



GATEWAYS ECE LEVEL 2 CREDENTIAL PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT

Introduction

This report describes the vision, accomplishments, and resulting insights realized by ECE teacher preparation faculty while creating a virtual reality-based Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) for college credit based upon the Illinois Gateways to Opportunity® ECE Level 2 Credential competencies. Support for this six-month project (July-December 2021) was provided by the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development's (GOECD) federal Preschool Development Birth to Five Renewal Grant (PDG B-5) through an allocation to the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (INCCRRA). All ECE faculty at Gateways-entitled community colleges and universities were invited by INCCRRA leadership staff to participate in developing this instrument. Agency administrators from the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE), the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB), the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), and the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) informed the project's design and goal setting; endorsed its efforts; and served as on-call experts and collaborators throughout. ECE employers from around the State participated in further vetting the instrument's validity and relevance to the incumbent workforce for whom this instrument was designed. There were two main project goals:

Goal 1: Create an accessible, standardized competency-based PLA instrument to award college credit and the Gateways ECE Level 2 Credential.

Goal 2: Identify specific changes needed to build a 21st Century PLA system in Illinois that is consistent, clear, and responsive to how early childhood professionals and other adults work and learn across their lifespans.

This project launched at an apropos time in Illinois' postsecondary education history. The Illinois Strategic Plan for higher education, A Thriving Illinois (<https://ibhestrategicplan.ibhe.org/ibhe-strategic-plan-2021.html>; approved in June 2021), pointed directly to improving and expanding PLA as an essential element of adult student recruitment, retention, and graduation strategies across all institutions. The ISBE's June 2021 guidance for teacher licensing programs when reviewing prior learning (<https://www.isbe.net/documents/professional-educator-licensure-flexibilities.pdf#search=FORM%2083%2D85>) emphasized the need for universities to flexibly recognize students' prior learning of all kinds when determining their degree program content. Nationally, in October-December 2020, the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) and the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) released results of their 2018-2020 studies into PLA policies, practices, and impacts on adult students' college outcomes (i.e., credentials, degrees, credit hours earned). Among their many findings was how at institutions with PLA programs, adult students not only saved time and money but also their overall credit hours earned, plus retention and completion rates, were significantly higher than those of peers at institutions without PLA or student awareness of PLA options (Klein-Collins, Taylor, Bishop, Bransberger, Lane, & Leibrandt, 2020).

The specific impetus for this ECE PLA initiative emerged from statewide discussions by ECE faculty, employers, and policymakers about the comprehensive ECE 2020 workforce data released by Gateways early in 2021. One analysis of the Gateways Registry data revealed how over 7,000 known ECE employees do not possess a college degree (Whitehead, 2021). Most of these staff are younger (less than 25 years or within the 25-34 years age band) and typically work in infant/toddler programs. Given the earning potential of a bachelor's degree (20% more over 30 years), the earning years these experienced employees have ahead of them, and the known ECE program quality improvement an educated, degreed workforce provides, forging a degree pathway for them is imperative. Since these employees annually complete at least 11 hours of professional development training (Whitehead, 2021) in addition to other, informal training, creating a way to assess this prior learning and convert it to college credit made sense. Equally important: Creating a PLA instrument would signify the field's recognition of the value of their everyday work.

Arnez Cooper, Child Development and Compliance Manager, Marillac Family Services, Chicago

"This is truly a pivotal moment in time for all ECE educators to have this tool. It's giving staff an opportunity I wish I had when I was starting. It truly would have made a huge difference in both my educational and teaching journeys. If I had this option, I would have spent less time and money earning my degrees. Starting out, I took courses that were 'too easy' and not teaching me anything new. The staff I work with now will appreciate being able to show what they know and earn credit for it, then move on to new content they want to learn. I like how this assessment is something everybody can take—it's easy to use but it's challenging. You must know a lot and be able to do a lot to pass it. I think it's a very fair way to assess what it takes to be a good Level 2 assistant teacher."

Project Background

Gateways to Opportunity Credentials and their levels were originally created to classify and codify the knowledge and skills required of ECE professionals working in various roles. In the over two decades since their inception, the Credentials have been refined to reflect changes in the ECE profession writ large. In 2015, through support from federal Race to the Top funding, Illinois ECE faculty began revamping all Credential areas (e.g., Infant/Toddler, ECE) to be competency-based. During the ensuing years, faculty incorporated the final-draft competencies into their credential and degree-program coursework. Simultaneously, faculty subgroups began developing instructional course modules and criterion-referenced assessments based upon these competencies, for use by all programs. The main goal of this work (still underway) is to unify both content and practices across ECE degree programs, thereby increasing articulation and transfer among them.

In deciding upon the nature of a PLA instrument that would best serve the incumbent workforce without credentials or degrees, attention initially turned to the content of first-year coursework in (ECE) programs at community colleges and universities. The 12 professional competencies of the Gateways ECE Level 2 Credential are typically taught for mastery within those course experiences at both degree levels. Designing an instrument that assessed those 12 assured it would address these two known needs: Provide a means for awarding the ECE Level 2 Credential plus some ECE-focused college credit to field practitioners without either. Basing our instrument's evaluation criteria on the key performance indicators of the ECE Level 2 competencies enabled us to establish the necessary content standardization, too. Yet we also realized that creating a PLA instrument, alone, wasn't sufficient. ECE faculty were aware that relatively little prior learning credit in the ECE major was being granted by Illinois institutions. Moreover, there was a growing sense that PLA credit in ECE and other majors wasn't transferring to four-year institutions or if so, it was being designated as electives. Students were retaking courses, or taking courses with personally redundant content, when they transferred to earn a bachelor's degree. Learning more about the scope of these problems and their causes became equally important project activity. Work with state agency personnel and institutional administrators responsible for transfer and articulation, as well as overseeing program development, was in order. There was a need to understand the context within which any new PLA instrument or process would be used and, if necessary, design safeguards for its continued relevance and success.

Another set of assessment design considerations involved standardizing the test's format, administration, and evaluation of users' performance. Presently, there is no standardized PLA instrument for the ECE field. Institutions use PLA tools and processes (e.g., portfolios, faculty-created challenge exams) developed by and unique to their individual programs. This lack of consistency among institutions confuses potential students. It forces some to 'shop around' colleges to find a PLA that matches their knowledge and skill sets. Others either give up trying and take redundant courses or never attempt college. Creating a PLA instrument for both community colleges and universities to use, administered and scored the same way by all, fosters confidence in potential students. They realize no matter where they apply for consideration of their prior learning, they will be evaluated fairly.

In designing the PLA instrument, there was a desire to capitalize upon the field's competency structure as evidence was secured that the ECE professionals that are assessed (i.e., the 'test takers') are indeed competent—that is, they readily apply what they know and use their skills strategically in meeting myriad workplace challenges. Through reflecting upon typical PLA approaches presently used—portfolios, challenge examinations, interviews, candidate-developed videos—we realized their limitations in capturing all that we intended. We aimed to find a means of observing in 'real time' somehow practicing ECE workers demonstrate Gateways Credential competence. A solution was found through collaborating with a longtime nonprofit partner, the Competency-Based Education Network (C-BEN) organization of Tennessee. C-BEN's previous work with early childhood faculty in developing the Credential competency structure and incorporating virtual-reality experiences into ECE course instruction had shown us the potential of these 21st Century tools in authentically engaging users in learning and demonstrating their learning. C-BEN was contracted by INCCRRA to join the project at the outset, to guide faculty in developing the content for a virtual-reality based PLA instrument and then training them in evaluating it consistently. C-BEN contracted with Mursion, a virtual-reality technology company, to create and administer the actual instrument. C-BEN also worked with the project faculty and leaders in training the Mursion staff to deliver the assessment in standardized ways and to provide supports for accessibility by diverse users.

C-BEN's distinguished experience in designing innovative competency-based curricula and assessments through use of virtual-reality technologies for other fields (e.g., healthcare) was especially appreciated as ECE faculty collaborated with them in creating content for the resulting instrument: A set of 15 interactive, authentic workplace scenarios, delivered in real time in a virtual-reality environment, that assess the user's proficiency in evidencing the 12 ECE Level 2 competencies embedded in first-year college courses.

The following sections describe the project's participants, work phases, and outcomes. The project leadership team included Mr. Zachary Allen, Workforce Policy Coordinator of the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development (GOECD), who communicated and coordinated all project aspects with relevant GOECD administrators and staff. INCCRRA leadership staff provided ongoing oversight and coordination with statewide stakeholders from relevant state agencies as well as faculty in Gateways-entitled institutions. Two project consultants with far-reaching experience in early childhood education and transfer/articulation of degrees led the ongoing work with faculty, institutional administrators, and employer representatives: Dr. Marie Ann Donovan, ECE faculty and Department Chair for the Counseling and Special Education Programs at DePaul University, and Ms. Anne Brennan, Assistant Vice President of Academic Affairs at Oakton Community College. Dr. Tiffany Freeze of C-BEN spearheaded the development of the instrument, using the project faculty-created workplace scenarios upon which the assessment's virtual-reality simulations are based. She jointly led the faculty workshops and assessor training with Dr. Donovan.

Lynn Burgett, Program Manager, THE CENTER: Resources for Teaching and Learning

How exciting it would have been for me (a late starter) to be able to use some of my experience in the ECE classroom as credit toward getting my degree at a faster rate. I think it would have boosted my confidence right off the bat, by letting me know that I was capable of being successful. This is very exciting stuff, and I hope the ECE faculty community accepts it, it will be so valuable for their students.

Project Process

Detailed summaries and listings of project participants (faculty, campus administrators, employers), the assessment development template, as well as the project faculty handbook, project communications, and the project's statewide showcase meeting agenda are contained at the end of this report in the Appendix section. Notification about the formation of this project and its purpose was shared by INCCRRA leadership with a variety of stakeholders in early June—ECE faculty at all Gateways-entitled community colleges and universities; state agency representatives; and relevant workforce development entities. An introductory meeting was held for state agency representatives (GOECD, IDHS, ICCB, IBHE, ISBE) on June 17 to communicate the project's goals and solicit their initial thoughts about the efficacy of current PLA approaches and to identify known historic barriers to their robust implementation. An introductory meeting for ECE faculty and their institutions' administrators was held a week later (June 24). This meeting was designed to recruit faculty to participate in the project's working groups responsible for writing the workplace scenarios used in creating the interactive, virtual-reality simulations for the PLA instrument. Campus administrators also were invited so they could learn firsthand the project role and responsibilities their faculty would assume from July through November, along with the goals of the project's research into current PLA policies and procedures they might be tapped to help inform. Follow-up faculty recruitment was conducted (Appendix J) after the meeting, to secure ample representation of institution types and range of locations. From this point forward, effort and activity toward reaching the two main project goals occurred in tandem, as summarized in the next sections and outlined chronologically in Appendix C, Calendar of Project Activity.

Instrument Development: July – November 2021

Project faculty recruitment focused upon securing representatives of community colleges and universities from around the State, to ensure ECE program student demographic diversity as well as that of child populations served by local employers. A total of 30 faculty (see Appendix A) from 23 institutions of these types agreed to work on the project:

- 15 faculty from community colleges
- 13 faculty from universities [8 public, 4 private/nonprofit, 1 for-profit]
- 2 faculty from a graduate-only institution

These institutions are in the northern, northwestern, northeastern, western, southwestern, and central regions of Illinois. One institution located in Minnesota is authorized by IBHE to operate in eight locations around the State.

Project faculty participated in a two-hour orientation and initial training session on 12 July led by Drs. Freeze and Donovan. This session concentrated on becoming acquainted with the template for writing workplace scenarios in which each of the 12 Gateways ECE Level 2 Credential competencies (see Appendix H) could be demonstrated. Faculty were pre-assigned (based on choice, if indicated) to a Working Group focused upon one of the five competency areas of the Level 2 Credential shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Faculty Working Groups by Level 2 ECE Credential Competency Area

During the meeting, faculty were asked to serve as their Working Group's leader. These faculty agreed to serve in this capacity for the duration of the project:

Health, Safety, & Well-being: Dr. Inna Dolzhenko, Chicago State University

Human Growth & Development: Dr. Lindsay Meeker, Western Illinois University

Interactions, Relationships, & Environments: Ms. Carolyn Beal, Southwestern Illinois College

Family & Community Relationships: Dr. Diane Schael, College of Lake County

Personal & Professional Development: Ms. Mary Muhs, Rasmussen College

Working Groups devoted the following two weeks to developing workplace scenarios they drafted and critiqued electronically among themselves, then uploaded to a designated Dropbox.com folder for access by Drs. Donovan and Freeze for their joint review. Dr. Freeze then converted these scenarios to virtual-reality simulation drafts for Working Group reviews in late August (8/23-8/25). During these review and critique sessions, Drs. Freeze and Donovan led Working Group members in focusing especially upon the planned challenges the PLA assessment simulation avatars (powered by a Mursion company actor specially trained in this ECE assessment) would present to the learners (i.e., the 'test takers') in eliciting the Level 2 competency behaviors targeted in each simulation. Faculty made suggestions for amendments to the simulation scenarios as well as uploaded changes to scenarios for incorporation by C-BEN and Mursion during the following two weeks.

