

Creating an Illinois Early Childhood Career Lattice & Career Information System

GOAL: To ensure that all early childhood practitioners are well-prepared to educate, nurture, and meet the needs of young children and their families, develop an Early Childhood Career Lattice and a Career Information System. These will form the foundation to facilitate smooth transitions through the educational system for students to attain meaningful credentials, degrees, and employment, as well as effectively link credential and degree programs, college faculty and administration, and community-based training entities.

OBJECTIVES:

- A) Create a career lattice that identifies the core knowledge, skills, prerequisite qualifications, and training requirements for all roles in early childhood and for the levels within those roles, including working with children with developmental delays or disabilities and their families.
- B) Create pathways and options for professional preparation and movement along the career lattice.
- C) Market the career lattice and all components of Illinois' early childhood professional preparation and development system through a comprehensive, easily accessible Early Childhood Career Information System.

Why is an Illinois Early Childhood Career Lattice Needed? Illinois has a rich history of commitment to developing a comprehensive early childhood professional preparation and development system and to implementing initiatives that stabilize the early childhood workforce. Although most of the components of an early childhood pre-service and continuing professional development system are in place, Illinois lacks a fully articulated career lattice that identifies the core knowledge, skills, and prerequisite qualifications for the roles and levels in the early childhood field. In addition, qualifications and education and training requirements vary greatly by program funding source, workplace setting, and regulatory requirements. Without a mutually agree-upon, inclusive career lattice that spans the early childhood years of birth through age eight, current practitioners seeking increased education and better pay, and those entering the field, often find movement within our training system cumbersome, disjointed, and frustrating.

What is a Career Lattice? The term "career lattice" is meant to create the vision of a trellis that provides multiple opportunities for growth and development, as opposed to a career ladder that enables only vertical movement along a single track. A career lattice describes how individuals can move (horizontally, vertically and diagonally) within a single system or across systems as positions become available and as professional preparation enables them to seek and move into positions with more responsibility and increased compensation. The Illinois Early Childhood Career Lattice will form the foundation necessary to effectively link credential and degree programs, college faculty and administration, and community-based training entities, as well as facilitate smooth transitions through the educational system for students to attain meaningful credentials, degrees, and employment. Many other fields within Illinois, such as nursing, have developed a career lattice, and numerous other states have early childhood career lattices.

What are Key Steps in the Career Lattice Development Process? Through the career lattice development process, a progression of roles, levels within the roles, core knowledge and skills, training requirements and identified pathways for movement will be specified across Illinois's early childhood sectors, including Child Care, Head Start, PreKindergarten, Preschool Special Education, Birth-to-Three and/or Home Visiting, Early Intervention, and Family Support programs. Individuals should be able to enter the career lattice at any point in their growth as professionals, and have multiple opportunities for their future professional development. Personnel should also be able to explore a variety of areas of emphasis, including infant/toddler, preschool, kindergarten/primary grades, administration/leadership, children with special needs, and/or family support.

Through an inclusive statewide process that uses ideas and feedback from a broad range of stakeholders and links to existing Illinois early childhood professional development activities and initiatives, key action steps include:

- ✍ Identifying guiding principles for the career lattice and Illinois' early childhood professional preparation and development system
- ✍ Developing roles, levels, and requisite qualifications for early childhood practitioners from entry level to college faculty, and inclusive of all systems and programs serving children from birth through age eight
- ✍ Developing core knowledge, skills and indicators that specify the content and level of competence required of each role along the lattice
- ✍ Identifying career pathways and opportunities for movement along the lattice

What will the Early Childhood Career Information System Include? With the career lattice as a foundation, a coherent system of collecting and disseminating information about educational and training opportunities in early childhood is needed in Illinois to assist students who are entering and working to complete training and education programs. A statewide inventory of current resources will be conducted to identify assets and gaps. A comprehensive information system (web-based) could include: 1) the career lattice; 2) training calendars; 3) requirements for credentials and degrees at participating institutions of higher education; 4) available education and training opportunities in settings throughout the state; 4) information geared toward high school students regarding career options in early childhood; 5) articulation plans; 6) financial, academic, personal, and planning incentives and supports for students; and 7) links to other key resources such as the Illinois Virtual Campus, Tech Prep, etc. Trained Professional Career Advisors will be available throughout the state on campuses, through local CCR&Rs and other community-based organizations, and as independent career consultants.

How will other current initiatives be coordinated with the development of the career lattice?

To coordinate the development of the career lattice with a range of current early childhood professional development initiatives, the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, in conjunction with the Ounce of Prevention Fund, is working with the Governor's Office, the Illinois State Board of Education, the Illinois Board of Higher Education, the Community College Board, Workforce Investment Board, the Departments of Human Services, Children and Family Services, Commerce and Community Affairs, and the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services and Labor. Some of these initiatives include:

Paraprofessional Credential, Associate of Arts in Teaching, and Revised Early Childhood Teacher

Standards, which will establish the requirements for a paraprofessional credential in education, establish the requirements for a transfer degree in teacher education, and align and revise courses with newly established early childhood teacher standards.

Illinois Director's Credential Program, which is involving colleges in aligning and revising their courses to meet the Illinois Director's Credential entitled program requirements.

Infant/Toddler Credential Project, which will develop career lattice components for paraprofessionals & professionals who work with infants, toddlers, and their families, including children with special needs, as well as develop a voluntary Infant/Toddler Credential.

Child Care Apprenticeship Program, which will plan and implement a Child Care Apprentice Program to move entry-level child care professionals along the career lattice as part of a comprehensive strategy to reduce turnover, increase salaries and enhance early care and education program quality for young children and families across the state.

Natural Allies Project, the vehicle through which we will ensure that early childhood professionals at all levels have knowledge and skills to meet the needs of young children with disabilities and their families who are served in a variety of settings.