

ECE CREDENTIAL LEVEL 2 PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT PILOT REPORT



Introduction

In June 2021, a group of 30 early childhood education (ECE) faculty from Illinois community colleges and universities banded together to create an instrument for assessing the prior learning of the over 12,000 early childhood (EC) teacher assistants without any credentials or college credit in our state. These faculty were keenly aware of the deep, abiding difficulties assistants had in considering a return to school (e.g., time, family responsibilities, funding). Faculty also knew that while a significant college degree scholarship opportunity (up to \$33,000/year) through the newly formed Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity (ECACE) was attractive, assistants would be reluctant to complete coursework containing content they already knew—understandably so. Finding a way to award college credit for what EC practitioners learned in their jobs and requisite staff development activities could create a glide path for their subsequent enrollment in a degree program. Completing a degree program would lead to a better outcome for their personal lives and those with whom they worked: young children and their families (National Research Council, 2015).

Pilot Learner Story

By the time she heard about the Pilot Implementation Project through her employer, Alex had attended two colleges. She dropped out in the first few weeks at each because of technology issues and frustration with accessing course materials. Encouraged to enroll in the PLA pilot, Alex wound up demonstrating her knowledge and skills in six competency areas and in turn, earning six college credit hours. Through this ECE PLA opportunity, Alex now is pleased her professional learning is recognized and she finally has some college credit bringing her closer to her goal. She presently is enrolled as a college student, committed to working through any perceived barriers from her past experiences. Alex is quick to tell all who listen about how this PLA opportunity has been the motivator she needed to focus on herself and her learning.

Further complicating this prior learning assessment (PLA) landscape was how despite the majority of Illinois institutions with ECE teacher preparation programs having PLA policies, instruments, and systems in place, little if any prior learning credit in ECE was ever awarded statewide. Clearly, the current methods, approaches, and policies for using them were not meeting the needs of teacher assistants in the incumbent workforce. Faculty recognized a new way to conduct PLA was necessary, one that capitalized upon advances in assessment technology and authentically enabled test-takers to demonstrate their professional competencies while earning college credit for them. Through funding provided by the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development's (GOECD) federal Preschool Development Birth to Five Renewal Grant (PDG B-5), during June-December 2021 those 30 faculty developed a virtual reality-based PLA instrument that assesses the 12 professional competencies of the Gateways® to Opportunity ECE Credential Level 2 and enables awarding of up to 12 credit hours in an ECE teacher preparation program. (Access the instrument development project report through <https://www.ilgateways.com/docman-docs/professional-development/2266-gateways-to-opportunity-ece-level-2-credential-prior-learning-assessment-report/file>.) The next phase of developing and refining this PLA instrument was to implement a pilot version. This report describes the Gateways to Opportunity ECE Credential Level 2 Prior Learning Assessment Pilot Implementation Project that ran from February 22, 2022 through December 30, 2022. The pilot project also was supported 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 this instrument's pilot implementation. The primary goals of this piloting project included:

1. Conducting a national diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) review, also known as a sensitivity and bias review, to ensure that the information presented within the PLA scenarios do not unintentionally offend or bias learners on the basis of personal characteristics such as gender, race, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, disability, or geographic region.
2. Providing access to a statewide standardized, competency-based simulation instrument in both English and Spanish versions that assesses incumbent early childhood workforce members' prior learning for awarding college credit.
3. Piloting the PLA instrument in a systematic, controlled manner to collect data and feedback related to the processes, procedures, DEI-amended assessment exercises and scoring tools, as well as recommendations for prior learning credit (PLC), at Illinois two- and four-year institutions of higher education.
4. Making recommendations to further refine the Gateways® ECE Credential Level 2 Prior Learning Assessment in preparation for a full launch to all institutions interested in using this instrument in awarding prior learning credit.

As discussed in the [Gateways® ECE Level 2 Credential Prior Learning Assessment](https://ibhestrategicplan.ibhe.org/Ibhe-Strategic-Plan-2021.Html) report released in early 2022, an initial impetus for the PLA project was contained in the Illinois strategic plan for higher education, *A Thriving Illinois* (<https://ibhestrategicplan.ibhe.org/Ibhe-Strategic-Plan-2021.Html>; approved in June 2021), which pointed directly to improving and expanding PLA as an essential element of adult student recruitment, retention, and graduation strategies across institutions and degree programs. In October 2021, when reviewing prior learning assessment practices for teacher licensure programs to follow, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) also emphasized the need for universities to flexibly recognize students' prior learning of all kinds when determining their degree program content (Illinois State Board of Education, 2021). For ISBE, this flexibility was viewed as removing a potential barrier to adults considering a career change to teaching. Continuing the refinement of this PLA instrument for the ECE field, then, was timely and necessary.