Working Groups met again in late October (10/22-10/28) to watch their workplace scenarios 'come to life' in the Mursion simulations that 10 employer volunteers (see Appendix B) agreed to try out as Level 2 Credential employees. Working Group observers then critiqued and suggested further modifications to their simulations so they would better stimulate the competency behaviors to be evidenced. Nuanced feedback on each simulation's ability to mimic realities of the ECE workplace was solicited from the employer volunteers as well, to improve instrument validity. Once this step in the instrument development process was completed, Drs. Freeze and Donovan compared notes on the changes suggested and compiled them for the Mursion simulation specialists to use in finalizing the instrument for phase one assessor training sessions in December.

Tracey Young, Senior Director of Early Learning Programs, St. Vincent DePaul Family Services Center, Chicago

Thank you for the opportunity to be a part of such great work, and for all the rich conversation; it really gave me hope for helping to serve and give access to another group of teachers who struggle.

ECE faculty at all Gateways-entitled institutions were invited in mid-November to engage in the first phase of assessor training. A total of 58 faculty from 48 institutions (30 community colleges, 17 universities, one graduate-only) participated. Of those 58, 20 faculty were project members (see list in Appendix E). During four, two-hour scoring sessions (12/1-12/10), faculty learned to conduct direct behavioral observations of volunteer ECE students while they worked through a set of two, three, or four simulations in the Mursion virtual-reality space for a competency area (15, total). Faculty also completed eight hours of on-demand background training webinars prepared by Dr. Freeze of C-BEN. These webinars focused on the fundamentals of making direct observation of behaviors such as how to use behaviorally anchored rating scales containing key performance indicators, and ways to minimize bias while increasing accuracy in rating. Upon completion of the training sessions, redesign suggestions submitted by participants (i.e., faculty, student volunteers) were incorporated into the simulation scenarios and/or used in formulating related environments, avatars, and ancillaries (e.g., anecdotal notes, video).

As further described below, phase two of assessor training will be conducted with phase one faculty from institutions that agree to participate in the soft launch of this PLA instrument in Winter 2022.

Mapping PLA Use in Illinois: June-November 2021

No matter the institution or degree, prior learning assessment is subject to a range of state-level regulations that shape campus policy in awarding credit for it. Registrars, chief academic officers (CAOs), provosts, and student services officers work closely with their faculty and other administrators to ensure the prior learning assessment instruments and systems they create comply with these regulations. As noted in the Introduction, while within-institution PLA may be consistently applied and align with state regulations, there are no specific statewide rules that ensure consistency in measures or practices across institutions or degrees. Nor are there any that guarantee PLA-earned credit will transfer either to a similar type of institution (e.g., university to university) or from one type to another. Basing this project's instrument on the Level 2 ECE Credential competencies, which are used consistently across ECE programs, and standardizing the delivery of the assessment as well as its evaluation by faculty, were essential to its potential credit portability.

From the start of the project, state agency representatives and academic officers engaged periodically with project leads Dr. Donovan and Ms. Brennan in unpacking the rules, regulations, policies, and issues surrounding use of PLA. At the launch meeting on June 24, these administrators and academic officers met in a separate Zoom Breakout Room with Ms. Brennan to discuss these baseline questions:

1. What policies, rules, and/or laws affect/are touched by this project?
2. In Tennessee, where C-BEN is implementing a statewide project, they use badges to award PLA credit. What is the view of micro credentials or badges in Illinois? Are we using micro credentials for college credit? Do we have preferred language for micro credentials?
3. At the institutional level, what are the policies and practices that are touched by this project (e.g., admissions policies)?

Themes emerged within the responses: Many attendees were quick to note that the ICCB System Rules Manual ([HTTPS://WWW.ICCB.ORG/ICCB/WP-CONTENT/PDFS/MANUALS/ICCB_SYSTEMRULES_MANUAL.PDF](https://www.iccb.org/iccb/wp-content/pdfs/manuals/iccb_systemrules_manual.pdf)) contains guidelines and stipulations that affect use of this competency-based assessment:

- A community college can only award prior learning credit if the student is enrolled and meets all admissions requirements for the program.
- A degree-seeking student cannot be awarded prior learning credit before completing 15 credit hours at the college.
- Colleges can only charge for the cost of conducting the prior learning assessment for credit, not for the awarded credit itself.
- Prior learning credit must be validated on a course-by-course basis.
- Only certain methods/publications are listed as being acceptable ways to validate prior learning for credit: CLEP, ACT, DANTES, AP, IB, challenge examinations prepared by the department/program, portfolios, and published guides from nationally recognized professional organizations (e.g., the American Council on Education, ACE).

Others noted the historic, chronic loss of PLA credit in transfer. One way suggested to counteract this is to award PLA credit through a badging system hosted by a known and respected third party. Related to badges: Some in attendance shared their institutions are using badges or intend to do so, as part of developing micro credentials. The current concern is similar to prior learning credit, if the micro credentials aren't secured through a reliable source separate from the institution somehow, the credit will be lost in transfer. AP, IB, and CLEP are viewed as reliable prior learning credit due to their third-party evaluation and security.

In consideration of these issues raised at the June 24 meeting, project focus during July through September shifted to developing resolutions for them. Three possibilities emerged through the project leaders' research and informal interviews with transfer administrators and ECE program directors:

- Develop a definition for the new kind of credit this assessment leads to awarding, so that its source and stability are recognizable: standardized, competency-based prior learning credit.
- Secure statewide recognition of this unique type of PLA as an acceptable method for awarding prior learning credit through a state-level agency or other entity.
- Establish a common system of badges based upon the 12 Level 2 ECE Credential competencies, to ensure achievement of them will be consistently recognized in admission or transfer.

After further research into other states' PLA systems and types of credit awarded, plus consideration of the insights shared by the Breakout Room participants at the June 24 meeting, determination of a working definition for this new credit type commenced in August for later vetting and subsequent proposed inclusion in the ICCB System Rules Manual:

Standardized Competency-Based Credit, SC-BC, is college credit that has been evaluated via a Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) process that recommends both workforce/industry-regulated credentials and college-level credit, by using aligned, competency-based standardized methods. This type of college-level Prior Learning Assessment credit is awarded for courses in which competencies are documented. The award of SC-BC should shorten the prospective learners' time required to advance toward a higher credential or degree. This type of PLA credit is used to recognize the learning gained by incumbent workers whose competence has been verified using standardized assessment processes.

This definition was shared during focus group sessions, meetings, and interviews with chief academic officers, registrars, and student services administrators from community colleges and universities in November and December (see Appendix C). Respondents agreed that the definition expresses the unique type of prior learning credit earned through this assessment instrument. None suggested any changes to it.

During these meetings, registrars' main concerns centered on two aspects of recording this credit for students:

- Timing of when the credit could be entered in their systems (i.e., before or after a student is admitted) plus
- How the credit earned through this PLA correlates to courses.

They thought amending the 15-credit ICCB rule would eliminate this issue but not entirely: A student still would need to be admitted so a record is generated in their systems. In terms of how the credit earned through this assessment converts to actual credit: Since registrars can only record credit for entire courses, they agreed that creating variable-credit versions of courses in which these 12 competencies are embedded would protect whatever prior learning credit a prospective student earns through this assessment.

Another issue raised in these sessions relates to community college residency requirements. Assuming one competency is worth one credit hour, a student who successfully completes this entire assessment would be earning 12 credit hours. Some session participants were concerned that students seeking the institution's early childhood credential would not be completing sufficient remaining credit hours to establish residency (i.e., 25% of the total). According to our research, however, this shouldn't be the case. Institutions' credentials typically (with two known exceptions) are set at 16-18 credit hours. Completing another 4-6 credit hours at the college equates to 25-30% of the required credit-hour residency for short-term credentials.

Since these issues are interconnected and influenced by extant rules and guidelines, resolution of them requires a holistic approach to modifying relevant elements in the system governing how and when institutions can convert experience to credit. The Recommendations section below outlines the intersecting changes needed for this resolution.

Summary Project Timeline

At the outset of the project, faculty sometimes questioned how they would manage to complete the work before them by late November. By the project's end, they freely commented with relief about how much they accomplished during their (busy) five months of focused project activity. Appendix C contains a chronological description of the project's activities across its duration (i.e., July-December). Figure 2 shows how activities related to both aspects of the project—building the PLA instrument and understanding the status of PLA use in Illinois institutions—unfolded simultaneously.

This project was conducted during the pandemic. Therefore, all listed meetings and training sessions were held virtually (via Zoom). Additionally, all faculty work products and training materials were uploaded, reviewed, and shared through cloud storage spaces such as Dropbox.com and Google Drive. Working Group members held periodic ad hoc, virtual meetings as well, as did members of the project leadership team.

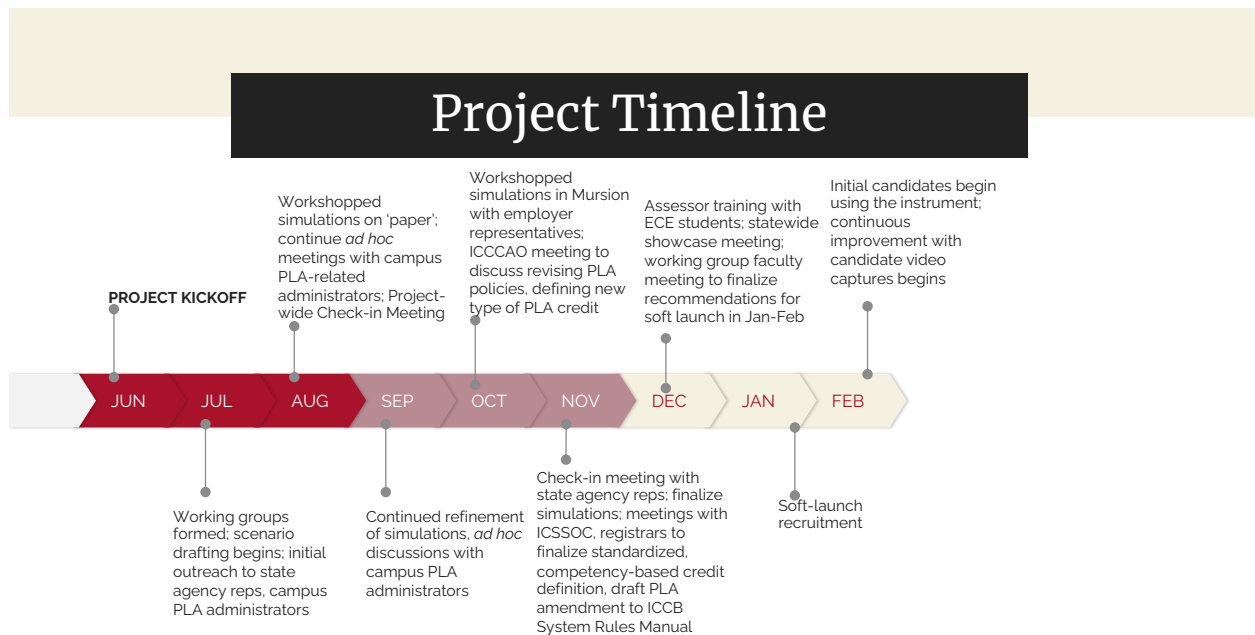


Figure 2. ECE Level 2 Prior Learning Assessment Project Timeline

Statewide Project Communications

Given the large number and variety of ECE stakeholders affected by the work of this project, communicating its purpose and ongoing findings to them all was a paramount activity. In addition to the meetings listed in the Appendix C timeline, project team members, leaders, and INCCRRA staff shared regular project updates with groups such as:

- Governors' Office of Early Childhood Development (GOECD)
- Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS)
- Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE)
 - Faculty Advisory Council to the Illinois Board of Higher Education
- Illinois Community College Board (ICCB)
- Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE)
- Illinois Gateways Professional Development Council (PDAC)
 - PDAC Higher Education Committee
 - PDAC Qualifications and Credentials Committee
 - PDAC Workforce Development and Pathways Committee

Project Outcomes

Overall Accomplishments

Through the unstinting efforts of over 30 faculty and assessment design consultants during the last six months, the Illinois ECE professional community now has a pilot-ready Prior Learning Assessment instrument that institutions can use with members of the incumbent workforce that addresses issues of access and equity through technology. Unlike any other PLA instrument, this assessment is standardized for consistent, reliable use by Gateways-entitled community colleges and universities with a qualified faculty assessor. Here's how it works:

The assessment consists of a series of simulations that challenge the learner (i.e., 'test taker') to interact with children and/or adults in ways that evidence the learner's Level 2 ECE competencies while problem-solving authentic, everyday workplace situations (e.g., parent-child tension during morning drop off; insensitive comments to a child by a volunteer). In each simulation, the learner interacts with child and adult avatars powered by a Mursion company actor who's been thoroughly trained to deliver these simulations, using phrasing and responses developed by the project faculty who created the scenarios upon which the simulations are based. At the start of the assessment session, the learner is greeted by a 'host' adult human avatar (powered by the same Mursion actor). This host serves as the learner's guide throughout the (average) 90-minute session, moving the learner from simulation to simulation, explaining the tasks at hand as well as checking in with the learner to answer any questions or remedy issues that arise. The host reviews some basic navigation features and familiarizes the learner with the virtual environment, calling to the learner's attention any ancillary materials (e.g., prepared anecdotal notes, prefatory video) available that enhance the authenticity of the simulation. The host also reminds the learner that the entire session is recorded, and the recording evaluated by a certified ECE faculty assessor. At the end of each simulation run-through, the host engages the learner in reflecting momentarily on the experience, using prompts developed by the project faculty, before launching into the next simulation. At the end of the session, the learner is reminded about the next steps in the process (i.e., upcoming receipt of the link to where the session's video is stored for faculty assessor evaluation; submission of the URL to the preferred institution for review and consideration for credit).

