C State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) – Phase II*. Retrieved from <http://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=84825>.

¹⁷ <http://www.partnerplanact.org/>.

¹⁸ The Early Intervention and Child Care: Natural Partners in Natural Environments video is available on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vMcTEch--Lc>.

¹⁹ The supplemental materials referenced can be located on the Early Intervention Training Program (EITP) website at <https://uofi.illinois.edu/blog/view/6039/230963?count=1&ACTION=DIALOG&sort=asc#CC>.

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