Yet another impetus for the 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 2022 (INCCRRA, 2022). The Gateways Registry data for the 19,284 assistant teachers working in licensed centers in Illinois revealed how most of these staff are relatively young (less than 25 years or within the 25-34 years age band). The data also indicated the majority of these professionals are BIPOC (53%) and identify as female (97.9%). The education background data captured in the Registry for 17,853 of these assistants showed how 12,711 reported their highest level of education is high school/GED or some college. The remaining 5,142 reported to possessing a post-secondary credential including a community college certificate ($n = 732$); an associate's degree of any kind ($n = 1,767$); a bachelor's degree ($n = 2,249$) in any area; or a graduate degree ($n = 375$) in any field. 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 these assistant teachers 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 relevant way to assess this prior learning and convert it to college credit made sense. Equally important: Creating a new type of PLA instrument tapping knowledge and skills mastered through working with young children and their families would signify higher education's recognition of the value of what is learned from everyday dedication to the profession.

Another theme woven throughout 2021's *A Thriving Illinois* and related policy statements issued concurrently by the ISBE as well as the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) regarding adult learners is a focus on affecting equitable futures for all Illinoisans through postsecondary education:

Higher education has always been a path to a better future, for individuals, communities, and the entire state of Illinois. The challenge of the next decade is to focus on creating broad paths to a prosperous future for every learner, leader, and community that we engage. We can do this with a commitment to a higher education ecosystem that reinforces equity, sustainability, and growth. That's the vision of a thriving Illinois.

Introduction, *A Thriving Illinois*

Of the 12,711 self-reports of highest level of education attained, 71% of the African-American teacher assistants indicated they held a high-school diploma or GED, as did 38% of the Asian, 69% of the Hispanic/Latino, 72% of the Mixed-race, and 68% of the White assistants. Another 56% of those not listing a race also indicated the diploma/GED as their highest level of education attained. Examining these demographics of the potential ECE student pool, faculty realized their instrument had the potential to be a significant strategy for their institutions to deploy in recruiting, retaining, and graduating students of color—as the quote from one Learner who completed the Spanish language version attested.

Pilot Learner Observation

This program opened the doors to continue learning and studying to help my community at school. We say knowledge is power. That is how I feel, with power. I want to keep going and decide what I want to do now and all the options that opened up. The doors and windows of opportunity and to keep going....Thank you for this program!

Much more is now known about the benefits of earning college credit through PLA, particularly its impacts on adult students' overall outcomes such as credentials, degrees, and credit hours earned. In their 2020 PLA Boost Report, the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) and the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) found that adult students at institutions with PLA programs not only saved time and money—their overall credit hours earned, plus retention and completion rates, were significantly higher than those of peers at institutions without PLA or with limited student awareness of PLA options available to them (Klein-Collins, Taylor, Bishop, Bransberger, Lane, & Leibrandt, 2020). Creating a standardized, readily accessible PLA instrument awarding as many as 12 credit hours toward an ECE degree, then, ultimately could also improve the ECE program graduation rates at community colleges and universities around the state.

Context: ECE Competency-based Education Provides Infrastructure for PLA

To create a PLA instrument that measures performance, promotes equity, and achieves benefits of PLA as discussed above, ECE faculty developers adopted the extant Illinois competency-based approach embedded in their higher-education program curricula. Consumers of higher education—the learners—ultimately rely on the notion of being prepared with the knowledge and skills to be successful in the workplace and life in general. Many systems, institutions, and organizations are considering competency-based education (CBE) models of various types for designing programs that evidence learning and increase student program progress flexibility for a wider range of learner populations (American Institutes for Research, 2020).

Competency-based education combines an intentional and transparent approach to curricular design with an academic model in which the time it takes to demonstrate competencies varies and the expectations about learning are held constant. Students demonstrate their knowledge and skills by engaging in assessment exercises that align with clearly defined programmatic outcomes, often aligned to workforce expectations. Learners earn credentials by demonstrating mastery, at the predetermined level of competence, through authentic assessment of the competencies in action and application (Competency-Based Education Network, 2021).