The assessment is readily accessed on the Web through a desktop, laptop, or tablet; no other equipment is necessary. Learners make an appointment to complete the assessment on its website (currently hosted by C-BEN). There they can view a presentation about the format of the assessment as well as the expectations of their performance (e.g., a review of the Level 2 ECE Credential competencies). After registering, learners are encouraged to review a tutorial on how they will work through the simulations before they arrive for their assessment appointment. Upon completion, users receive a link to the (non-editable) video captured during their session which they send to their selected institution for competency evaluation and conversion to college credit by a certified faculty assessor. These assessment results inform the campus personnel responsible for determining students' pathways to credentials and degrees.

Alicia Stupavsky, Quincy University ECE Student and Home Childcare Owner

[In working through the simulations, I realized] the scenarios were very realistic.... Although I have never been in these specific scenarios with our home daycare, I can see myself being in them while I am a teacher at some point in my career.... I am thankful that you made me reach out of my comfort zone and made me think about how I would react in these situations.

The other, main accomplishment of the project team regards the work focused upon mapping the landscape of PLA policy and practice in Illinois. Our research illuminated the need for changes to regulations and published guidelines affecting the recognition of what incumbent ECE workforce learners bring to their programs of study, as well as ensuring this new PLA instrument can be used. For example: Presently, faculty at community colleges and some universities are not permitted to evaluate prior learning until the student has completed 15 credit hours. Yet this instrument assesses competencies typically taught in introductory-level ECE courses. This policy prevents adult learners and their professors from confidently designing a personalized course of study based upon the results of this or any other prior learning assessment. It risks course redundancy, unnecessary time to and cost for degree, and—as we learned from anecdotes shared during campus administrator interviews and focus groups—may deter incumbent workers from considering college. Project findings point to changing this policy and others to remove this planning barrier, explained further in the Recommendations below.

Goal 1: Create an accessible, standardized competency-based PLA instrument to award college credit and the Gateways Level 2 ECE Credential.

Impact on Illinois Early Childhood Teacher Educators and Teacher Education Programs: Shifting our ECE practice principles and course content to be competency-based a few years ago afforded us new ways to conceptualize and level individual courses as well as course sequences in our programs. Developing this instrument that focuses entirely on the Level 2 ECE Credential competencies now led to statewide ECE faculty discussions about whether and how to modularize current courses, to take advantage of its resulting evaluation data. Presently, many courses in most ECE programs combine related competencies across areas (e.g., Human Growth and Development with Health, Safety, and Well-being) and levels (i.e., 2-4 or 5) within them. This presents challenges in determining whole-course equivalencies for the competencies assessed. ECE faculty now familiar with this instrument are deliberating plans for unbundling competencies within courses that don't exclusively contain the Level 2 competencies and then creating variable-credit versions that separate out only those for Level 2. This curricular redesign will make it easier to grant prior learning credit from this instrument. Given the ISBE will issue competency-based teacher licensing requirements for all areas including ECE in 2022-2023, all teacher educators in Illinois anticipate having further course modularization and program redesign discussions soon.

During discussions with faculty and campus administrators, the workload involved in evaluating prior learning emerged as a salient and problematic issue for some. Those from institutions using portfolio-based tools, especially, noted how time-consuming they can be to evaluate. They found this instrument, which takes experienced assessors about one hour to review, appealing. In view of the number of ECE programs that are under resourced and understaffed in terms of faculty, this assessment might enable them to increase their use of PLA as part of their student recruitment efforts.

Impact on the Early Childhood Education Profession in Illinois: This instrument was designed to help the thousands of incumbent ECE workers without credentials or college credit realize that what they've learned through their jobs can 'count' beyond their paychecks. Moreover, since the assessment simulations are based on real-world workplace challenges, they (hopefully) will see how connected the worlds of work and college is in actuality.

The employer representatives who participated in the Mursion workshopping sessions frequently expressed that this form of PLA felt "more natural" and "real" than ones that require writing or test-taking. They also thought the highly interactive nature of the simulations would give users more and ample opportunities to demonstrate the breadth and depth of their knowledge and skill, unlike a writing-based project or examination. They suggested developing an "advertising campaign" for staff emphasizing the accessibility and availability of this assessment, as well as its significance in "jumpstarting" their careers.

During various meetings with workforce development groups (see Appendix C), organization representatives and center directors reflected on this assessment's potential for increasing program quality and staff compensation levels. Participants appreciated this instrument for its "two-fer value," as one described it—assessing for both credential and credit that convert to higher rates of pay. They, too, recommended a series of statewide announcements be made about the instrument's availability, to alert owners and directors who could help recruit eligible staff.

Some project faculty and employer representatives noted how developing this instrument responds to the call for innovation in designing educator preparation program pathways issued by the Task Force that prepared recommendations for the cluster of Decision Cycles 345+6 (Pathways, Preparation, and Compensation, July 2019; [HTTPS://WWW.NAEYC.ORG/SITES/DEFAULT/FILES/GLOBALLY-SHARED/DOWNLOADS/PDFS/OUR-WORK/INITIATIVES/P2P_DECISION_CYCLES_3456.FINAL_CONSENSUS.PDF](https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/pdfs/our-work/initiatives/p2p_decision_cycles_3456.final_consensus.pdf)) for the national Power to the Profession project's March 2020 Unifying Framework for the Early Childhood Profession ([HTTP://POWERTOTHEPROFESSION.ORG/WP-CONTENT/UPLOADS/2020/03/POWER-TO-PROFESSION-FRAMEWORK-03312020-WEB.PDF](http://powertotheprofession.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/power-to-profession-framework-03312020-web.pdf)):

The Task Force recognizes that there are multiple and flexible approaches in professional preparation programs, and it seeks to encourage effective innovations that are, in particular, designed to reach non-traditional students, eliminate the existing barriers to higher education, and maintain a commitment to quality. Examples of these approaches may include competency-based programs, use of prior learning assessments.... (p. 14)

Dr. Diane Schael, Chair, Early Childhood, College of Lake County

I recently had a new student who has been a family childcare provider for years. She enrolled in our “introduction to early childhood” class. She KNOWS the course content from her years of experience and trainings and would have been the perfect candidate for this prior learning assessment if only it were available today. She wound up sharing lesson plans and ideas throughout the course that supported the learning of the other students, and always completed top-quality assignments. Based on what she did, and how well, I wish there’d been a PLA like this that could have saved her time and money in earning her credential. Having this PLA now will help the many others like this student—knowledgeable from devoting years in the field, worthy of prior learning assessment consideration.

Goal 2: Identify specific changes needed to build a 21st Century PLA system in Illinois that is consistent, clear, and responsive to how early childhood professionals and other adults work and learn across their lifespans.

Impact on the Development and Use of PLA in Illinois: During the Illinois higher-education strategic planning process, many design working groups lamented about the lack of PLA opportunities for working adults. Another issue they raised was how often PLA credit doesn’t or doesn’t neatly transfer from one institution to another. (Institutions are not required to accept another institution’s PLA credit.) Initiatives to fix these known issues in awarding prior learning credit in Illinois have waxed and waned, especially in the last decade. Despite these efforts, there remains much known inconsistency and lack of transferability of PLA credit. We cannot afford this situation to remain so, especially in our ECE field, given the teacher shortage and the growing need to maintain or improve ECE program quality through professional education. Developing better PLA processes, tools, and consistent standards in using them will go a long way in recognizing and respecting the adult learners we aim to bring to our campuses.

There is another compelling reason for everyone in Illinois higher education to focus on fixing these known problems with PLA: Equity. In their report for CAEL and WICHE, *Equity Paradoxes in the PLA Boost*, Klein-Collins, Bransberger, and Lane (2021) demonstrate how the PLA benefits for all students mentioned earlier in this report—increased persistence and graduation rates, less time and costs for degrees—are even greater for racial minorities and lower-income students when they have access to PLA. Yet disparities among minority groups exist: These benefits aren’t as significant among nonveteran/nonmilitary Black adult students, even when compared to other racial minorities. These Black students earned the least amount of PLA credit among their minority peers. When they received PLA, however, their retention and completion rates were higher than those of their minority peers (Klein-Collins, Bransberger, & Lane, 2021). Though the authors were not able to definitively identify the factors influencing these outcomes, they pondered whether inherent exam bias or lack of work-related PLA instruments for use with these and other minority students could be contributing to their lower rates of success in earning PLA.

Because the instrument is standardized in content, administration, and evaluation, as well as aligned to ECE program learning standards in place around the state (i.e., the Gateways competencies), and assesses competence in meeting workplace challenges, we believe it will become a model approach for resolving many of these extant PLA issues in Illinois. Other fields that are competency-based could adopt and adapt this approach to their assessment instruments, too, thereby increasing the availability of PLA on the State campuses.

Dr. Dawn A. Katz, Dean, Social Sciences and Public Services Division, McHenry County College

From an administrator perspective, I’m hopeful I’ll see more of these initiatives led by the state across disciplines. The more we can establish standard PLAs in various fields, the more opportunities we provide for our communities to pursue education and strengthen our workforce, communities, and state overall.

Recommendations

For this unique PLA instrument created by ECE faculty for the incumbent workforce to fulfill its promise and resolve the chronic issues in recognizing prior learning for credit, we recommend the following to establish a competency-based, PLA-friendly system for the ECE field. Table 1 follows this list. It summarizes the recommendations and proposes a timeline for their completion. It also identifies potential entities for following through on realizing the suggested changes.

Recommendation 1: Add the term “Standardized Competency-based Credit” and Its Definition (below) as a New Type of PLA, on page 39, Section 1501.311, under Credit for Prior Learning, b.2 in the ICCB System Rules Manual ([HTTP://WWW2.ICCB.ORG/ICCB/WP-CONTENT/PDFS/MANUALS/ICCB_SYSTEMRULES_MANUAL.PDF](http://www2.iccb.org/iccb/wp-content/pdfs/manuals/iccb_systemrules_manual.pdf)) AND ADD THE CATEGORY “STANDARDIZED COMPETENCY-BASED CREDIT” TO THE ILLINOIS ADMINISTRATIVE CODE ([HTTPS://WWW.ILGA.GOV/COMMISSION/JCAR/ADMINCODE/023/023015010C03110R.HTML](https://www.ilga.gov/commission/jcar/admincode/023/023015010C03110R.html)) SECTION 1501.311: CREDIT FOR PRIOR LEARNING.

Definition:

Standardized Competency-Based Credit, SC-BC, is college credit that has been evaluated via a Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) process that recommends both workforce/industry-regulated credentials and college-level credit, by using aligned, competency-based standardized methods. This type of college-level Prior Learning Assessment credit is awarded for courses in which competencies are documented. The award of SC-BC should shorten the prospective learners' time required to advance toward a higher credential or degree. This type of PLA credit is used to recognize the learning gained by incumbent workers whose competence has been verified using standardized assessment processes.

Recommendation 2: Articulate the AAS Courses Through the IAI ECE Panel

The IAI Early Childhood Panel should oversee the process of articulating the courses in the AAS degree for transfer among all institutions in the Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity (ECACE). Our research indicates that not all ECE courses in which the Gateways competencies are typically embedded within the AAS degrees have been articulated as transfer courses among colleges and universities. This is because prior to the passing of HB 2878, the Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity Act, some were classified as CTE courses ('Program Code 1.2 courses') by ICCB in its Program Classification System:

From the 2021 ICCB Program Approval Manual:

PCS – Program Classification System (PCS) is a two-digit number used for identifying both instructional programs and other functions of the college. For example, PCS 1.1 refers to Baccalaureate/Transfer programming and courses, PCS 1.2 refers to CTE, PCS 1.4 refers to Developmental or Remedial Education, PCS 1.6 Vocational Skills, PCS 1.7 and 1.8 refer to Adult Education and PCS 1.9 ESL.

These ECE courses need to be articulated with every college and university in ECACE. Normally, Illinois only requires two-year colleges to articulate their courses with four-year colleges. However, to increase transfer mobility of the competency-based courses and the PLA that will be posted by ECACE-member programs, it is recommended that all community colleges articulate their courses that are a pathway to the Gateways ECE Level 2 credential with all other community colleges and the ECACE member universities. The Form-13 process of the Illinois Administrative Code also should require the Gateways Competencies be published clearly in the syllabi. The IAI approval should mean that every college or university in ECACE will have predictable courses for the Standardized Competency-based Credit to be awarded.

The ECE AAS curriculum in Illinois needs to be changed from Program Code 1.2 courses to Program Code 1.1 courses. The State can help save a lot of faculty and administrative staff work by creating time-saving ways for community colleges to make these changes in the many systems in Illinois that need to be updated due to the creation of ECACE, and the change of the AAS degree in Child Development and Early Childhood Education to be accepted in transfer for junior status.

