

Early Childhood Credential Completion Cohort Grants

Submitted for: Information.

Summary: This informational item provides details about an early childhood workforce development project funded through federal monies as part of the State's Preschool Development Birth to Five Grant initiative. In partnership with the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development, the Illinois Board of Higher Education will invite institutions of higher education to apply for grants to support cohorts of working early childhood professionals to complete a degree or Illinois Gateways credential.

Action Requested: None.

STATE OF ILLINOIS
BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Early Childhood Credential Completion Cohort Grants

The State of Illinois was awarded \$13.4 million in federal funds through the Preschool Development Birth to Five (PDG B-5) Renewal Grant to maximize parental choice, improve transitions within early learning and care programs, and improve the overall quality of early childhood and child care programs. Recognizing that effective, skilled, diverse early childhood educators are the lynchpin to quality, the State granted \$1.43 million to the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) for the Early Childhood Credential Completion Cohort (EC4) Grant program, to grow the number of working early childhood professionals who hold an Illinois Gateways credential or degree.

IBHE intends to issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) to two- and four- year institutions of higher education (IHEs) in Illinois for Academic Year 2020-2021 to develop and implement innovative, personalized, responsive programs of study and supports for cohorts of early childhood educators to attain degrees and credentials. Through these grants, the State seeks 1) to equip early educators with appropriate knowledge and skills critical to implementing high-quality early childhood experiences for young children and their families; 2) to address local community workforce challenges; and 3) to support the development and implementation of innovative early childhood teacher preparation pathways.

Recognizing the diverse array barriers facing the incumbent workforce, the EC4 grant emphasizes tailored opportunities and supports to encourage persistence and completion. These supports might include tailored advising and mentoring, job-embedded coaching, technology access and skills support, transportation, childcare, credential application fee waivers, scholarships or small stipends to alleviate financial barriers to enrollment. Grants will be made to IHEs that successfully address the criteria in the RFP and that reflect a diversity of strategies in terms of geography; urban, rural, suburban communities; race and ethnicities, and program focus.

The intention of the EC4 grant opportunity is to award \$1.3 million in grants for at least four cohorts of 20-40 students, with grants potentially ranging between \$100,000 to \$400,000. At least one grant will support a cohort of primarily infant toddler educators and another will support a cohort serving predominantly rural¹ communities, to the degree that applications are received that address the grant criteria.

IBHE plans to release the RFP May 1, 2020, and make awards in late June, with awardees announced mid-summer 2020. IBHE anticipates at least one more grant opportunity will be available for institutions of higher education in 2021, contingent upon additional federal funding. The next opportunity will be informed by the lessons learned through innovative grants awarded for Academic Year 2020-2021.

¹ Rural communities are those classified as Micropolitan or Noncore in the 2013 NCHS Urban – Rural Classification; Ingram DD, Franco SJ. 2013 NCHS urban–rural classification scheme for counties. National Center for Health Statistics. Vital Health Stat 2(166). 2014. https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/series/sr_02/sr02_166.pdf.