In 2020, the National Survey of Postsecondary Competency-Based Education (NSPCBE), conducted through the American Institutes for Research (AIR; 2020), surveyed 3,217 institutions to map the scope of CBE programs and where they are situated. The results show that these programs are on the rise and are not limited to a specific institution type. Of the reporting institutions with CBE programs, 34% were private, nonprofit four-year institutions; 23%, public four-year institutions; 11% were private, for-profit four-year institutions; and 28% were public two-year institutions. When surveying their expressed level of interest in providing CBE, it appears that two-year institutions are embracing CBE, with 100% reporting they have some CBE program(s), CBE program(s) in progress, or have interest in starting CBE program(s).

The 2020 National Survey of Postsecondary Competency-Based Education survey (American Institutes for Research, 2020) also showed that many institutions are adopting certain design elements of CBE but not all.

For example, some institutions modularized their curriculum and now offer it for variable credit, making it more obvious where specific competencies are taught and assessed. This also makes it easier for institutions to assess competencies achieved through prior learning and award some credit, thereby reducing time to degree. Results show that discipline types in CBE programs are varied and are able to better serve nontraditional learners and those with prior learning experiences and/or credits. Other survey results showed how institutions with CBE programs are predicting a higher rate of growth for them, compared to their traditional programs. Since CBE programs typically qualify for federal student aid, with most institutions choosing to charge by the credit hour, this predicted growth makes sense. The forecasted Demographic Cliff (Boeckenstedt, 2022) of enrollment for institutions of all kinds indicates more will be shifting their attention to designing programs for adult and adult returning students seeking to upskill.

Employers are increasingly reliant on demonstrable competencies that are clearly aligned with industry-recognized credentials and credential attainment in potential employees. There is growing acceptance of and sophistication around skills as a common currency. For example, employers are relying on skills-based hiring. In turn, it makes sense for educational institutions to rely on knowledge- and skills-based learning models, especially as higher education struggles to articulate graduate outcomes and employers are voicing that a degree is not always equivalent to successful performance in the workplace. Meanwhile, \$516 billion is spent annually by employers on training and training wages. If an institution is expected to produce a graduate ready to successfully perform in a workplace role, what is the responsibility of the employer to invest in training for that employee? A better-aligned model between higher education and the workforce could reduce risk for employers and produce better outcomes for learners. Higher education is responding to this movement through an assurance of learning by validating the knowledge, skills, abilities, and intellectual behaviors of their programs through a required demonstration of evidenced competence. This new way of using a shared language and currency for learning through competencies is a way of recognizing a learner's and potential employee's knowledge, skills, abilities, and intellectual behaviors, also known as competencies (Long & McIntyre, 2020).

A PLA model built from a common competency framework supports several key quality elements in CBE, according to C-BEN's Quality Framework model (Competency-Based Education Network, 2017). Figure 1 depicts C-BEN's identified quality elements. (Appendix A: Resources includes an explanation of the full Framework.) Several of these elements are already met in Illinois ECE teacher preparation programs through the Gateways competency framework, which provides a shared language of competencies for the field, based on the nature of EC employees' levels of responsibility and authority. Building a PLA instrument for college credit based on these competencies engages employers and employees, demonstrating higher education institutions' commitment to better align education and workforce demand. This PLA project directly addresses several of the quality elements as a next step. First, PLA certainly promotes student progress in the professional learner's journey by providing an opportunity for them to earn college credit for what they already know and can do. Second, PLA serves as an important component of criterion-referenced and performance-based assessment strategy, allowing learners to demonstrate their competencies acquired through prior experiences and also to personalize their learning pathway. Third, PLA allows for a credentialing strategy that serves learners equitably, including workforce and adult learners, by capturing learning in its various forms. A statewide initiative to build and deliver a standardized PLA offering is forward thinking in itself, while a statewide standardized performance-based PLA offering, aligned with field-relevant and meaningful competencies, is cutting edge.

Figure 1. C-BEN's Quality Framework: Eight Elements of Quality in Competency-based Education Programs



Finally, through this statewide initiative, Illinois joins a growing national effort to recognize and honor learning by mapping industry-recognized competencies to college courses and credit hours, opening new pathways to American college credentials. The president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, Timothy Knowles, announced in December 2022 that it has launched a “decade-long research, practice, and legislative initiative to replace time as the essential measure of learning.” ([Sandra D. Sparks, EducationWeek, December 08, 2022.](#)) This project initiative should be recognized as aligned with that work.