Recommendation 3: Establish a Badging System for the Gateways Level 2 Competencies Through the Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity (ECACE)

Building upon the opportunity that formation of the ECACE represents, we recommend it establish a badging system to assist its members in awarding competency-based, college-level credit. The collection of badges from the ECE PLA Project could be entitled: Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity Badges or ECACE Badges and the titles on transcripts will match the titles of the Gateways ECE Level 2 Credential competencies. The twelve ECACE titles for the badges could be:

- ECACE Badge for Human Growth and Development (HGD) 1, 2, or 3
- ECACE Badge for Health, Safety, and Well-being (HSW) 1 or 2
- ECACE Badge for Interactions, Relationships, and Environment (IRE) 1 or 2
- ECACE Badge for Family and Community Relationships (FCR) 1, 2, or 3
- ECACE Badge for Personal and Professional Development (PPD) 1 or 2

Recommendation 4: Determine the Badging Process Manager

We recommend that the assistant project manager of ECACE oversee and manage the service provided by a third-party, secure badging vendor. It is expected that the setup of the badges in the system would be assisted by the vendor and that managing the badges would be akin to distributing transcripts upon request, an automated process. Organizations like Parchment and Credly have automated these services and reduced the load on registrars to manually provide and receive the transcripts and test results. The amount of time this will require of the person managing the badging system on an annual basis would be determined by the level of activity. Colleges will need instructions from ECACE about how to read the reports and post the credit.

Recommendation 5: Award 1 Credit per Badge, for a Total of 12 Credits Leading to Attainment of the Gateways Level 2 ECE Credential

This credit shall be awarded in alignment with course competencies that are documented as expectations of students who complete these courses.

Recommendation 6: Establish Steps for Students to Attempt PLA and Earn Badges

1. Starting in 2022, incumbent workforce members interested in taking this prior learning assessment will register for an appointment to do so at the C-BEN website. The registration form will include an area where users indicate their preferred community college or university.
2. On the day of the assessment, learners (i.e., the assessment 'takers') log in and complete their assessment session. At the end, they will be prompted to confirm their intention to have their video capture evaluated to receive credit. If users opt not to send their captures for evaluation, their video will be stored, and records will reflect their attempt.
3. Participating colleges and universities will be notified by C-BEN when prospective students have completed their assessments and need evaluations. This will enable the institutions' admissions offices and ECE programs to follow up with specific guidance about next steps for applying and receiving a video evaluation.
4. The certified faculty evaluator completes the review and authorizes the relevant badges for the competencies evidenced.
5. The learner receives a report from C-BEN indicating which badges (if any) were awarded, along with guidance on how to follow up with their preferred institution.
6. Learners must request that a badges report from the digital credential service provider be sent to the college or university to which they have been admitted.
7. BEST PRACTICE: This ECACE badges report should instruct the colleges/universities to post the credit without expecting the admitted student to submit a separate application to have the PLA credit posted to their record.
8. The student should be notified when the credit has been posted. The posting of the credit should be copied to the chair of the ECE program, who should reach out to the student with instructions about the next steps needed to be awarded the Level 2 Gateways ECE Credential and to continue in the early childhood credential or ECE program.

Recommendation 7: Conduct a Phased Roll-out for the Instrument and Process

Once the PLA instrument is ready for piloting, we recommend a limited number of institutions (4-5) of both types (community colleges and universities), if possible, be invited to participate. As with any new assessment instrument and the processes accompanying it, piloting should be done methodically and in phases during January-August 2022. For the first phase (a 'soft launch' anticipated for January-March 2022), establishing a cadre of pilot faculty focused on collecting and tracking learner data as well as soliciting feedback on their experiences will be invaluable. This 'continuous improvement oversight group' should provide periodic highlights of their general findings to the Governors' Office of Early Childhood Development (GOECD), the funders of this instrument's development and this PLA project.

As pilot faculty undergo phase two assessor training to become fully certified, they should establish a 'binder' (physical or virtual) of their evaluation materials (e.g., scoring tools, assessment exercises) for use by other assessors in the future. Where and how this 'binder' is stored needs to be determined by the training leaders.

Pilot faculty also might consider whether, when, and how to involve an ECE doctoral student in the soft launch process. Since this instrument is like none other currently available for prior learning assessment in the ECE field, there's much to be learned about its effects on ECE workforce and preparation programs.

Recommendation 8: Make Additional Amendments to the ICCB System Rules Manual for Awarding PLA Credit

The standards for awarding credit in the ICCB System Rules Manual (p. 42) must be amended:

CURRENT:

Standard for Awarding Credit for Prior Learning

- 1) The student must enroll at the college and meet all admission requirements for the program in which course credit for prior learning is being sought. A college may seek an exception to this provision by making a request and receiving subsequent approval from ICCB.**

REQUESTED CHANGE:

This rule should be amended to more accurately describe how Illinois handles some standardized tests (like AP and IB) and this new category, Standardized Competency-Based Credit, SC-BC. Both types of standardized assessment are completed by students prior to college admission. In Illinois, these standardized categories of PLA should have predictable outcomes for student credit per state legislation.

This ECE prior learning assessment process is targeted at incumbent childcare workers who are not in college. ECACE faculty will be awarding badges for evidence of competence, which will be housed by a secure credential service provider, overseen by a central body within ECACE, before students apply for college. The students will be awarded the ECE college credit during the admission process, just as they receive IB or AP-based credit after they are admitted to an Illinois college.

CURRENT:

- 2) Fifteen credit hours toward a degree must be completed at the college prior to awarding credit for prior learning to degree-seeking students.**

REQUESTED CHANGE:

This rule should be eliminated.

or

This rule should be changed to say that colleges may wait for a student to complete at least one course or 3 credits at a community college before committing to a PLA review to award credit for experience. Colleges may assess the credit at any point in the application and admission process.

Recommendation 9: Establish Preliminary Assessment Taker Eligibility and Attempt Policies

Incumbent early childhood workforce members who have completed the equivalent of at least one year of full-time work in an early childhood setting (birth through age 8y) and have a high-school diploma or GED should be deemed eligible to attempt this PLA. Learners (users) should be allowed one retake. Due to the nature of this assessment, they would need to take the entire assessment again the second time. Learners would retain their passing scores on any competencies evidenced during their first attempt.

Recommendation 10: Create a Faculty Assessor Pool/Establish an Assessor Certification and Recertification Process

Establishing a pool of volunteer ECACE-institution faculty who agree to participate in annual training and recertification is necessary, in addition to supporting the training/retraining of institutions' designated assessors, for this PLA instrument to remain viable. The faculty pool will be 'on call' to institutions whose faculty are temporarily unable to handle the workload of numerous applicants who need quick turnarounds of their video captures. Pool members will be responsible for scoring the assessments and sending the results to ECACE, for forwarding to the prospective students. The faculty in the assessment pool will evaluate the assessments for students from any part of the State. Any candidate evaluated by a pool faculty member can submit badges earned through the PLA to any participating institution.

<i>Recommendations</i>	<i>Timeline</i>	<i>Potential Entities Responsible</i>
Recommendation 1: Add the term "Standardized Competency-based Credit" and its definition as a new type of PLA to the ICCB System Rules Manual and ADD THE CATEGORY "STANDARDIZED COMPETENCY-BASED CREDIT" TO THE ILLINOIS ADMINISTRATIVE CODE SECTION ON 'CREDIT FOR PRIOR LEARNING'	In time for inclusion in the 2022 System Rules Manual update	For determination by the ICCB Executive Director
Recommendation 2: Articulate the AAS Courses Through the IAI ECE Panel	May 2023	For determination by the ICCB Executive Director and the IAI Director
Recommendation 3: Establish a Badging System for the Gateways Level 2 Competencies Through the Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity (ECACE)	February-August 2022	GOECD, ECACE, and INCCRRA leadership
Recommendation 4: Determine the Badging Process Manager	February-August 2022	GOECD, ECACE, and INCCRRA leadership
Recommendation 5: Award 1 Credit per Badge, for a Total of 12 Credits Leading to Attainment of the Gateways Level 2 ECE Credential	February-August 2022	GOECD, ECACE, INCCRRA, ICCB, and IBHE leadership
Recommendation 6: Establish Steps for Students to Attempt PLA and Earn Badges	February-August 2022	GOECD, ECACE, and INCCRRA leadership
Recommendation 7: Conduct a Phased Roll-out for the Instrument and Process	February-August 2022	GOECD, ECACE, and INCCRRA leadership
Recommendation 8: Make Additional Amendments to the ICCB System Rules Manual for Awarding PLA Credit	In time for inclusion in the 2022 System Rules Manual update	For determination by the ICCB Executive Director
Recommendation 9: Establish Preliminary Assessment Taker Eligibility and Attempt Policies	January-March 2022	GOECD, ECACE, and INCCRRA leadership
Recommendation 10: Create a Faculty Assessor Pool/Establish an Assessor Certification and Recertification Process	January-March 2022	GOECD, ECACE, and INCCRRA leadership

Next Steps and Opportunities

Next Steps

Based on feedback from the simulation workshopping sessions and phase one assessor training, further refinements to the instrument will be made before its piloting in Winter 2022:

- Revisions to certain Planned Challenges, Hits and Misses in various simulations
- Creation of ancillary materials to enhance certain simulations (e.g., anecdotal notes, videos)
- Continued development and review of the new avatars, ECE environments currently in production at Mursion
- Addition of learner (user) supports, before and during the simulation
- Development of an 'introduction to the instrument' for its registration website plus an online assessment orientation tutorial for learners to complete before their assessment session
- Conduct an independent diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) review of the simulations' scenarios

Subject-matter (SME) volunteers (faculty) will be recruited in January 2022 to review and inform aspects of these refinements during January-February, before the initial cohort of learners takes the assessment.

A project coordinator for the soft launch will be designated to work through the recommendations listed in #7 (above), as well as oversee and manage the instrument refinements plus the soft launch.

Opportunities

This project was planned, implemented, and completed during an unprecedented moment in the history of higher education in Illinois: While the Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity (ECACE) was being formed. This project and the Consortium share the same charge, as expressed in HB 2878, which became the Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity Act:

To meet the strong demand for highly qualified early childhood educators by prioritizing innovative higher-education pathways and supporting greater access and completion.

With the establishment of the Consortium, there is an opportunity to realize the PLA plans described in the Impacts and Recommendations above. The Consortium's cross-cutting state agency and institutional structure provides an administrative framework we aim to tap for maintaining communication and collaboration about our PLA work across colleges and universities around the State. The Consortium's key personnel—the Project Managers and the Navigators, especially—will be asked to partner in educating the workforce and institutions about our 'new way to PLA' that's innovative, sets incumbent workforce members on a pathway, and increases access while lessening time to completion.

The project outcomes provides an opportunity to the Consortium's members, too. The barriers to PLA of any kind that have been identified and proposed remedies for, once adopted, will benefit all adult students. The definition for the unique type of PLA credit the instrument assesses for—competency-based, standardized by ECE faculty—and the proposed badging framework, once in place, will make it easier for students to take full advantage of the interconnectivity among member institutions.

We finish this project while ending another pandemic-inflected year, one that forced us in higher education to continue rethinking what we do and how. We greet the new year with some new tools, new ideas, and new hope that our collective efforts to support the early childhood workforce generate the advantages we planned.

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Appendices

Appendix A: PLA Project Faculty Working Group Participants and Institutions

Family & Community Relations (FCR)

Diane Schael, College of Lake County [lead]

Antuanette Mester, St. Augustine University

Kathy Nikolai, Harper College

Sham'ah Md-Yunus, Eastern Illinois University

Victor Broderick & Danyle Watkins, Lincoln Land Community College

Health, Safety, & Well-being (HSW)

Inna Dolzhenko, Chicago State University [lead]

Darsh Bias & Patricia Steinhaus, Chicago State University

Dawn Munson, Elgin Community College

Kimberlee Hendricks, National Louis University

Marilyn Toliver & Scott Wernsman, John A. Logan College

Human Growth & Development (HGD)

Lindsay Meeker, Western Illinois University [lead]

Erika Gustafson-Dietz & Jennifer Kemp Berchtold, Erikson Institute

Melissa Batchelor, Lewis & Clark Community College

Paula Luszcz, Oakton College

Interactions, Relationships, & Environment (IRE)

Carolyn Beal, Southwestern Illinois College [lead]

Amy Clark, DePaul University

Amy Lofthouse & Kristin Schulz, Northern Illinois University

LaTia Collins, Prairie State College

Melissa Johnson, Highland College

Personal Professional Development (PPD)

Mary Muhs, Rasmussen University [lead]

Dawn Katz, McHenry College

Julie Cotter, Heartland Community College

Katy Hisrich, Governors State University

Tanille Ulm, Lake Land College

Appendix A: PLA Project Faculty Working Group Participants and Institutions

Arnez Cooper, Marillac House, Chicago

Erin Gutierrez Soto, Governors State Family Learning Center

Julia Labuda, Chicago State University C-CAMPIS

Kathy Trainor, Heartland Head Start

Lee Eklund, Malones Early Learning Center, Carterville

Marie Schreiber, College of Lake County Campus Learning Center

Monte Nix-Hodges, St. Vincent DePaul Center, Chicago

Stephanie Inis, Marillac House, Chicago

Teri Meisner, Heartland Head Start

Tracey Young, St. Vincent DePaul Center, Chicago

Appendix C: Calendar of Project Activity

June 17: Project introduction to state agency representatives (GOECD, ICCB, ISBE, IDHS, IBHE)

June 24: Statewide project kickoff meeting to recruit EC faculty and their administrators

July 12: Project faculty learn to design the workplace scenarios assessing the Level 2 ECE Credential competencies

July 23: Project faculty submit written scenarios for simulation development

August 23-25: Working Groups review written simulation drafts with Drs. Freeze and Donovan

August 30: Project-wide check-in meeting to reflect on work accomplished, discoveries being made, and clarify remaining steps

October 18: Meeting with the Illinois Community College Chief Academic Officers (ICCAOs) Association to discuss the project and learn about PLA use, barriers at their institutions, and to share the working definition of standardized, competency-based credit

October 21-27: Working Groups review simulations in Mursion virtual space while employer representatives work through them

November 10: Meeting with the Illinois Chief Student Services Officers (ICSSO) Council to share project findings and accomplishments to date, solicit feedback on the working definition

November 19: Project check-in meeting with state agency representatives to update them on project accomplishments and key findings

November 19: Focus group session with community college and university registrars to discuss the project, development of a standardized competency-based credit PLA instrument, and solicit feedback on the working definition

November 29: Working Group leaders' meeting to finalize simulation edits, plan ancillaries to embed in the simulations for user support

December 1-10: Phase one assessor training

December 7: Statewide project showcase meeting

December 20: Working Group leaders' meeting to review recommendations for final project report

Appendix D: Administrator Participants and Institutions

1. June 24, 2021 Project Launch Meeting

Anne Brennan met with state agency representatives and college administrators during the project launch meeting, June 24, 2021. Discussed policies and rules that need amendment to allow PLA to transfer into colleges smoothly.

