

# Registry News



## Fall 2025 Newsletter

*You are receiving this email newsletter because you are a Gateways to Opportunity Registry Member. The Registry News will provide up-to-date information about programs and policy changes. Additionally, we always include something you can use in your classroom. Feel free to share this newsletter by printing a copy for your program, or forwarding it to a friend.*

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## SMART START WORKFORCE GRANTS



So far in fiscal year 2026, **3,952 programs** have already received Smart Start Workforce Grant funding. Smart Start Workforce Grant funding helps early childhood programs support and retain their staff by providing financial assistance to strengthen wages and promote workforce stability. On average, programs have received the following quarterly Smart Start Workforce Grant payments:

- **Child Care Centers:** \$31,500
- **Family Child Care:** \$2,900
- **Group Family Child Care:** \$4,700

Is your program eligible for funding you haven't applied for yet? The final round of applications for fiscal year 2026 opens **January 1, 2026**, covering wages paid in April, May, and June 2026.

Make sure your program doesn't miss this opportunity. **Check your eligibility here:** [gateway.com/smart-start/smart-start-workforce-grants](http://gateway.com/smart-start/smart-start-workforce-grants).

### Data Bits and Bites

CCR&Rs supported **264 Licensed Family Child Care** and **545 Licensed Centers** in achieving an ExceleRate® Illinois Bronze, Silver, or Gold Circle of Quality in one year.



GATEWAYS TO OPPORTUNITY®  
Illinois Professional Development System

Find us on 

### SHAPE BRIGHT FUTURES

GET CREDENTIALLED TODAY!



## IDEC Immigration Enforcement Guidance for Providers

In response to the increased presence of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), U.S. Customs and Border Protections (CBP), the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and other federal agencies in Chicago and across Illinois, have partnered with the Illinois [Department of Children and Family Services](#) (DCFS) to develop Non-Regulatory Guidance for licensed day care facilities. This guidance is available in both [English](#) and [Spanish](#).



The top priority is the safety and well-being of the children in child care settings.

This guidance offers helpful recommendations that can make a difference in the event of immigration enforcement activity near or around your facility.

In addition to the guidance, the following resources are available to support your staff, the children in your care and their families:

- [IDEC's Know Your Rights information page](#)
- The Illinois Immigration Information Hub [Know Your Rights Toolkit](#)
- A [comprehensive overview](#) of free and low-cost immigration legal services
- A [family emergency plan template](#) – with step-by-step guidance
- [Organizational preparedness resources](#) – for businesses and employers



The Gateways Scholarship Program pays up to **100% of tuition at participating colleges and universities** for Early Childhood Education and Child Development (ECE/CD) coursework and degrees.

For more information, visit [www.ilgateways.com](http://www.ilgateways.com) or email [scholarship@ilgateways.com](mailto:scholarship@ilgateways.com).

## Birth to Five Illinois Updates

### Funding for Local Early Childhood Collaborations

Birth to Five Illinois has entered its fourth year of directing funds to groups working to improve Early Childhood opportunities for families in their communities. In fiscal year 2026 (FY26), the \$2.5 million in subcontracts going to Local Early Childhood Collaborations brings the total amount Birth to Five Illinois has invested to \$11,875,000. Subcontracts this year are made possible by the Illinois State Board of Education.



[View for Funding Recipients](#)

### Welcome Fourth Year Council Members!

We are thrilled to announce that 1,283 community members have joined our Regional Councils to support the Early Childhood needs of children and families across Illinois. Visit the "Council Members" section of your Region's webpage to see who is representing your community this year!

[Find Your Council Members](#)

### Want More Updates from Birth to Five Illinois?

[Subscribe to our statewide and regional newsletters!](#)

## How ERS Works Virtual Training is Now Available!

This is a free, virtual training that provides an overview of the Environment Rating Scales (ERS). Scale format, terminology, and key words used across all ERS will be introduced. In addition, resources available to help programs be successful in using ERS will be discussed.

Anyone who is not familiar with ERS and interested in learning about the Scales should register for training. **How ERS Works** training fulfills the training requirement of ExceleRate<sup>®</sup> Illinois Standard 1A for licensed child care centers and licensed family child care homes. *Please keep in mind that if you have previously taken Introduction to ERS/FCCERS (2007-June 2025), that is accepted for ExceleRate<sup>®</sup> application/renewal.*

Training dates are now searchable on the [Gateways Training Calendar](#). Additional training dates will be added, so please continue to check the calendar for availability.



**GREAT START WAGE SUPPLEMENT PROGRAM**

# YOU'VE EARNED IT

*(Graphic showing three diverse people peeking from behind a corner on a green background)*

Do you make **\$24 an hour** or less **AND** \$49,920 a year or less\*?

**You may qualify for a Great START wage supplement paid directly to you every six months.**

If your wages fall within the income limits, **APPLY TODAY!** For more information, visit [www.ilgateways.com/financial-opportunities/great-start](http://www.ilgateways.com/financial-opportunities/great-start) or email [gstart@inccrra.org](mailto:gstart@inccrra.org).

*\*All Great START requirements must continue to be met to qualify.*



**Protect Children from Lead Exposure!**

*(Image of a smiling child)*

LeadCare  
Cook County

## Free Lead Service Line Replacement in Cook County

**Act now for free lead service line replacement. Spots are limited!**

LeadCare Cook County offers **FREE** lead water line replacement to licensed and license-exempt child care providers in suburban Cook County. The program, backed by Cook County Government with ARPA funds, provides free water service line inspections and free water testing to help providers understand what's in their water and act if needed.

Lead is invisible. You cannot see, taste, or smell lead in drinking water. Children under the age of six are especially vulnerable to its harmful effects, which can include brain and nervous system damage. Lead service lines can be the biggest source of lead in

drinking water and can cost up to \$20,000 to replace, but with LeadCare Cook County, it's completely free!

Change the way you protect the children in your care. Learn more by visiting [LeadCareCookCounty.org/INCCRRA](http://LeadCareCookCounty.org/INCCRRA).

*LeadCare Cook County is administered by Elevate in partnership with Cook County Government.*



## Thousands of Job Seekers on the Gateways Job Board!

Post your open roles on the Gateways Job Board— it's a free, statewide platform that connects you directly with early childhood, youth development, and family support professionals across Illinois.

- Takes 10 minutes or less
- Traffic of 4,000+
- Completely FREE!

[Post a job on our website!](#)

# Kitchen Science with Fall Leaves

Talk to the children in your program about how sometimes we don't know all the answers. When we don't know something, we get the opportunity to ask another person or look up the answer on the computer or create an experiment to help us understand. When we don't know something, we get to be scientists!

## Materials

- Glass jars with lids
- Water
- Spoon
- Marker
- Salt
- Leaves from your yard
- Masking tape
- A lime

## Directions

1. Look around your kitchen and choose a few liquids to use for your experiment.
2. Pour liquids into glass jars. (We tired water, salt water, and water with lime juice. We poured water into 3 glass jars, then added sale to one and lime juice to another.)
3. Add a leaf to each jar, cover lid, and label the jars so you remember which liquid is in which jar.
4. Write down your child's predictions!
5. Set the jars near a window and let them sit for 48 hours.
6. After 2 days, it's time to record your results! What does the water look like in each jar? What about the leaves?
7. Write down what your child observes and compare it to the predictions. Were any of your guesses correct? Did anything suprise you?



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