Pilot Implementation Project Background

Since 2015, Illinois ECE faculty in community colleges and universities have worked to incorporate the state-and industry-recognized Gateways® ECE Credential competencies into their credential and degree-program courses' planned learning outcomes. As ECE majors progress in completing courses in their programs, they become eligible to be awarded increasing levels of the ECE Credential (see the leveled credentialing framework [here](#)) by the Illinois Gateways Professional Development System. Although institutions vary somewhat in where they embed the 56 ECE Credential competencies across their programs' courses, there is consensus among faculty about the utility of basing course and, ultimately, ECE program learning outcomes on the ECE Credential competencies. By incorporating the competencies into ECE coursework, there is a pathway for sharing content and practices across institutions, ultimately promoting articulation and student transfer as well as a cohesive ECE teacher preparation community.

As noted above, in 2021, a PLA instrument was designed to assess the 12 competencies of the Gateways ECE Credential Level 2. This credential level requires college coursework for awarding. These 12 competencies are typically taught within first-year courses in ECE programs at both two-year and four-year institutions in Illinois. Targeting the ECE Credential Level 2 for a prior learning assessment had a three-fold purpose. First: The PLA instrument would recognize the ECE Credential Level 2 competencies that incumbent workforce members without college or credentials, through their professional development and other on-the-job learning, often develop over time. Since these competencies are embedded in course learning outcomes, whatever competencies the assessment taker evidence could be used to recommend prior learning credit (PLC) tied to ECE program courses. Second: The PLA instrument would identify which competencies of this credential level need further development. This allows a workforce candidate to pursue earning the ECE Credential Level 2 first by demonstrating competencies they already possess, earning the related college course credit toward an ECE degree. Then, the workforce candidate can personalize their credential pathway to subsequently take only the content/coursework needed while not spending time and money in content/coursework they already know and can show. Third: Most importantly, use of this instrument by higher-education institutions of both types (i.e., community colleges, universities) sends the clear message that workforce members' knowledge and skills are respected and recognized. Prior learning assessment, then, is seen as prior learning acknowledgment. In sum: Designing an instrument that assessed the 12 ECE Credential Level 2 competencies assured it ultimately could provide a means for awarding the ECE Credential Level 2 plus some ECE-focused college credit to the almost 13,000 known ECE field practitioners without either. For the workforce members who were part of this demographic at the launch of the project, this message was critical for higher education to send.

Continuing their partnership on this project, C-BEN was contracted to facilitate a pilot of the PLA instrument designed in 2021. C-BEN uses a virtual-reality platform developed by an award-winning technology company, Mursion, to present the assessment's exercises, or simulations, to the Learner (i.e., the test taker). C-BEN specifically trained a team of Simulation Specialists (SimS) to deliver the customized assessment exercises in a standardized manner. SimS are trained to power the simulation technology while using their unique skill sets in acting and gaming technology to deliver each assessment exercise within the parameters determined by Subject Matter Experts (SMEs), the Illinois faculty who participated in the instrument's creation in 2021. This promotes standardization and ensures that each Learner receives an equitable and fair assessment experience.

As described in further detail in this report, when Learners decide to take this assessment, they are linked to a web-based registration portal to make an appointment with a SimS for an (approximately) hour-long session to work through the assessment simulations. The session is recorded in its entirety. A link to the video capture is uploaded into the scoring platform, GoReact, for faculty to view. Trained Illinois ECE assessor faculty at the institutions evaluate the video performance and determine the prior learning credit (PLC) to be awarded. Those results are sent to the Learner by the institution, with further guidance on how to follow up to develop a degree progression plan that also leads to receiving the Gateways Level 2 ECE Credential.

Pilot Faculty Observation

Oh yes, we want us to pursue this [opportunity] to use the PLA instrument]. The ECE field is so desperate [due to the] shortage of quality educators who see this as a viable profession from which they can have satisfying work and make a living. This is one way to shorten the timeline and still assess accurately what their skills and competencies are.

The following sections describe the project's participants, work phases, and outcomes. The project leadership team included Dr. Jamilah Jor'dan, Executive Director, Governor's Office for Early Childhood Development (GOECD), who envisioned the direction for the project with INCCRRA leadership. INCCRRA leadership staff Julie Lindstrom and Joni Scritchlow provided ongoing oversight project management 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 Early Childhood Education Program Director at DePaul University, and Ms. Anne Brennan, Assistant Vice President of Academic Affairs at Oakton College. Dr. Tiffany Freeze of C-BEN spearheaded the facilitation and pilot of the instrument. As a well-respected national expert in CBE, Dr. Freeze jointly led the faculty workshops and assessor trainings with Dr. Donovan.