Participants

City Colleges of Chicago: Kate Connor

City Colleges of Chicago: Vincent Wiggins

City Colleges of Chicago: Kennedy King—Brittany Burton

Early Childhood Workforce Council: Christina Krasov

Eastern Illinois University: Dr. Laretta Henderson

Elgin Community College: Rick Mao

Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development: Dr. Jamilah R. Jor'dan, Executive Director

Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development: Zachary Allen, Workforce Policy Coordinator

Governor's State University: Shannon Dermer

Governor's State University: Dr. Joi Patterson

Illinois Board of Higher Education: State Context – Dr. Sophia Gehlhausen

Illinois Community College Board – Dr. Marcus Brown

Illinois Department of Human Services: Olga Torres

Illinois State Board of Education: Emily Fox

Illinois State Board of Education: Bess Johnson

John A. Logan College: Scott Wernsman

Kishwaukee Community College: Judson Curry

McHenry County Community College: Dr. Dawn Katz

National Louis University: Joao Goebel

Northern Illinois University: Dr. Thomas Pavkov

Roosevelt University: Monique Herard

Roosevelt University: Dr. Tom Phillion

2. August 16, 2021

Anne Brennan and Marie Donovan met with Heartland College VP, Rick Pearce and Chair of ECE, Johnna Darragh.

Discussed how Heartland College has modularized their curriculum so that they could create a second pathway through their ECE childcare curriculum. This work has made Heartland ready to accept the credit that is awarded through this PLA process. If the project is successful, they agreed they would be ready to participate in the assessment and awarding of credit in Spring 2022.

3. Aug 31, 2021

Anne Brennan and Marie Donovan met with Dr. Lisa Downey, Coordinator, Early Childhood Practice Program at National Louis University.

NLU has modularized their ECE curriculum and are prepared to participate in awarding PLA from this project in Spring 2022.

4. October 18, 2021

Illinois Chief Academic Officers (ICAO) Fall meeting

Anne Brennan and Marie Donovan presented to the Illinois Chief Academic Officers meeting chaired by Karen Weiss, Ed.D., Vice President of Academic Affairs, Southeastern Illinois College.

The presentation was shared with the membership. The presentation introduced them to the definition of Standardized Competency-based Credit and asked for feedback about its implementation. The CAO's offered their support for the new type of PLA and recommended that a presentation is provided to the Illinois Chief Student Affairs Commission to gain their input. They were shown the plan to reach out to Registrars for more detailed feedback.

5. November 10, 2021

Anne Brennan and Marie Donovan presented the project's goals and activities to date to the Illinois Chief Student Services Officers Commission.

All members received follow-up information about the content of this presentation through meeting minutes and the presentation slide deck, via the Commission's chair.

6. Illinois Registrar Mailing

Project goals and activities to date were shared in a focus group invitation to all Illinois registrars:

Institution	First/Last Name	Title
1. Black Hawk College	Amy Snyder	Registrar
2. City Colleges of Chicago	Brittany Burton	District Director Articulation
3. City Colleges of Chicago	Laura Clark	District Director, Academic Systems
4. City Colleges of Chicago	Jeffrey Wonders	Academic Systems Analyst
5. College of DuPage	Jill Pierson	Registrar
6. College of Lake County	Jacob Cushing	Registrar
7. Elgin Community College	Ann Kalas	Registrar
8. Frontier Community College	Sibyl Janello	Registrar
9. Harold Washington College	Emmanuel Esperanza	Dean of Enrollment Interim Registrar
10. Harry S. Truman College	Mylinh Tran	Registrar
11. Heartland CC	Cindy Alfano	Registrar
12. Illinois Valley CC	Tom Quigley	Dir Admissions, Records, & Transfer
13. John A. Logan College	Tim Williams	Registrar
14. John Wood CC	Melanie Lechtenberg	Dean of Records, Reg/Fin Aid
15. Joliet Junior College	W Wreg	Registrar
16. Kankakee CC	Kathryn Wachtor	Registrar
17. Kaskaskia College	Jenna Lammers	Registrar
18. Kishwaukee College	Santina Swiger	Registrar
19. Lake Land College	Muriel Robinson	Registrar
20. Lewis and Clark CC	Heidi Plunkett	Registrar
21. Lincoln Land CC	Robin Ackman	Registrar
22. Lincoln Trail College	Amber Malone	Assoc Dean of Admissions & Records
23. McHenry County College	Vicki Brennan	Assoc Registrar
24. McHenry County College	Amy Haller	Registrar
25. Moraine Valley CC	Dave Marcial	Dean of Enrollment Services
26. Morton College	Courtney O'Brien	Registrar
27. Oakton CC	Cheryl Warmann	Registrar
28. Olive Harvey College	Nailah Watson	Registrar
29. Olney Central College	Steve Patberg	Registrar
30. Parkland College	Jason Rotzoll	Registrar
31. Prairie State College	Jaime Miller	VP Student Affairs/ Dean of Enrollment
32. Rend Lake College	Kelly Downes	Registrar
33. Richard J. Daley College	Victor Sanchez	Registrar
34. Richland CC	M Palmer	Registrar
35. Rock Valley College	Christine Lott	Registrar
36. Sauk Valley CC	Pamela Medema	Registrar
37. Blackburn College	Dianna Ruyle	Registrar
38. Bradley University	Andy Kindler	Registrar
39. Chicago State University Caleb	Westberg	Registrar
40. Columbia College	Keri Walters	Registrar
41. Concordia Univ Chicago	Katherine Heetal	Registrar
42. DePaul University	Fran Cebrzynski	Director, DePaul Central
43. Dominican University	Julie Zeller	Registrar
44. Eastern Illinois University	Brad Bennington	Registrar
45. Elmhurst College	Linda Dufort	Registrar

	Institution	First/Last Name	Title
46.	Erikson Institute	Sandy Branch	Registrar
47.	Illinois State University	Jess Ray	Registrar
48.	Judson University	Virginia Guth	VP Student Success/Registrar
49.	Lewis University	Gilbert Martinez	Registrar
50.	Loyola University	Rita Vasquez	Registrar
51.	Millikin University	Angela Bakeman	Registrar
52.	National Louis University	Hanna Wielgat	Registrar
53.	North Park University	Anthony Scola	Registrar
54.	Northern Illinois University	Cody Schmitz	Director/Registrar
55.	Quincy University	Nancy Geissler	Dean of Enrollment Management
56.	Rasmussen College	Juliana Klocek	Registrar
57.	Rockford University	Cory Espensen	Assistant Registrar
58.	Roosevelt University	Deonna Alexander	Registrar
59.	Roosevelt University	Tom Phillion	Dean of EDU/Assoc Provost
60.	Saint Xavier University	Elena Carrillo	Director of Academic Planning
61.	SIU-Carbondale	Tamara Workman	Registrar
62.	SIU-Edwardsville	Patrick Sears	Registrar
63.	U of I at Chicago	Robert Dixon	Registrar
64.	U of I at Springfield	Aleta Carlberg	Assoc Registrar
65.	U of I at Springfield	Brian Clevenger	Registrar
66.	U of I at Urbana-Champaign	Megan Hazen	Registrar
67.	U of I at Urbana-Champaign	Kristi Kuntz	Exec Assoc Provost Academic Prog Policies
68.	Western Illinois University	Joani Wilson	Registrar

7. Attendees at November 19, 2021 Registrar Focus Group

The following participated in discussions, interviews, or sent feedback in writing via email:

	Institution	First/Last Name	Title
1.	McHenry County College	Vicki Brennan	Assoc Registrar
2.	Prairie State College	Jaime Miller	VP Student Affairs/ Dean
3.	Quincy University	Nancy Geissler	Registrar
4.	U of I at Springfield	Aleta Carlberg	Assoc Registrar
5.	City Colleges of Chicago	Brittany Burton	District Director Articulation
6.	City Colleges of Chicago	Laura Clark	District Director Academic Systems
7.	City Colleges of Chicago	Jeffrey Wonders	Academic Systems Analyst
8.	Harry S. Truman College	Mylinh Tran	Registrar
9.	Illinois State University	Jess Ray	Registrar
10.	Northern Ill University	Cody Schmitz	Director/ Registrar
11.	Olive Harvey College	Nailah Watson	Registrar
12.	U of I at Urbana-C	Megan Hazen	Registrar
13.	U of I at Urbana-C	Kristi Kuntz	Associate Registrar
14.	Eastern Ill University	Brad Bennington	Registrar
15.	U of I at Chicago	Robert Dixon	Registrar
16.	Roosevelt University	Tom Phillion	Dean of EDU & Associate Provost
17.	Oakton CC	Cheryl Warman	Registrar/Director of Financial Aid

Appendix D: Administrator Participants and Institutions

Institutions	Participants
Blackburn College	John Essington, Cindy Rice
Chicago State University	Inna Dolzhenko*, Ty Giles, Pat Steinhaus*
College of Lake County	Diane Schael*
Danville Area CC	Penny McConnell
DePaul University	Amy Clark*, Marie Donovan*
Eastern Illinois University	Sham'ah Md-Yunus*
Elgin Community College	Dawn Munson*
Erikson Institute	Erika Gustafson-Dietz*
Governors State University	Katy Hisrich*
Greenville University	Laura Schaub
Harper College	Kathy Nikolai*
Heartland Community College	Julia Cotter*, Johnna Darragh, Margherita Davita, Joellen Scott, Teri Wilson
Highland Community College	Melissa Johnson*
John A Logan College	Marilyn Toliver*
Kankakee Community College	Sarah Gowler
Kaskaskia College	Alexis Myers
Kennedy King College	Alishia Atkins
Kishwaukee College	Maria Lombardo
Lake Land Community College	Tanille Ulm*
Lewis and Clark Community College	Melissa Batchelor*
Lincoln Land Community College	Danyle Watkins*
Loyola University	Adam Kennedy
McHenry County College	Lisha Linder
Moraine Valley	Tanginia Southall
Morton College	Sonya Pencheva
National Louis University	Kimberlee Hendricks*, Shawntay King, Kamilah Wilson
North Park University	Nikki Flanagan
Northeastern IL University	Lindsay Maldonado
Northern IL University	Stephanie DeSpain, Melissa Walters
Oakton College	Paula Luszcz*
Parkland Community College	Amy Kilgus Chamley
Prairie State College	LaTia Collins*
Rasmussen University	Kristen Walley
Rend Lake College	Amy Wylie
Richard J. Daley College/CCC	Joy Terrell Hearn
Richland Community College	Catherine Welsh
Rockford University	Brandi St. James
Sauk Valley College	Beth Smaka
South Suburban Community College	Vernita Lewis
Southern IL University-Edwardsville	Michelle Wright
St. Augustine University	Antuanette Mester*
St. Xavier University	Natalie Phillips
Southwestern Illinois College	Carolyn Beal*
Triton College	Ally Miller
Truman College	Jen Asimow
Wabash Valley College	Carla Cadwalader
Waubonsee College	Linda O'Connell-Knuth
Western IL University	Lindsay Meeker*

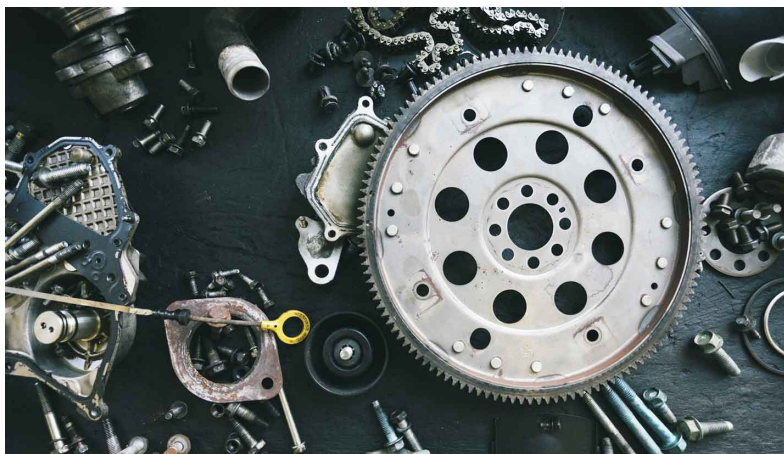
*Denotes project Working Group member

Appendix F: Faculty Participant Project Handbook

LEVEL 2 ECE PLA PROJECT | July-November 2021

PROJECT FACULTY HANDBOOK

During the next five months, EC faculty groups from around Illinois will be building a virtual reality-based prior learning assessment that evaluates the Gateways Level 2 competencies. This handbook is the main reference for workgroups to consult as they collaborate and coordinate with [C-BEN](#) and each other in creating this innovative tool for our field.



