

Public Comments March 12, 2021-March 19, 2021

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1. Comment #1 (Comment on IBHE Draft Strategic Plan): Received 3/16/21

From: Estlund, Maria [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, March 16, 2021 9:45 AM
To: [REDACTED] Ostro, Ginger [REDACTED] zscott21 [REDACTED] [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]; Bernoteit, Stephanie [REDACTED]
Subject: [External] Comment on IBHE Draft Strategic Plan

Good morning,

Please see the attached comment on behalf of Illinois Action for Children, Illinois Community College Trustees' Association, and Illinois Council of Community College Presidents. Thank you for your consideration as you work to finalize the IBHE strategic plan.

Best,



Maria Estlund

Senior Policy Associate

[REDACTED]

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Illinois Action for Children is a catalyst for organizing, developing and supporting strong families and powerful communities where children matter most.

Illinois Board of Higher Education Strategic Plan

Advisory Committee Memo: IBHE ADVISORY

COMMITTEE

We would like to thank the members and staff of the Illinois Board of Higher Education, Illinois Community College Board, Illinois Student Assistance Commission, for your hard work in engaging the field. We applaud and thank you for your inclusive consideration of the incumbent child care and early education workforce. We support the several high-level strategies IBHE has put forward to address the state's educator shortage. We, the undersigned advocates for children & families and community college administrators, would like to submit comment on the initial strategies being explored by the committee.

We encourage the advisory committee to continue thinking boldly about closing equity gaps, increasing completion and improving affordability. As such we request you consider explicitly elevating a strategy for early childhood educators: *authorizing community colleges to offer bachelor's of applied science degrees, as well as educator licensure, in early childhood education in order to advance racial and gender equity in access and degree completion and to stem the teacher shortage crisis.*

As Illinois continues to advance its commitment to expanding access to high-quality early childhood opportunities, we know the early childhood field does not have enough qualified educators, especially those with bachelor's degrees. In fact, we're seeing a decline in early childhood education BA degrees conferred across the state,ⁱ as well as a decline in lead early childhood teachers with bachelor's degrees in licensed child care centers.ⁱⁱ In the early childhood field, we see women balancing full-time employment and family responsibilities, who want to advance their education and career, but often cannot find a bachelor's degree program that works for them. For these students who are place-bound, adult learners, and/or work full-time one promising strategy would be the community college bachelor's pathway.

Illinois Action for Children surveyed early childhood faculty, students, and providers to gather feedback and insight on higher education strategies, and the survey responses demonstrate overwhelming support of a community college bachelor's pathway in the field. Of the 455 current and prospective early childhood students surveyed, 71% said that a CCB pathway would reduce barriers, including those mentioned above, that they face trying to get their degree. Of the ECE faculty member responses, 83% of 2-year program faculty, and 40% of 4-year program faculty, said their students who work full time would benefit from a community college bachelor's pathway. The qualitative responses received echoed the importance of this type of local, flexible, supportive pathway for our incumbent workforce.

The community college bachelor's in early childhood pathway could advance several priorities identified in IBHE's draft strategic plan, including:

- Developing delivery models that support place-bound and rural individuals to access educator preparation programs
- Examining options for applied baccalaureate degrees for educators
- Increasing access to affordable programs to increase attainment
- Closing equity gaps by designing a system that meets students' needs

- Meeting the unique needs of adult learners, including developing nimble and flexible learning opportunities that account for the unique circumstances of working adults in rural, urban and suburban settings

Data from the 23 states with community college bachelor’s programs (in a variety of fields) suggests that this pathway would expand enrollment statewide, diversify all levels of the early childhood workforce, and respond to local workforce demands.

Community colleges have the flexibility and resources to support a diverse community of students, including adult learners, full-time workers, parents, place-bound students, and first-generation college students. In Florida, 3 out of 4 CCB students are from populations historically underserved by higher education.ⁱⁱⁱ The average CCB student is 31 years old, compared to 22 for students at public universities.^{iv} Additionally, Florida CCB programs have no impact on degree completion at 4-year public and private nonprofit institutions, suggesting programs reach students who would not otherwise access a traditional BA route.^v

CCB enrollment data suggests that the CCB pathway is an opportunity to expand access to early childhood bachelor’s degrees and PELs – along with the subsequent higher-paying career options – among Black and Latinx educators. While Illinois’ ECE workforce overall is diverse, Black and Latinx educators are underrepresented in higher paying positions that require a BA and/or educator license. In publicly-funded, high-quality Preschool for All programs, 90% of teachers are white, compared to licensed child care settings, where nearly 40% of teachers are non-white.^{vi} In contrast, the incumbent early childhood workforce that could be served by the CCB is predominantly women of color.

