

Registry News



Spring 2026 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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Environment Rating Scales (ERS) Trainings Now Available Online!

We are pleased to announce that three ERS trainings are now available through Gateways i-learning! These include:

- **How ERS Works** training provides an overview of the Environment Rating Scales (ERS). Scale format, terminology, and key words used across all ERS are introduced. Anyone who is not familiar with ERS and interested in learning about the Scales should complete the training. How ERS Works training fulfills the training requirement of ExceleRate? 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? application/renewal.*
- **Making ITERS-3 Work For You: Supporting Young Children's Playful Learning training** is for center administrators and teaching staff in classrooms with children birth to 36 months.
- **Making ECERS-3 Work For You: Supporting Children's Engagement in Learning training** is for center administrators and teaching staff in classrooms with children 3 to 5 years old.

For description of each training and to complete the trainings above, visit the [Gateways i-learning website](#).



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.



SMART START WORKFORCE GRANTS



Smart Start Workforce Grants FY27 Round 1 applications are now open!

The Round 1 applications will be available online in the Registry Director Portal from April 1-30, 2026. Eligibility decisions for all programs applying for a [Smart Start Workforce Grant](#) will be determined based on funding availability. All programs applying for FY27 Round 1 funds will be reviewed for eligibility criteria and placed on a waitlist for approval based on the availability of funding.

The Smart Start Workforce Grants are available to all programs who:

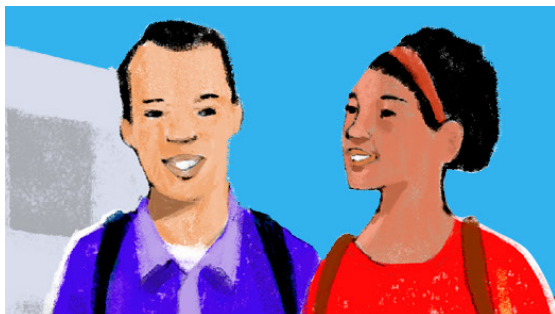
- are licensed as a child care center, family child care, or family group child care.
- licensed and caring for children as of March 1, 2026, and continue to care for children today.
- operate full-day and full-year program offering at least eight consecutive hours of care per day, five days per week, 47 weeks per year.
- For Centers- at least 15% of the program's current licensed capacity (at time of application) enrolled and funded by CCAP in any one month prior to submitting an application (e.g., any one month between January 2025 – date of application).
- For family child care – care for at least 1 child enrolled and funded by CCAP and for family group child care – 2 children enrolled and funded by CCAP in any one month in the year prior to submitting an application (e.g., any one month between January 2025 – date of application).

Due to high demand, adjustments may be made in FY27 to maintain a sustainable and equitable program. Programs should plan to operate without limited waivers. Additional adjustments may include maintaining a waitlist and other refinements as needed.

Orientation Requirement!

As part of our commitment to ensuring all applicants are fully prepared, an orientation will continue to be required for the FY27 grant cycle. The orientation will have two versions, one for centers and one for family child care, both available in English and Spanish, and can be taken in two ways:

- **In-person or Virtual (Live):** Through your **CCR&R (Child Care Resource & Referral) local expert**. Contact your [Local Expert](#) for scheduled dates.
- **Virtually (Self-paced Online):** Through [i-learning](#).



NEED MONEY TO GO BACK TO SCHOOL?

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 or email scholarship@ilgateways.com.

Upcoming Registry-Verified Conferences

Illinois Council on Family Relations Annual Conference 2026

April 23-24, 2026 | Naperville, IL
Presented by: Illinois Council on Family Relations

Please join the Illinois Council on Family Relations (ILCFR) for our 2026 annual conference on Friday, April 24th at Northern Illinois University! ILCFR is excited to have Dr. Dan Wuori as the keynote speaker, expert on early childhood and author of *The Daycare Myth: What We Get Wrong About Early Care and Education (and What We Should Do About It)*!

Please share with your colleagues, students, and all who may be interested in submitting proposals!

There will also be having a pre-conference dinner on Thursday, April 23 from 6-8 pm in the NIU Naperville Atrium.

[Register!](#)

Leadership Connections National Conference 2026: Onward

May 27-29, 2026 | Schaumburg, IL
Presented by: McCormick Institute for Early Childhood

This conference features interactive sessions and captivating keynote speakers specifically for leaders in ECEC: center-based, school-based, and family child care program administrators, program coordinators, technical assistance specialists, advocates, researchers, and more. The 2026 conference will feature a Family Child Care track, with specialized sessions designed for those seeking to enhance their businesses and leadership skills in the family child care home setting. Several Leadership Connections conference workshop sessions will be offered in Spanish.

[Register!](#)

Birth to Five Illinois Updates

Statewide Family Leadership Council

Birth to Five Illinois launched a Statewide Family Leadership Council, comprised of Family Council alumni who served for three years in their respective Regions. [Learn more!](#)



Funding for Early Childhood Collaborations

With the latest round of [Planning Grants](#) awarded to help create new Local Early Childhood Collaborations, Birth to Five Illinois has allocated \$12 million to 37 of Illinois' 39 Regions. [Learn more!](#)

Join Your Local Council

Interest Forms for the Birth to Five Illinois Action and Family Councils will open this spring. [Join today!](#)

Want More Updates from Birth to Five Illinois?

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

YOU'VE EARNED IT

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 or email gstart@inccrra.org.

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

IPHI & UIC Illinois State Physical Activity and Nutrition (ISPAN) Assessment

The Illinois Public Health Institute (IPHI) and the University of Illinois Chicago (UIC) School of Public Health are conducting an assessment of nutrition and physical activity-related practices at licensed early care and education (ECE) centers and homes statewide.

The study is being conducted as part of the Illinois State Physical Activity and Nutrition (ISPAN) initiative funded by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The information gleaned from this assessment will help to better tailor training and technical assistance (TTA) programming in the future and support ECE-related advocacy efforts statewide.

If you received an invitation from the ISPAN Assessment team (ispan@uic.edu), please take the time to complete the assessment and you will be entered into a raffle to win a \$25 Amazon electronic gift card for use by your site!

Spring Tree Terrarium

Celebrate spring with a terrarium made from a glass jar, a twig and some colorful tissue paper. This craft makes a great gift and facilitates conversation with your child about the changing seasons.

Materials

- Glass jars with lids
- Glue gun
- Colored tissue paper
- Tiny twig

Directions

1. Tear off some green tissue paper pieces and scrunch them into crumpled balls.
2. Glue the tissue paper balls onto the inside of the jar lid.
3. Glue colored pieces of tissue to the twig branches.
4. Glue the base of the twig to the inside of the jar lid.
5. Carefully slip the jar on top of the lid with the tiny tree.
6. Flip the jar back over.
7. Screw on the lid.



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