The information contained herein was provided separately to all project faculty in a series of emails between 25 June-9 July 2021. Additional information and materials for the project's activity workflow is located in the Dropbox folders assigned to the five PLA Competency Area Workgroups and a general project folder that will be created once the workplace scenarios are completed in late July. All Dropbox folder links will be sent via Dropbox.com to their respective faculty owners. If you don't receive a link to your folder, please check your Spam or Junk folders, since the link comes from an email address ending in .com—and many colleges' security screens won't allow it through immediately.

PLA Competency Area Workgroups

This project's team is divided into five workgroups, one per competency area of the ECE Level 2 credential. A listing of the 12 competencies in Level 2 (a sort of competency 'cheat sheet' for your reference) appears at the end of this handbook and was shared via Chat at the faculty meeting on 12 July.

LEVEL 2 CREDENTIAL PLA PROJECT TEAMS

Per Competency Area/Number of Competencies in Area

HGD (3)	HSW (2)	IRE (2)	FCR (3)	PPD (2)
Lindsay Meeker, WIU [lead]	Darshe Bias, Inna Dolzhenko [lead], & Pat Steinhaus, CSU	Carolyn Beal, SWIC [lead]	Diane Schael, CLC [lead]	Mary Muhs, Rasmussen [lead]
Erika Gustafson & Jenny Kemp, Erikson	Dawn Munson, Elgin	Amy Clark, DePaul	Antuanette Mester, St. Augustine	Dawn Katz, McHenry
Melissa Batchelor, Lewis & Clark	Kimberlee Hendricks & Lisa Downey, NLU	Amy Lofthouse & Kristin Schulz, NIU	Kathy Nikolai, Harper	Julie Cotter, HCC
Paula Luszcz, Oakton	Marilyn Toliver & Scott Wernsman, John A Logan	LaTia Collins, Prairie State	Sham'ah Md-Yunus, EIU	Katy Hisrich, GSU
		Melissa Johnson, Highland	Victor Broderick & Danyle Watkins, Lincoln Land	Tanille Ulm, Lake Land

Email addresses for the project participants listed above plus the project lead (Marie Donovan) also are located at the end of this handbook.

Project Workflow and Timeline

This table summarizes the order of activities the workgroups will accomplish, along with their timeline. Later sections (see below) break down each project work segment and its specific activities, products, and timeline.

LEVEL 2 PLA PROJECT ACTIVITIES/WORKFLOW/TIMELINE

All Faculty	Faculty Workgroup Leaders*
Faculty Training Session: 12 July, 1:30-3:30pm [2hrs]	Darshe Bias, Inna Dolzhenko [lead], & Pat Steinhaus, CSU
Submit workplace scenarios for creating simulations: due 23 July [3hrs] Workgroup members will 'swap' their draft scenarios before submitting on 23 July. (Dropbox folder)	Workgroup leader reviews all scenarios submitted by group members for consistency, clarity across the group's competency area, and ensures members have 'swapped' before due date (26 July). [3hrs]
Submit suggested environment design photos, descriptions of children and their gestures, language for use in creating the simulations' avatars, reactions, movements, and speech. Due: 30 July [~1hr] (Dropbox folder)	Simulation environment and avatar design recommendations: due 4 August [3hrs] Workgroup leaders review submissions and check with submitters to ensure clearance to share/use photos, artifacts, etc. Leader also checks materials submitted for their relevance to the group's competency area plus overall Level 2 competencies and settings. Leaders meet on a quick call with C-BEN and project team to review instructions before conducting reviews (1-3 August).
Review draft simulation exercises and provide feedback during a workgroup meeting with C-BEN: week of 23 August [3hrs]	[same]
Project faculty share-out/check-in meeting: 30 August [10a-12n] [2hrs + 1hr prep = 3hrs]	Workgroup leaders will present brief summaries of their groups' work to date. [1hr for additional presentation prep]
Two workgroup meetings with C-BEN to workshop simulations and review assessment scoring tools to check validity. 20 September through 15 October [5-6hrs total] (includes employer feedback)	[same]
Four meetings with C-BEN and project, other faculty for assessor training on behavioral assessment methodology, 15 assessment exercises, scoring processes, and establishing reliability: 25 October-5 November [16hrs total]	[same]
Project showcase meeting: week of 15 November [2hrs]	Workgroup leaders will present brief summaries of their groups' work. [2hrs presentation prep]
	Mid-to-late November: Workgroup leaders review relevant sections of draft project report [5-6hrs]
Total max hours = 36	Total max hours = 51 [36 + 15= 51]

*Each Competency Area Faculty Workgroup (5, total) chooses a Leader. The Leaders assume additional responsibilities described in the righthand column. Their stipend reflects this additional workload.

Note: All meetings are conducted online, via Zoom.

Roles & Responsibilities of Workgroup Members & Leaders

The project contract from INCCRRA stipulates the minimum amount of effort expected of workgroup members and workgroup leaders. All workgroup members are asked to devote ~36 hours between 12 July and mid-November 2021 to complete the project. Workgroup members are key to this project's success from the very beginning—for it's their workplace scenarios that C-BEN uses to develop the simulations for the Level 2 prior learning competency assessments. Moreover, members' ongoing directions to the developer (C-BEN) as the tool is created and tested will be critical in ensuring its validity and later, its reliability. Once the tool is in final-draft form, all members will be trained in using it (late October through mid-November).

Workgroup leaders assume the same responsibilities as fellow members plus others that include coordinating and reviewing members' input at various stages (e.g., submitted workplace scenarios, avatar and environment design suggestions) and presenting the project faculty's work at meetings (e.g., project showcase in mid-November). Leaders will dedicate approximately 15 extra hours to the project, through late November. They receive an additional stipend for their leadership work.

Dropbox Folders & Other Project Repositories

Dropbox folders for each workgroup will be assigned for use throughout the project's duration. There you'll find various forms to use in submitting the workplace scenarios as well as a place for uploading your photos and design ideas for the simulation environment and its avatars. (This handbook also will be uploaded there.) As the project progresses, C-BEN will share proprietary links to where the draft simulations as well as the final-draft simulations and assessments are accessed. Emails with all these links (i.e., for Dropbox.com folders, C-BEN sites) will be sent to your address on file for the project at each juncture. Feel free to add to your workgroup's folder any materials you find helpful or pertinent—it's your workspace.

Meetings

Most of the work on this project is done collaboratively. While some meeting dates are already established, others can't be settled until the work unfolds. Doodle polls for certain meetings will be conducted to arrange mutually convenient days and times. Contact Marie Donovan (mdonovan@depaul.edu) if you have any questions or concerns about meeting dates and times. Please note: All meetings are conducted virtually (i.e., via Zoom). Appointments with Zoom links are sent through INCCRRA. Please confirm your attendance upon receipt of these appointments so we'll know you received the invitation and can expect you to join.

Date/Time	Meeting Purpose
w/o 23 August /2-3hrs	Workgroups review draft simulations (based upon submitted workplace scenarios) for their competency area with C-BEN staff (all members attend with their workgroups) and provide feedback MONDAY, 23 AUGUST FCR: 11a-2p TUESDAY, 24 AUGUST PPD: 10a-12p HSW: 12-2p WEDNESDAY, 25 AUGUST HGD: 9a-12p IRE: 1-3p
30 August 10a-12n	Project-wide faculty check-in/sharing session (all members attend; workgroup leaders present summaries of their groups' work to date)
20 Sept-15 Oct /5-6hrs, total	Two meetings with C-BEN to workshop the simulations and assessments, and check validity (all members attend; employer colleagues will be invited to participate)
25 Oct-5+ Nov /16hrs, total	Assessor training sessions (format of sessions TBD, e.g., four half-days or multiple two-hour sessions; all members attend)
w/o 15 Nov /2hrs	Project showcase statewide meeting (workgroup leaders present summaries of work accomplished; all members attend)

Step One: Developing Workplace Scenarios & Designing the Virtual Environment

For the virtual environment to be as authentic as possible, workgroup members will prepare workplace scenarios in which EC professionals would demonstrate ECE Level 2 competencies. Two workplace scenarios for each of the 12 Level 2 competencies are needed (24, total) from workgroups by 23 July. Scenario writers especially focus upon one competency from their workgroup's competency area in preparing theirs. Scenarios also will include other competencies from the same or different areas since our EC work is integrative in nature. C-BEN uses these scenarios to develop the simulations and assessments for all five competency areas of the Level 2 credential.

Workgroup members decide among themselves who will work on which scenarios for their group's competencies. All scenarios need to be 'swapped' between group members at least once, to check for clarity, consistency, and relevance to the target competency. (If two members work on a scenario, there's no need to swap.) C-BEN's Tiffany Freeze will teach workgroups how to write scenarios during the faculty training session on 12 July. Each workgroup will draft one together that day then compare notes on approaches as well as personal discoveries about the process. A template for each competency area workgroup to use in writing up their scenarios is located in the group's Dropbox folder. A sample scenario-writing template appears at the end of this handbook.

Workgroup leaders will conduct one more review of the submitted scenarios for clarity, consistency, and relevance to the targeted competencies of the group's competency area by 26 July. Marie Donovan and C-BEN will access the scenarios on 27 July. If they've any questions, they'll be in touch with the workgroup leaders.

Summary of Step One:

Workgroups divvy up scenario-writing responsibilities (2/competency)
Faculty determine timeline for swapping their scenario drafts to review
All scenarios are submitted to Dropbox by 23 July
Workgroup leaders conduct final reviews by 26 July

Step Two: Reviewing C-BEN's Draft Simulation Exercises & Project-wide Check-in Session

C-BEN's team will draft the PLA simulation and its exercises based upon the workplace scenarios submitted, then share these with all project faculty for their feedback and further direction. Each workgroup meets once with C-BEN to review its competency area's simulation draft during the week of August 23rd (2-3 hours; Doodle poll will determine the day and time). This highly interactive session will elicit even more faculty insights into designing the simulation's environment, the children's and assistant teachers' behaviors and appearances, and their communication patterns. This step is critical in ensuring faculty perspectives on how Level 2 credentialed professionals perform in the workplace are incorporated into the ultimate simulation's design. It also checks on whether and how the design allows users to evidence their Level 2 competencies in action. There is no preparation for workgroups to do before this meeting, though there might be some follow-up questions to workgroup leaders to ensure all members' insights were captured accurately.

A follow-up check-in meeting of all workgroups and project team leaders, with C-BEN designers, will be held August 30th (10a-12n). Workgroup leaders will present brief summaries of their group's work and impressions to date. Anne Brennan and Marie Donovan also will be presenting about the Illinois PLA landscape mapping work being conducted simultaneously for this project.

Summary of Step Two:

Workgroups attend a simulation design meeting week of 23 August
Workgroups attend an all-project meeting on 30 August [10a-12n]

Step Three: Workshopping the Simulations with C-BEN

Once C-BEN converts the draft simulation exercises into the virtual reality system, they need feedback from all workgroup members plus some employers/teachers to check its validity, usability, and more. All workgroup members will attend two meetings (5-6 hours, total) sometime during the weeks of 20 September-15 October to complete this work. The meeting dates and times will be determined by a Doodle poll. Please send the names and contact information for any employers/teachers you know would be appropriate and interested partners in completing this work to Marie Donovan. These individuals will receive a stipend for their efforts.

The workshopping sessions are conducted by C-BEN through their cloud-based tools. Participants check the look, feel, and interactivity of the actual simulation and its assessments. They check aspects as the user, as well as the assessor of a user's completion of a simulation for prior learning credit. They also evaluate the validity and utility of the assessments in measuring users' ECE Level 2 credential knowledge and skill. There is no preparation for workgroups to do before this meeting, though there might be some follow-up questions to workgroup leaders to ensure all members' insights were captured accurately.

Summary of Step Three:

Workgroups participate with employer partners in two meetings (5-6 hours, total) to 'workshop' the simulations and check assessment validity, 20 September – 15 October

Step Four: Assessor Training

All project faculty members plus others designated by institutions across the state will participate in sessions where they'll learn how to score a captured user interaction with the simulation for use in determining prior learning credit. As part of this training, they'll also establish the instrument's reliability. These meetings will be scheduled as half-day, professional development-type training sessions during late October-early November. (Some sessions might run into mid-November. Forecasts of this timing will be communicated once the workshopping is finished.) The total time devoted to training will range from 14-16 hours. There is no preparation for workgroups to do beforehand. Project faculty members are asked to share any announcements about the upcoming training with their higher-education colleagues (part- and full-time) and ECE networks so that a wide range of institutions can include this instrument in their PLA tool suites. All participants will receive a stipend upon completion of their training.