Pilot Faculty Story

I met with the assistant director for special education services and the program supervisor for speech language pathologists in Livingston County who both supervise early childhood classrooms, including Preschool for All, special education classrooms, plus blended programs. I explained the PLA pilot with details about the opportunity. I also present each year to the Illinois State University's principal's cohort. These students are already experienced teachers and are working towards a master's in administration. I explained the PLA project to them and how it could help their future employees gain college credit for their work experiences. They were very interested and have a workforce ready for this; they are very enthusiastic!

Pilot Implementation Project Steps

Piloting this ECE PLA instrument involved the following steps:

1. Regular leadership and faculty meetings
2. Identification of Learner recruitment strategies
3. Development of user-friendly enrollment and scheduling processes
4. Translation of materials into Spanish
5. Recommendation for PLC

Formal meetings were held monthly to update faculty representing each pilot institution on plans for the pilot, dates of launch, training offerings, debriefing progress, as well as to receive feedback, ask meaningful questions, hear from fellow faculty regarding implementation, etc. Meanwhile, leadership meetings were held bi-monthly to plan, problem-solve, discuss next steps, and communicate needs. (A full listing of formal meetings by date can be seen in Appendix F.) Additionally, extensive informal meetings, calls, and emails with faculty were supported by the leadership team throughout the project to discuss various topics (e.g., prior learning credit awarding criteria and procedures) and provide ongoing support (e.g., assessment scoring) as needed throughout the pilot process.

Pilot Implementation Project Components

A primary goal of this project was to pilot the comprehensive PLA instrument intended to measure an individual's prior learning across the 12 Gateways ECE Credential Level 2 competencies. To accomplish this goal, the following elements were identified to ensure a successful pilot:

- Authentic Assessment Exercises
- Standardization of Assessment Content and Delivery
- Assessor Training and Materials
- Standardization of Scoring Procedures
- Institution and Learner Recruitment Strategies
- User-friendly Enrollment and Scheduling Processes
- Recommendations for Prior Learning Credit

Once this work was underway, the need for a Spanish offering of the PLA instrument emerged in order to better meet Illinois incumbent diverse workforce needs. For the Spanish version of the PLA pilot, formal faculty meetings were combined with meetings in the Diverse Workforce Supports for Equity project and can be seen in the full report about this initiative (Appendix A: Resources). The entire PLA instrument developed in English, including the 15 assessment exercises as well as orientation and enrollment materials, were translated into Spanish by experts for use with Learners whose language preference is Spanish. PLA enrollment, delivery, and scoring followed the same processes and procedures established during the pilot phase of the PLA English version. Enrollment for the PLA Spanish version began in November 2022.

Authentic Assessment Exercises

Feedback received during the 2021 project to create the PLA instrument resulted in recommendations for creating customized virtual environments and avatars as well as supplemental materials for select assessment exercises. A number of faculty in the workgroups who created the PLA exercises expressed concern that the virtual environments and child avatars available through Mursion technology were not authentic to Illinois ECE environments and the actual demographics of the children in early care settings across the state.

Simulations are shown to be effective when they are contextualized to a Learner's personalized setting and situation. Authenticity is key to the success of using virtual reality technology to mirror a workplace situation that evokes Learners' real-to-life patterns of behavior, so they can be measured against professional performance standards. In using Mursion as the delivery platform for the assessment exercises, the authenticity of this instrument was grounded in an approach used by virtual reality developers termed the persuasive suspension of disbelief. Talking with an avatar—even one powered by a trained SimS knowledgeable about the scenario—can seem at first, for skeptical Learners, an awkward experience. The SimS are trained to lead Learners in suspending their disbelief in the 'virtual' aspect of the scenario's reality by fostering Learners' emotional buy-in and feelings of psychological safety as they work together through each scenario. Please see Appendix A: Resources to learn more about the persuasive suspension of disbelief and to access relevant research about how it is a cornerstone of virtual reality design.

Pilot Learner Observation

I just bought right into it.

Virtual Environments

Much of the feedback about the original draft virtual classroom environments concerned the target age depicted. Project faculty noted that the classroom furniture, objects, and other props were appropriate for children older than the target age of the prepared scenarios (i.e., preschool). As a result, action was taken in the 2021 project to create authentic virtual environments that more accurately represent an early childhood classroom environment in Illinois. To achieve this, faculty from across participating institutions were asked to submit real photos of Illinois-based ECE classrooms. Extending into 2022, the submitted photos were used to engage Mursion in creating virtual environments through customized artwork specifically for the state of Illinois. The design plan shown in Figure 2 was created based on the photos submitted by Illinois faculty.

