

APPROVED
AUGUST 10, 2021

Item #C-9
August 10, 2021

**EARLY CHILDHOOD ACCESS CONSORTIUM FOR EQUITY:
SUPPORTING THE ILLINOIS EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE TO ATTAIN DEGREES**

Submitted for: Action.

Summary: The IBHE, state agencies, and public two- and four-year institutions of higher education will launch a statewide consortium of institutions to make coursework available for members of the incumbent early childhood care and education workforce. The Consortium will ensure courses are offered when and where students need it with program delivery and student support services that are specifically targeted to meet the needs of working adults. One-time federal resources will be used to provide financial supports to students and institutions.

Action Requested: That the Illinois Board of Higher Education grants the Executive Director authority to implement the Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity and related strategies to support credential and degree attainment for the incumbent early childhood care and education workforce. The Board additionally authorizes the Executive Director to:

- 1) Enter into an intergovernmental agreement with the Illinois Department of Human Services;
- 2) Enter into intergovernmental agreements with public universities;
- 3) Issue Requests for Proposals and enter into agreements as a result of that process;
- 4) Use funds, in accordance with provisions of an intergovernmental agreement with the Illinois Department of Human Services to hire temporary staff at the IBHE and consultants for implementation of the Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity.



STATE OF ILLINOIS
BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

**EARLY CHILDHOOD ACCESS CONSORTIUM FOR EQUITY:
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The educator shortage affects all educational sectors including early childhood. There are nearly 28,000 current members of the early childhood workforce. Of these, approximately 8,000 have an Associate degree and need to upskill to a Bachelor's degree. An additional estimated 20,000 currently have less than Associate degree, who would upskill to additional credentials or an Associate degree. Barriers exist for candidates and educators at multiple points in the pipeline including initial recruitment; access to, retention in and completion of preparation programs; and persistence and advancement in the profession. These obstacles disproportionately affect diverse candidates and low-income and rural areas, leading to inequities that ultimately impact students in the same groups and geographic regions.

As part of its strategic planning process and as mandated by Public Act 101-0654, the Illinois Board of Higher Education led a working group of higher education professionals and other stakeholders in a process to review the barriers to higher education and career advancement experienced by the early childhood workforce and develop systems to increase their attainment of postsecondary education and credentials. The resulting strategies are described in *A Thriving Illinois* and Illinois House Bill 2878, Public Act 102-0174, the Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity Act.

The Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) will work in concert with the Illinois Community College Board, Illinois State Board of Education, Illinois Student Assistance Commission, Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development, and Illinois Department of Human Services to make higher education more accessible and affordable for members of the incumbent early childhood care and education workforce. State agencies and public two- and four-year institutions of higher education will scale credential and degree completion by launching a statewide consortium of institutions to make coursework available when and where students need it. Program delivery and student support services will be specifically targeted to meet the needs of working adults. Related efforts will include creating seamless pathways for students across institutions through the consortium structure. Private, non-profit universities will also be eligible to participate in the consortium. This effort will be supported by one-time federal resources through the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) to provide financial supports to students and institutions. Beginning in FY22, the IDHS will allocate an estimated \$39.6 million over two to three years to the IBHE.

Recommendation

The staff recommends the adoption of the following resolution:

The Illinois Board of Higher Education hereby grants the Executive Director the authority to allocate funds to implement the Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity and related strategies to support credential and degree attainment for the incumbent early childhood care and education workforce. The Board additionally authorizes the Executive Director to:

- 1) *Enter into an intergovernmental agreement with the Illinois Department of Human Services;*
- 2) *Enter into intergovernmental agreements with public universities;*
- 3) *Issue Requests for Proposals and enter into agreements as a result of the RFP process;*
- 4) *Use funds, in accordance with the provisions of the intergovernmental agreement with the Illinois Department of Human Services to hire temporary staff at the IBHE and consultants for implementation of the Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity.*