Furthermore, the data shows that CCB graduates are more likely to be employed in-state than university graduates.^{vii} By investing in our own community members, CCB programs would provide ECE employers with a pool of qualified, local candidates to work in their community.

Expanding access to and enrollment in early childhood degree programs will require significant intentionality, with pathways that are designed to support the existing workforce where they are. As such, we recommend including the community college bachelor’s pathway for early childhood educators in this strategic plan. Thank you again for your consideration and your dedication to advancing equitable access to higher education for our early childhood educators and students across the state.

In partnership,

Illinois Action for Children
Illinois Community College Trustees’ Association Illinois Council of
Community College Presidents

ⁱ Illinois Board of Higher Education, Enrollments & Degrees System, accessed September 2020

ⁱⁱ Illinois Salary and Staffing Survey of Licensed Child Care Facilities FY2019, Illinois Network of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies, 2020 ⁱⁱⁱ The Florida College System Transparency, Accountability Progress, and Performance: To what extent are Florida College System baccalaureate programs educating underserved student populations?” Florida Department of Education, April 2014.

^{iv} Emily Sikes, “OPPAGA Research on Florida College System Baccalaureate Degrees,” Florida Legislature’s Office of Program Policy Analysis & Government Accountability, March 10, 2015

^v “Competing for Bachelor’s Degrees: Are Community Colleges Cutting into the Market Share of Four-Year Institutions?” Jacqueline Donovan, Dennis Allan Kramer, and Justin C. Ortagus, April 2018

^{vi} *Transforming the Early Childhood Workforce: A Call to Action for the State of Illinois* (Main and Yarbrough, 2018)

^{vii} Community College Baccalaureate Degrees Offer Strong Labor Market Returns, 2020 (Elizabeth Mesa)

2. Comment #2 (Start Early strategy comments-IBHE strat plan): Received 3/19/21

Ireta Gasner [REDACTED]

To: Ginger Ostro

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on these draft strategies. Attached please find Start Early comments. We are very appreciate of IBHE's approach toward this strategic plan, particularly the explicit reference to the early childhood workforce. We and our partners in the early childhood sector stand ready to partner in any way that would be helpful to advancing these important proposed shifts to improve equity in access to higher education.

Thank you,

Ireta Gasner



Ireta Gasner, M.S.W.
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Dear Executive Director Ostro and members of the Strategic Plan Advisory Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to offer comments on the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) strategic plan and we want to specifically thank you for intentionally examining the needs of the early childhood workforce. We applaud the articulated vision statement in the draft plan and believe this vision is critical to success for the Early Childhood Education (ECE) workforce. Because earning potential remains relatively low in the ECE field, it is difficult to attract new, traditional students to the field. At the same time, the incumbent workforce includes a significant number of very experienced professionals with some secondary education but no degree.

The ECE Field has worked for decades to increase degree and credential attainment in the incumbent workforce, which is critical to increasing salaries and recruiting the representative, highly qualified professionals we need to educate and care for our youngest learners. These efforts, including improving articulation and expanding access to scholarships, have led to some progress; however, without significant shifts to higher education, progress will continue to be very limited.

The future of ECE depends on the success of our current workforce. Unfortunately, the current higher education system is not designed for adult learners who often work long hours and may have responsibilities to their families and communities that make full-time (and even part-time) enrollment in traditional education delivery models next to impossible. In order to advance the ECE field, we must make degree and credential attainment more accessible through strategies such as stackable/competency-based education and credentials that can build on the education and experience of adult learners. Developing policies that support multiple entries into the early childhood field, building on prior learning and experience, and improving flexibility to carry credits/experience into new credentials have shown great promise in strengthening the early childhood workforce.

We are pleased to see some of these strategies articulated in the draft plan and believe IBHE could both advance the early childhood workforce and begin to enhance equity in higher education by building on these strategies. We offer some specific comments and recommendations below.

Priority Area 1: Increase postsecondary credential/degree attainment to develop the talent that drives Illinois' economy

- Building on work underway to strengthen the early childhood portion of the Illinois Educator Preparation Profile, we recommend that IBHE coordinate with the Illinois State Board of Education and the Illinois Department of Human

Services to ensure that early childhood workforce data represents the field more accurately and comprehensively, including educators who work in both school- and community-based settings, as well as home visitors, Early Intervention staff, family support staff, and other roles within the early childhood field. A narrow focus on teacher licensure often leads to excluding large portions of the early childhood workforce from critical conversations about pre-service preparation, which in turn

disrupts the ability of early childhood practitioners from moving in and through these related, complementary roles within the broader early childhood field.