Figure 2. Design Plan for Illinois PLA Customized Mursion Environments



An example of one customized virtual environment, Reading Area, can be seen in Figure 3. Additional examples of customized virtual environments can be found in Appendix B .

Figure 3. Customized Virtual Environment - Reading Area



Child Avatars

Mursion maintains a library of avatars available for client use that represents a range of demographics. Prior to this project, Mursion had child avatars primarily available at ages 5y and up. Figure 4 shows five child avatars from Mursion's pre-existing avatar library.

Figure 4. Child Avatars from Mursion's Pre-existing Avatar Library



Illinois ECE faculty SMEs provided detailed feedback addressing the age of the pre-existing child avatars. They voiced that these child avatars did not represent Illinois ECE child demographics in age or ethnicity. Based on this feedback, INCCRRA secured private philanthropic funding to develop customized child avatars in 2022 in order to create more accurate and authentic representations of the early childhood population in Illinois. To begin this needed customization work, Mursion first conducted a state of Illinois demographics analysis for students under the age of 5. With Illinois SME review and feedback, five customized child avatars were created specifically for use in Illinois PLA scenarios (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Illinois PLA Customized Child Avatars





Customization of Scenarios by Illinois ECE Faculty

During creation of the PLA exercises in 2021, faculty SMEs expressed their desire to supplement the virtual simulation scenario with activities that mirror the real-world workplace experience, for a more authentic and robust assessment experience. Five of the assessment exercises were identified as needing supplemental activities. As part of this pilot project, the supplemental activities were created as envisioned by the 2021 faculty workgroups in areas such as Human Growth and Development (HGD) and Health, Safety, and Well-Being (HSW). Supplemental activities included one set of anecdotal notes that Learners (i.e., the test-takers) have an opportunity to review before they begin their virtual simulation experience. This gives Learners the necessary background information that they would typically have available to them in a real-to-life situation. Additionally, four live actor videos were created for four of the assessment exercises. Prior to beginning their virtual simulation experience with the avatar, the Learner conducts an observation of a short live actor video, including teachers and children. The Learner is encouraged to take notes during the observation that will be used later in the simulation conversation with the avatar playing the role of the Learner's supervisor. This most closely resembles the real world in which the Learner would observe a situation that happens at work with children rather than reading about a situation. It should be recognized that live actor videos were filmed at the St. Vincent DePaul Center in Chicago with experienced EC teachers and preschool-age children from various centers acting in these vignettes. We especially thank all who participated and who made the video recording possible.

Pilot Faculty Observation

I love the technology and simulations as something different than just showing written work. It's an awesome way for students who have those skills to demonstrate [them].

Standardization of Assessment Content and Delivery

The intent of this PLA instrument is to provide incumbent or previous EC workforce members who need a Gateways ECE Level 2 Credential an opportunity to demonstrate their workplace learning that can be evaluated for credit by ECE faculty at any Illinois institution using the same criteria and yielding similar credit hours. During the initial phase of this project in 2021, the leads researched the current landscape of PLA use in Illinois institutions, for all majors not only those in ECE. They found that Illinois's practices and policies surrounding the development and use of PLA mirrored that of the other states. The only standardized prior learning assessment instruments used for awarding credit before this instrument's development were national exams such as AP, CLEP, and DSST. The balance of instruments and approaches were developed by faculty in programs at their institutions (e.g., portfolios, challenge exams, papers) or were based upon diploma examinations (e.g., the International Baccalaureate Diploma) and professional training and certifications (e.g., CPR, EMT, and Paramedic; CNC, Welding, and CAD). Even when using national exams, not all institutions consistently awarded the same course credit in hours or content for them. These inconsistencies in methods are among the factors known to influence the transfer issues faced by students who earn credit through PLA. The 'lesson learned' from this project's initial phase was how valuable and critical the standardization of this instrument would be for the ECE field's transfer students, especially. There is no other instrument used for ECE's (or any other major's) PLA in Illinois that is administered and assessed by using the same exact criteria, across ECE programs, across institution types (i.e., community colleges and universities, public and private).