Summary of Step Four:

Project faculty and others participate in assessor training sessions, 25 October-5 November

Step Five: Project Showcase Statewide Meeting

All project faculty will participate in a statewide meeting of all higher-education stakeholders, state agency representatives, and relevant employers that showcases the work of this project's two aspects—building the virtual reality-based prior learning assessment plus mapping of PLA processes, policies, and tools currently in use across two- and four-year institutions. Workgroup leaders and their group colleagues will share short presentations about their experiences and final thoughts. Anne Brennan and Marie Donovan will present the map findings, along with recommendations for policymakers and institutional administrators to consider in revamping PLA in Illinois.

Summary of Step Five:

Workgroups participate in a project showcase meeting week of 15 November

Project Team & Contact Information

Faculty representing over 25 institutions with ECE programs form the project team.

Please note: This list will be updated periodically as necessary.

ECE LEVEL 2 CREDENTIAL PLA PROJECT FACULTY MEMBERS

JULY-NOVEMBER 2021

Amy Clark, DePaul	aclark70@depaul.edu
Amy Lofthouse, NIU	alofthouse@niu.edu
Antuanette Mester, St. Augustine	ammester01@staugustine.edu
Carolyn Beal, SWIC	carolyn.beal@swic.edu
Danyle Watkins, Lincoln Land	danyle.watkins@llcc.edu
Darshe Bias, CSU	dbias@csu.edu
Dawn Katz, McHenry	dkatz15@mchenry.edu
Dawn Munson, Elgin	dmunson@elgin.edu
Diane Schael, CLC	dschael@clcillinois.edu
Erika Gustafson, Erikson	E.Gustafso@Erikson.edu
Inna Dolzhenko, CSU	idolzhen@csu.edu
Jenny Kemp Berchtold, Erikson	jkempberchtold@erikson.edu
Julie Cotter, HCC	Julie.Cotter@heartland.edu & jcotter55@frontier.com
Kathy Nikolai, Harper	knikolai@harpercollege.edu
Katy Hisrich, GSU	khisrich@govst.edu
Kimberlee Hendricks, NLU	khendricks5@nl.edu
Kristin Schulz, NIU	kschulz@niu.edu
LaTia Collins, Prairie State	lcollins12@prairiestate.edu
Lindsay Meeker, WIU	lc-dennison@wiu.edu
Lisa Downey, NLU	lisa.downey@nlu.edu
Marie Donovan, DePaul (Project Lead)	mdonovan@depaul.edu (312) 505-1939
Marilyn Toliver, John A Logan	marilyn.toliver@jalc.edu
Mary Muhs, Rasmussen	mary.muhs@rasmussen.edu
Melissa Batchelor, Lewis & Clark	mbatchel@lc.edu
Melissa Johnson, Highland	melissa.johnson@highland.edu
Patricia Steinhaus, CSU	psteinha@csu.edu
Paula Luszcz, Oakton	pluszcz@oakton.edu
Scott Wernsman, John A Logan	scott.wernsman@jalc.edu
Sham'ah Md-Yunus, EIU	smdyunus@eiu.edu
Tanille Ulm, Lake Land	tulm@lakelandcollege.edu
Victor Broderick, Lincoln Land	victor.broderick@llcc.edu

Gateways Level 2 ECE Credential Competencies

Level 2: The successful <i>Teacher Assistant</i>....
Human Growth & Development (HGD)
ECE HGD1: Identifies and describes theories of typical and atypical growth in all developmental domains and the interaction between individual and contextual factors on development and learning.
ECE HGD2: Describes the interrelationship between developmental domains, holistic well-being, and adaptive/living skills.
ECE HGD3: Defines how cultural, familial, biological, and environmental influences, including stress, trauma, protective factors, and resilience, impact children's well-being and learning.
Health, Safety, & Well-being (HSW)
ECE HSW1: Articulates components of a safe and healthy environment.
ECE HSW2: Maintains a safe and healthy environment.
Observation & Assessment (O&A)
(No competencies at Level 2)
Curriculum & Program Design (CPD)
(No competencies at Level 2)
Interactions, Relationships, & Environments (IRE)
ECE IRE1: Describes the role of the environment in supporting children's development.
ECE IRE2: Articulates the importance of relationships in supporting positive developmental and behavioral outcomes.
Family & Community Relationships (FCR)
ECE FCR1: Outlines the role and influence of families and communities on children's development, learning, and the early childhood setting.
ECE FCR2: Identifies culturally and linguistically responsive communication and collaboration strategies designed to engage families in their children's care and education.
ECE FCR3: Identifies and models respect for families by using strengths-based, culturally responsive practices.
Personal & Professional Development (PPD)
ECE PPD1: Demonstrates professionalism in image, behavior, and disposition.
ECE PPD2: Describes historical and present-day representations of the fields of early childhood general education, early childhood special education, and early intervention and how individual experiences and values influence perspective and practice within these fields.

Appendix G: PLA Instrument—Scenario Preparation Template

ECE LEVEL 2 PLA PROJECT [JULY – NOVEMBER 2021]

WORKPLACE SCENARIO TEMPLATE

Scenarios due to Dropbox folder by 23 July

COMPETENCY AREA:

PRIMARY COMPETENCY EVIDENCED IN SCENARIO:

SECONDARY COMPETENCIES EVIDENCED:

FACULTY AUTHORS:

DESCRIPTIONS (suggestions for how to bring this scenario 'alive' in a virtual environment)

Environment:

Individuals:

Gestures:

Idiomatic Expressions, Other Distinctive Language (e.g., 'crisscross applesauce'):

SCENARIO:

Gateways to Opportunity® Early Childhood Educator Career Lattice

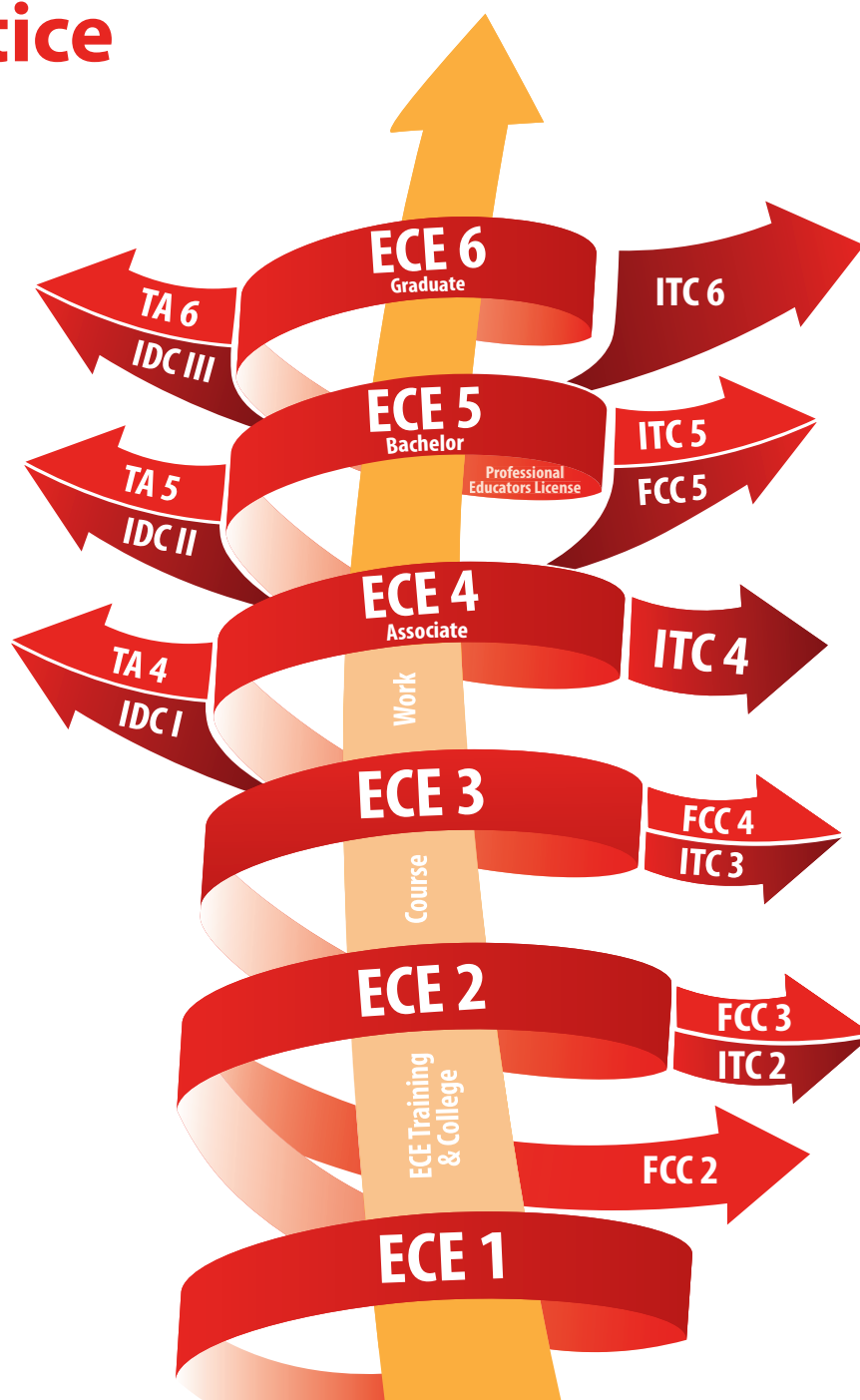
ECE: Foundational Early Childhood Educator requirements for all Credentials

FCC: Family Child Care Credential

ITC: Infant Toddler Credential

IDC: Illinois Director Credential

TA: Technical Assistance Credential



The ECE Credential is the foundation for these Gateways Credentials.

Gateways to Opportunity® Early Childhood Educator (ECE) Credential Framework

EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS		COLLEGE EDUCATION & TRAINING REQUIRED COMPETENCIES IN EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION	WORK & PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE IN EARLY CARE & EDUCATION
LEVEL 6	Graduate Degree	Must meet ECE Credential Level 5 requirements plus: Mastery in at least 3 of the 7 ECE Level 6 Skill Areas and Six professional contributions demonstrating competency in three different areas within the last five years [30 points]	6,000 hours of documented ECE related experience
LEVEL 5	Bachelor's Degree	Must meet all previous level competencies plus: ECE Human Growth and Development (HGD5, HDG6) ECE Health, Safety, and Well-Being (HSW7, HSW8) ECE Observation and Assessment (OA7, OA8) ECE Curriculum or Program Design (CPD10) ECE Interactions, Relationships, and Environments (IRE6, IRE7) ECE Family and Community Relationships (FCR7) ECE Personal and Professional Development (PPD7, PPD8, PPD9, PPD10) [30 points] A Professional Educator License with endorsement in Early Childhood Education meets these requirements	Minimum of 200 hours of ECE supervised experience or 1,200 total hours of documented ECE work experience
LEVEL 4	Associate's Degree or 60+ semester hours (including the 9 semester hours listed at level 3)	Must meet all previous level competencies plus: ECE Human Growth and Development (HGD4) ECE Health, Safety, and Well-Being (HSW6) ECE Observation and Assessment (OA4, OA5, OA6) ECE Curriculum or Program Design (CPD4, CPD5, CPD6, CPD7, CPD8, CPD9) ECE Interactions, Relationships, and Environments (IRE5) ECE Personal and Professional Development (PPD5, PPD6) [24 points]	100 total hours of ECE supervised experience or 600 total hours of documented ECE work experience
LEVEL 3	Three semester hours in each: Any Math, English, and General Education electives (Psychology, Sociology, Science, etc.) <i>(These 9 hours must be credit bearing and nondevelopmental 100 level +)</i>	Must meet all previous level competencies plus: ECE Health, Safety, and Well-Being (HSW3, HSW4, HSW5) ECE Observation and Assessment (OA1, OA2, OA3) ECE Curriculum or Program Design (CPD1, CPD2, CPD3) ECE Interactions, Relationships, and Environments (IRE3, IRE4) ECE Family and Community Relationships (FCR4, FCR5, FCR6) ECE Personal and Professional Development (PPD3, PPD4) [18 points]	10 hours of ECE supervised experience or 400 total hours of documented ECE work experience
LEVEL 2	High School Diploma or GED	ECE Human Growth and Development (HGD1, HGD2, HGD3) ECE Health, Safety, and Well-Being (HSW1, HSW2) ECE Interactions, Relationships, and Environments (IRE1, IRE2) ECE Family and Community Relationships (FCR1, FCR2, FCR3) ECE Personal and Professional Development (PPD1, PPD2) [16* points]	10 hours of ECE observation or 200 hours of documented ECE work experience
LEVEL 1	Level 1 ECE Credential is awarded through completion of a 48 clock hour training available through local Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies statewide or 16 modules online and meets these ECE competencies: HGD1, HSW1, IRE1, IRE2, FCR1 and PPD1 .		

The Child Development Associate Preschool (CDA) meets these ECE competencies: HSW1, HSW2, IRE1, IRE2, FCR1 and PPD1 . *12 or more points must be ECE specific. The additional 4 points required from general or ECE specific education.