- We recommend continued implementation of competency-based/stackable credentials, which can not only improve degree attainment, but also build in interim credentials along a career pathway. Building a professional development pipeline that leads to new skills and compensation at incremental points between degrees will likely improve retention in the early childhood workforce.
- We recommend that this section should specify that “options for applied baccalaureate” include the option of providing early childhood BA degrees in community colleges where appropriate.
- Building on previous efforts and existing local efforts, IBHE should work with relevant partners to develop scalable models for cohort and apprenticeship-based early childhood degree programs and incentivize schools to embed these models to better support working adults’ enrollment in higher education institutions. As partnerships with employers for upskilling are developed, it is critical to consider the early childhood field and develop models for coaching, supervision, and support for students working and learning in community-based settings where resources may prevent traditional supervision models.
- We recommend targeted career advising, financial aid and other financial supports to those in the early childhood field who are closest to the next credential or degree and with a lens to improve the racial, cultural and linguistic representation of the early childhood workforce.

Priority Area 2: Close equity gaps

- While “on track” tools are important to ensure that students are not languishing in programs, it is equally important to ensure that they are not unintentionally creating a disincentive to enroll and support working adult learners and other non-traditional students for whom making incremental progress is a success. We know that the incumbent early childhood workforce can and does make progress when given the opportunity, but it does take them longer to do so. We warn against too much focus on the timeliness of completion, as this can drive disparities and marginalize working adult learners who simply need more time and flexibility.
- In general, institutions of higher education (IHEs) likely need much stronger systems of student support around basic needs, mental health, and well-being for all students, particularly as we move into a multi-year recovery phase post-pandemic. In the absence of visible, well-organized campus supports, students are more likely to be reaching out to trusted faculty who are often not resourced or trained to provide the support students need. Additionally, supports for students must be responsive to their unique and complex needs throughout the lifespan—returning adult learners may have different needs than younger more traditional students.
- We appreciate the mention of increasing faculty, staff, and leadership of color in higher education and recommend including more detail on strategies for achieving this, as this work must be very intentional.
- Considering the increasing and sustained reliance on adjunct or part-time faculty in many IHEs, efforts to provide equity-focused professional development and advance other strategies for closing equity gaps must be explicitly inclusive of this part of the higher education workforce.

Priority Area 3: Improve affordability, increase access, and manage costs

- Improving access to financial aid and reducing student debt is essential for strengthening the ECE workforce. We are pleased to see mention of strengthening the Monetary Award Program (MAP) and agree that funding should be increased in order to close the gap between federal financial aid and student

need. Further, navigating financial aid/scholarships can be challenging for everyone and all students could benefit from a more cohesive and comprehensive system that doesn't leave the "blending and braiding" of financial supports to be figured out at the student level. The web of financial supports available for the ECE workforce is particularly complex and there is an urgent need to make these resources more accessible and understandable. We recommend that IBHE partner with DHS and ISBE to better coordinate and align scholarship opportunities and make those resources available across the early childhood pipeline in one larger scholarship pool with prioritized goals and targets for funds. Additionally, IHE financial aid specialists may not be best suited to help early childhood candidates navigate financial aid due to the current complexity of the system—more work is needed to either better support financial aid specialists in assisting early childhood candidates or some other centralized resource for navigating financial supports must be created.

- We agree that adequate and equitable funding is critical for a healthy and effective higher education system. We recommend that adequate and equitable funding include addressing fair compensation for faculty, both tenured and adjunct, as well as funding for the significant support services we know many students need.

Other comments

- Early childhood faculty are preparing students for a critical and increasingly complex job in their work with young children. We need to ensure that faculty have the supports needed to integrate into their curriculum meaningful instruction around things like working with children from diverse language backgrounds or improving inclusive practices, managing challenging behaviors in the classroom, and generally addressing issues of equity in the early childhood classroom.
- While adjunct instructors will always be an important part of higher education service delivery, the system should undertake critical analysis of the impact of the ongoing shift toward the high usage of adjunct instructors and the extent to which that is impacting services to students.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide these comments, and for your efforts to make access to higher education more equitable and affordable. We appreciate your partnership and look forward to working with you in the next steps of this process. Sincerely,



Ireta Gasner vice president, Illinois

Policy