Content standardization was achieved by basing the assessment exercises on the clearly defined competencies and performance expectations articulated in the Gateways to Opportunity® Early Childhood Educator (ECE) Credential Framework. This instrument is designed to measure the Learner's ability to evidence all 12 required Gateways ECE Credential Level 2 competencies. Each exercise requires demonstration of the knowledge, skills, and intellectual behaviors that define a particular competency area (e.g., Family and Community Relations, Personal Professional Development). The Illinois Gateways competency framework describes what proficient performance looks like at varying levels of mastery. Table 1 outlines the competencies of the Gateways ECE Credential Level 2. The competencies of the subsequent Credential levels (3-6) are listed in Appendix C.

Table 1. Illinois Gateways to Opportunity® ECE Credential Level 2 Competencies

Competency Area	Competencies
Family and Community Relationships (FCR)	<p>FCR1: Outlines the role and influence of families and communities on children's development, learning, and the early childhood setting</p> <p>FCR2: Identifies culturally and linguistically responsive communication and collaboration strategies designed to engage families in their children's care and education</p> <p>FCR3: Identifies and models respect for families by using strengths-based, culturally responsive practices</p>
Health, Safety, and Wellbeing (HSW)	<p>HSW1: Articulates components of a safe and healthy environment</p> <p>HSW2: Maintains a safe and healthy environment</p>
Human Growth and Development (HGD)	<p>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</p> <p>HGD2: Describes the interrelationship between developmental domains, holistic well-being, and adaptive/living skills</p> <p>HGD3: Defines how cultural, familial, biological, and environmental influences, including stress, trauma, protective factors, and resilience, impact children's well-being and learning</p>
Interactions, Relationships, and Environment (IRE)	<p>IRE1: Describes the role of the environment in supporting children's development</p> <p>IRE2: Articulates the importance of relationships in supporting positive developmental and behavioral outcomes</p>
Personal Professional Development (PPD)	<p>PPD 1: Demonstrates professionalism in image, behavior, and disposition</p> <p>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</p>

These 12 competencies are considered functional in nature. Functional competencies are best evaluated through performance-based means that challenge the Learner to demonstrate them in authentic, real-to-workplace-life situations. Performance-based assessments enable the assessor (in this project, trained Illinois faculty) to determine the degree of proficiency the Learner possesses. This assessment is powered by a blend of artificial intelligence and live human interaction situated in an immersive virtual reality platform. By using trained acting professionals to orchestrate the interactions between the Learner and the scenarios' avatar-based characters, the assessment simulations achieve the realism of a typical workday where the required competencies must be applied. Figure 6 shows one example of a virtual assessment environment used in real time during the assessment. The environment is the backdrop within which the Learner and avatar interact during simulations of the scenarios developed by the Project faculty and validated by the Subject Matter Experts (SMEs). The creation of the standardized assessment exercises was completed during the 2021 project (see Appendix A: Resources, in the Gateways ECE Credential Level 2 Prior Learning Assessment report to learn more about the standardized design process), and further refined during this 2022 project.

Figure 6. Example Assessment Environment Customized for Illinois PLA



Four scenarios created by project faculty and workshopped with employers and students, and then revised, were used in the pilot. These four simulations assessed all 12 ECE Credential Level 2 competencies outlined in Table 1. Table 2 outlines which competencies and their sub competencies were designed to be elicited by each simulation. All Learners were required to complete all four simulations during their assessment sessions.

Table 2. Competencies Assessed in Pilot Learner Cohort per Simulation

PILOT 2022	FCR 1	FCR 2	FCR 3	PPD 1	PPD 2	HGD 1	HGD 2	HGD 3	IRE 1	IRE 2	HSW 1	HSW 2
FCR Scenario 1 Sebas Dev Rev	X	X	X	X			X	X		X		
PPD Scenario 2 Job Fair					X							
HGD Scenario 3 Bathroom Acc	X			X		X	X	X				
IRE Scenario 2 Family Interview	X	X	X	X				X	X	X	X	X

Learners who successfully demonstrate competencies are recommended for prior learning credit corresponding to the particular Gateways ECE Credential Level 2 competencies evidenced. Learners who demonstrate all 12 Gateways ECE Credential Level 2 competencies on this assessment and earn the related course credit are eligible to apply for the Gateways ECE Credential Level 2.

As important as standardization is in the design of the assessment exercises, standardization is equally important in the delivery of the assessment exercises. As noted above, this prior learning assessment is powered by a blend of artificial intelligence and live human interaction through an immersive virtual reality platform.

