



Opportunities for Professional Development

Welcome to Gateways to Opportunity—a statewide system designed to support Illinois early care and education, school-age & youth development professionals, like you. From credentialing to career guidance to education and training resources to peer networking and more, Gateways to Opportunity focuses on what matters most—helping you help children and families.

Opportunities for Change

Over a decade of research supports the idea that positive stimulation and nurturing relationships during early years of life create the foundation for a child’s lifelong thinking, attitudes and behavior. Nurturing relationships begin with the long-lasting effects that parents have on their children’s growth and development. And nurturing relationships continue with highly qualified and motivated practitioners, like you, who prepare children to achieve greater academic and social success in school and later life.

For child and family support services to produce substantial long-term educational, social and economic benefits for Illinois, the supply of well-qualified teaching staff, administrators, and other professionals serving families from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds must be dramatically increased.

Gateways to Opportunity was designed by the Professional Development Advisory Council (PDAC), which is comprised of highly qualified practitioners, educators and advocates around the state. Part of PDAC’s overall strategy is to improve the stability of the early care and education, school-age and youth development workforce. Gateways to Opportunity

is designed to increase access to and use of opportunities for professional development and to meet the needs of early care and education, school-age and youth development professionals in Illinois, including, but not limited to:

- Early care and education (family child care, center based care, and relative, friend, and neighbor care).
- Early childhood special education
- Early intervention
- Public education (kindergarten through grade 3)
- Family support
- Head Start/Early Head Start
- Higher education
- Home visiting
- Pre-kindergarten
- Child Care Resource and Referral
- Other early childhood programs and settings
- School-Age programs
- Youth Services
- Before and After school programs

Opportunities for Development

Gateways to Opportunity provides a central resource to help you meet career development goals by providing services and unique benefits including:

- Professional Development Advisors – help ECE practitioners achieve professional development and credentialing goals.
- Credentialing and recognition levels – facilitates smooth transitions through the professional development system, enabling professionals to obtain meaningful credentials, degrees and support for increased compensation.
- Career development paths and choices – recruits, supports and retains professionals by identifying pathways for career advancement and movement between positions.
- Core job competencies and requirements – guarantees that professionals, policymakers and advocates are familiar with required knowledge and skills of those who care for children and their families in Illinois.
- Education and training resources – coordinates, improves, and increases access to education and training required for continued work or advancement in the field, both online and through qualified advisors.
- Finance and compensation – provides access to scholarships, wage supplements and financing mechanisms to support professional development.
- Peer networking and connections – offers an opportunity to connect with other professionals and career options at events online.



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