In addition to meeting required competencies through college coursework, up to 6 competencies (total) may be documented through credential approved training for Levels 2-4 and up to 11 competencies (total) may be documented through credential approved training for Levels 5 and 6.

ECE Credential Competencies

ECE HGD | Human Growth and Development

- 1** Identifies and describes theories of typical and atypical growth in all developmental domains and the interaction between individual and contextual factors on development and learning.
- 2** Describes the interrelationship between developmental domains, holistic well-being, and adaptive/living skills.
- 3** Defines how cultural, familial, biological, and environmental influences, including stress, trauma, protective factors, and resilience, impact children's well-being, and learning.
- 4** Interprets children's unique developmental patterns and identifies supportive resources for children who may require further assessment. Describes processes of first and second language acquisition.
- 5** Integrates research, developmental theories, and observational data to make decisions about evidence-based practice supporting children's learning and development.
- 6** Justifies and promotes the use of evidence-based practices supportive of each child's unique patterns of development and learning.

ECE HSW | Health, Safety, and Well-Being

- 1** Articulates components of a safe and healthy environment.
- 2** Maintains a safe & healthy environment.
- 3** Creates a healthy and safe environment.
- 4** Assesses healthy and safe early childhood environments.
- 5** Designs and implements learning opportunities emphasizing healthy bodies, healthy lifestyles, and a healthy environment.
- 6** Collaborates with families and community organizations to support children's healthy development and learning.
- 7** Identifies plans and procedures that support healthy and safe early childhood program practices.
- 8** Develops and implements policies, methods, plans, and guidelines reflective of healthy and safe program practices.

ECE IRE | Interactions, Relationships, and Environments

- 1** Describes the role of the environment in supporting children's development.
- 2** Articulates the importance of relationships in supporting positive developmental and behavioral outcomes.
- 3** Identifies factors that contribute to positive interactions with the environment.
- 4** Designs learning environments and activities supportive of healthy development and learning.
- 5** Creates engaging environments that meet the diverse development and learning needs of each child.
- 6** Considers the relationship between curriculum, relationships, and child development and learning in analyzing environments.
- 7** Facilitates the design of engaging environments based on appropriate theory, policy, and guidelines.

ECE OA | Observation and Assessment

- 1** Describes a variety of valid assessment procedures, screening tools, and observation methods and their role in supporting children's development and learning and in informing the instructional process.
- 2** Describes culturally and linguistically responsive assessment procedures, screening tools, and observation methods and appropriate strategies for engaging families in the assessment process.
- 3** Selects and uses legal and ethical assessment procedures, screening tools, and observation methods, and organizational strategies to gain knowledge of children and their familial and social contexts.
- 4** Identifies the impact and influence of external factors on assessment practices.
- 5** Evaluates and selects appropriate strategies for collecting, recording, measuring, disseminating, and utilizing observation, screening, and assessment data which are responsive to the strengths and challenges of individual children and reflective of family goals and priorities.
- 6** Implements and adapts effective observation, screening, assessment strategies that engage families and inform group and individual planning and instruction.
- 7** Articulates and advocates for legal and ethical data collection, analysis and interpretation procedures supportive of child development and learning, program evaluation, and program improvement initiatives.
- 8** Utilizes assessment data to support child development and learning and program development.

ECE CPD | Curriculum or Program Design

- 1** Identifies culturally, linguistically, and individually responsive planning strategies which utilize assessment and observation data.
- 2** Synthesizes the relationship between standards, evidence-based practices, culturally competent teaching strategies and curricular planning.
- 3** Plans, implements, and assesses appropriate learning experiences using knowledge of individual children's healthy development, abilities, interests, and needs.
- 4** Describes appropriate methods supportive of young children's development and learning.
- 5** Describes appropriate content supportive of young children's development and learning.
- 6** Selects appropriate content, aligned with relevant standards.
- 7** Selects and implements appropriate methods and instructional strategies which actively engage children in developmentally appropriate content.
- 8** Differentiates instruction to support diverse learning styles and abilities through incorporation of evidence-based practices, including universal design, and children's interests.
- 9** Adapts instructional practice through use of appropriate tools and strategies to support the development and learning of individual children.
- 10** Creates and assesses program policies, procedures, and plans using current research, theory and knowledge of children to optimize healthy child development and learning.

ECE FCR | Family and Community Relationships

- 1 Outlines the role and influence of families and communities on children's development, learning, and the early childhood setting.
- 2 Identifies culturally and linguistically responsive communication and collaboration strategies designed to engage families in their children's care and education.
- 3 Identifies and models respect for families by using strengths-based, culturally responsive practices.
- 4 Identifies, selects, and promotes meaningful connections to community resources that are responsive to the unique strengths, priorities, concerns and needs of young children and their families.
- 5 Describes culturally and linguistically responsive communication and collaboration strategies which facilitate culturally sensitive expectations for children's development and learning and family engagement in assessment and goal setting.
- 6 Selects and implements culturally and linguistically appropriate procedures designed to gather information about children and families, including child and family strengths, priorities, concerns, and needs, and collaboratively integrates this information into child and family goals.
- 7 Designs and advocates for procedures, plans, and policies, informing child and program goals, in collaboration with families and other team members.

ECE PPD | Personal and Professional Development

- 1 Demonstrates professionalism in image, behavior, and disposition.
- 2 Describes historical and present-day representations of the fields of early childhood general education, early childhood special education, and early intervention and how individual experiences and values influence perspective and practice within these fields.
- 3 Aligns professional practice with applicable standards and guidelines, legal and ethical considerations for confidentiality and impartiality, state and federal laws, and the expectations of relevant professional organizations.
- 4 Utilizes effective, ethical, culturally competent communication and collaboration skills when interacting with children families, and colleagues and as a member of early childhood teams.
- 5 Engages in reflection and the design of a professional development plan with the goal of improving professional practice and fostering professional growth.
- 6 Creates a professional philosophy that guides development as a practitioner and advocate.
- 7 Understands processes, procedures and identified roles within successful early childhood teams.
- 8 Engages in written, verbal and non-verbal communication skills with children, families, and colleagues that support culturally, linguistically, and ability diverse populations; program functioning; family and community collaboration; and healthy child development and learning.
- 9 Applies key legal, ethical, regulatory, and interpersonal skills reflective of professionalism and leadership within early childhood settings.
- 10 Designs and participates in collaborative systems and proactive, visionary leadership that ensures the healthy functioning of the early childhood program/agency and the children and families served.

Appendix I: Statewide Showcase Meeting Agenda



ECE Prior Learning Assessment Showcase Agenda

December 7, 2021
3:00PM – 5:00PM

- | | |
|----------------|---|
| 3:00PM | Welcome & Introductions – Joni Scritchlow, INCCRRRA <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Goal for today's meeting• State & National Consultants and State Agency Representatives |
| 3:10PM | Opening remarks from the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development, funder of the Prior Learning Assessment project – Zachary Allen |
| 3:15PM | Statewide Prior Learning Assessment Project Synopsis – Dr. Marie Donovan |
| 3:30PM | National Research and Promising Practices using Mursion Technology – Dr. Tiffany Freeze <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Highlights from Engaging Employer Partners Video• Remarks from Mark Atkinson, Chief Executive Officer |
| 4:00PM | Showcase: Group Work <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Group led by Lindsay Meeker• Group led by Carolyn Beal• Group led by Diane Schael• Group led by Inna Dolzhenko• Group led by Mary Muhs |
| 4:30 PM | Engagement with Higher Education Chief Academic Officers, Provosts, and Registrars – Dr. Marie Donovan and Anne Brennan |
| 4:45PM | Closing Thoughts – Joni Scritchlow |
| 5:00PM | Adjourn |

Appendix J: Faculty Participant Solicitation Emails

From: Julie Lindstrom

Sent: Wednesday, May 26, 2021 1:31 PM

Cc: Joni Scritchlow <JScritchlow@inccrra.org>; Marie Donovan <mdonovan@depaul.edu>;
Anne Brennan <abrennan@oakton.edu>

Subject: Opportunity to Participate in PDG B5 Prior Learning Assessment Project

Good Afternoon,

The Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development and INCCRRA invite all Gateways Entitled Higher Education Institutions to join in a state-wide discussion and development of a prior learning assessment (PLA) model based upon the Gateways ECE Credential competencies. A series of virtual meetings will be held based on participant availability from late June through November 2021. Please forward this meeting announcement to your dean, provost, vice president for instruction, or other faculty at your institution who may be interested in participating in this innovative work.

The state-wide meetings will be facilitated by Dr. Marie Donovan, Director of DePaul University's Early Childhood Education Program and IL Board of Higher Education Faculty Advisory Council representative, and Ms. Anne Brennan, Assistant Vice President of Academic Affairs and College Transitions at Oakton Community College, in partnership with national experts. Ways in which cutting-edge technology can be used to support PLA will be showcased. There is an opportunity for higher education institutions that participate in this project to receive a stipend to pay for the time of faculty or deans who participate in this project.

- Please send an email to Julie Lindstrom at jlindstrom@inccrra.org by June 7th if your institution wishes to participate in this project.

Kindest regards,

Julie Lindstrom

From: Julie Lindstrom

Sent: Friday, June 25, 2021 3:41 PM

Cc: Marie Donovan <mdonovan@depaul.edu>; Anne Brennan <abrennan@oakton.edu>; Joni Scritchlow <JScritchlow@inccrra.org>; Tiffany Freeze <tiffany@c-ben.org>

Subject: PDG B5 Prior Learning Assessment Meeting Follow up

Dear All,

Thank you for joining us yesterday to introduce what promises to be a busy five months of exploring, envisioning, and enacting new ways to conduct prior learning assessment (PLA) in our state. We appreciate the time and thoughts you shared as we laid out this project's goal and its two activity components—(a) faculty creating an accessible PLA tool for incumbent ECE workforce members to use in demonstrating their competency achievement plus (b) IHE administrators, government agency staff, and related stakeholders identifying specific changes needed to build a 21st Century PLA system that is consistent, clear, and responsive to how adults work and learn.

This project is ambitious and aspirational. It needs expert thought partners eager to collaborate in shaping something different, partners ready to question assumptions and find solutions. We sincerely hope you and others at your institution remain interested in being part of our team. **Please email [Julie Lindstrom](mailto:Julie.Lindstrom@inccrra.org) at INCCRRA by 1 July** to let us know. Please also encourage your colleagues to join our endeavor. We aim to recruit at least 15 to 20 faculty to ensure this project's success.

The table below recaps the types of activities we're asking you to complete across the five months of the project. Stipends of at least \$4,000 will be issued in December to institutions whose faculty members' complete the project. Stipends will also be issued to workforce volunteers who work with faculty to test the simulations.

We are preparing a set of FAQs based on the rich questions and ideas posed at yesterday's meeting. We'll post them along with the meeting's slides and referenced resources on the Gateways website. Please keep an eye on your email for a link to that page.

As you heard during presentations by the state agency and Governors' Office representatives at our meeting, we begin this work at an exciting, apropos time. [The Illinois Strategic Plan for Higher Education](#) (approved 15 June) frequently points to improving and expanding PLA as an essential element of statewide recruitment, retention, and graduation strategies. The Illinois State Board of Education's recent, new advisories [guiding teacher licensure programs in designating PLA more flexibly than before](#) also emphasize our need to

recognize students' prior learning in creating their degree program designs. With endorsement by these entities, along with that of the Illinois Community College Board and the Illinois Department of Human Services, we move forward knowing our efforts are necessary and valued.

Again, thank you for giving us some of your time yesterday. Thank you for your ongoing dedication to keeping our ECE field current and dynamic.

Very truly yours,

Marie Donovan

Anne Brennan

Joni Scritchlow

	PLA Project Activity: Faculty	Time	Via
w/o 12 July (Doodle poll)	Orientation and training to understand the simulation design process. The first step in the process will include writing descriptive workplace situations commonly encountered by an ECE Level 2 credentialed worker in the field. [Five workgroups, one per ECE Level 2 competency content area, e.g. HGD, FCR; 3-4 members, minimum, each]	2 hrs	Zoom
23 July	Submit descriptive workplace situations for use in developing the simulations [2 scenarios per competency; 24, minimum, needed]	~2-4 hrs	Dropbox folder
4 Aug	Provide input and examples to inform the simulation's environment, avatars (e.g., submit photos of rooms in centers, materials; describe ideal child demographics; describe behaviors and gestures needed by avatars)	~2-4 hrs	Dropbox folder
20-27 Aug	Meet with C-BEN team to review draft simulation exercises and provide feedback.	~4-5 hrs	Dropbox folder
w/o 30 Aug (Doodle poll)	Project faculty share-out/check-in meeting	1 hr	Zoom
20 Sep - 15 Oct	Workgroup leads (& other interested faculty) workshop simulations and review assessment scoring tools to check validity*with C-BEN team	25 hrs	Zoom/Website thru C-BEN
25 Oct- 5 Nov	Assessor training on behavioral assessment methodology, 15 assessment exercises, scoring processes and establishing reliability.	8-10 hrs	Zoom/Website thru C-BEN
w/o 15 Nov (Doodle poll)	Statewide project showcase meeting	2 hrs	Zoom

**Workforce partners also will review some simulations & scoring tools to check validity. [1-2hrs]*



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