Trained acting professionals, called Simulation Specialists (SimS), orchestrate interactions between the Learner and avatar-based characters, controlling gesturing, facial expressions, voice calibration, and responses to Learners for up to eight avatars per simulation. In order to achieve standardization in deliveries across SimS, a considerable training and certification process is followed. Each SimS is robustly trained in the technology and software used to power the simulation exercises. In addition, SimS are trained and must successfully complete a check-out process in order to be certified to deliver each simulation according to the parameters set in the design process by SMEs such as Hits/Misses and Planned Challenges. (See [Gateways ECE Level 2 Credential Prior Learning Assessment](#) for a full description.) Fidelity checklists are used to standardize the training and certification process for each SimS, ensuring delivery in a standardized manner and, in turn, creating an equitable and fair assessment experience across Learners. (See Figure 7 for an example fidelity checklist.) A team of four SimS were trained and certified to deliver the Illinois ECE PLA exercises in English and Spanish.

Figure 7. Example Fidelity Checklist



IL PLA Project_HGD_Scenario 3 (Human Growth and Development)

Fidelity Checklist Item
<input type="checkbox"/> Host Avatar: Welcome
<input type="checkbox"/> Welcomes learner into assessment experience.
<input type="checkbox"/> Verifies name of learner.
<input type="checkbox"/> Ensures the learner's audio and video are working. If not, the session is rescheduled.
<input type="checkbox"/> Asks the learner if they have any questions and answers to the best of their ability.
<input type="checkbox"/> Simulation Exercise
<input type="checkbox"/> Shows the learner the learner-facing vignette and any pre-assessment materials (none for HGD_Scenario 3).
<input type="checkbox"/> Presents all beats of HGD_Scenario 3. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Set up the conversation by letting learner know you are there to pick up Alex and ask about his day. <input type="checkbox"/> If needed, show concern and ask learner what kind of accident Alex had if not specified by learner. <input type="checkbox"/> Apologize for Alex's accident at school. <input type="checkbox"/> If needed, prompt the learner to talk about Alex's accidents at home. <input type="checkbox"/> If needed, prompt the learner to talk about possible contributing factors at home (e.g., recent move, Alex having his own bedroom for the first time). <input type="checkbox"/> Ask learner about Alex's current state (e.g., if Alex is embarrassed, how he's doing).
<input type="checkbox"/> Close out scenario by letting them know you are going to go take care of Alex and thank them for letting you know.
<input type="checkbox"/> Follows Planned Challenges, Hits, and Miss parameters standardized for HGD_Scenario 3.
<input type="checkbox"/> Host Avatar: Debrief
<input type="checkbox"/> Welcomes learner out of the assessment experience.
<input type="checkbox"/> Asks learner the outlined debrief questions.
<input type="checkbox"/> Communicates next steps to the learner that a faculty member will communicate their results and potential pathways with them. ▼

Assessor Trainings and Materials

During the 2021 project, 58 faculty from 48 Illinois institutions completed the initial assessor training to review and score Learner assessments. Due to time and institutional capacity to participate, eight Illinois institutions and their trained assessors engaged in the 2022 PLA pilot. (An additional institution joined to pilot the Spanish language version developed subsequently during the pilot.) Because there was a lapse of time between their initial training in 2021 and conducting pilot scoring in 2022, additional assessor training and assessor refresher sessions were held to review assessment methodology, scoring procedures, and assessor materials. (See the initial assessor training agenda in Figure 8.) Ongoing refreshers and new assessor trainings were held during fall 2022 as needed and requested for any and all interested faculty from each of the institutions who piloted this work. Project leads were on-call throughout the pilot for both the English and Spanish versions, offering insights, advice, and recommendations as requested by assessors.

Figure 8. Faculty Assessor Initial Training Agenda

Assessor Training Agenda	
IL ECE PLA Project Overview <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goals • Work to Date • Plan for Implementation Assessment Technology <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to Mursion • Research Base • Validity and Reliability • Authenticity • Inclusion and Accessibility • Simulation Specialist Behavioral Assessment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scoring Methodology <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Direct Observation ◦ Predetermined Criteria • Validity • Reliability PPD Simulation and Measurement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competencies Measured • Scenarios • Scoring Tools • Scoring Practice IRE Simulation and Measurement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competencies Measured • Scenarios • Scoring Tools • Scoring Practice 	HGD Simulation and Measurement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competencies Measured • Scenarios • Scoring Tools • Scoring Practice HSW Simulation and Measurement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competencies Measured • Scenarios • Scoring Tools • Scoring Practice FCR Simulation and Measurement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competencies Measured • Scenarios • Scoring Tools • Scoring Practice Processes and Procedures <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learner Assessment Videos • Assessment Security • Assessment Results • Awarding PLA credit

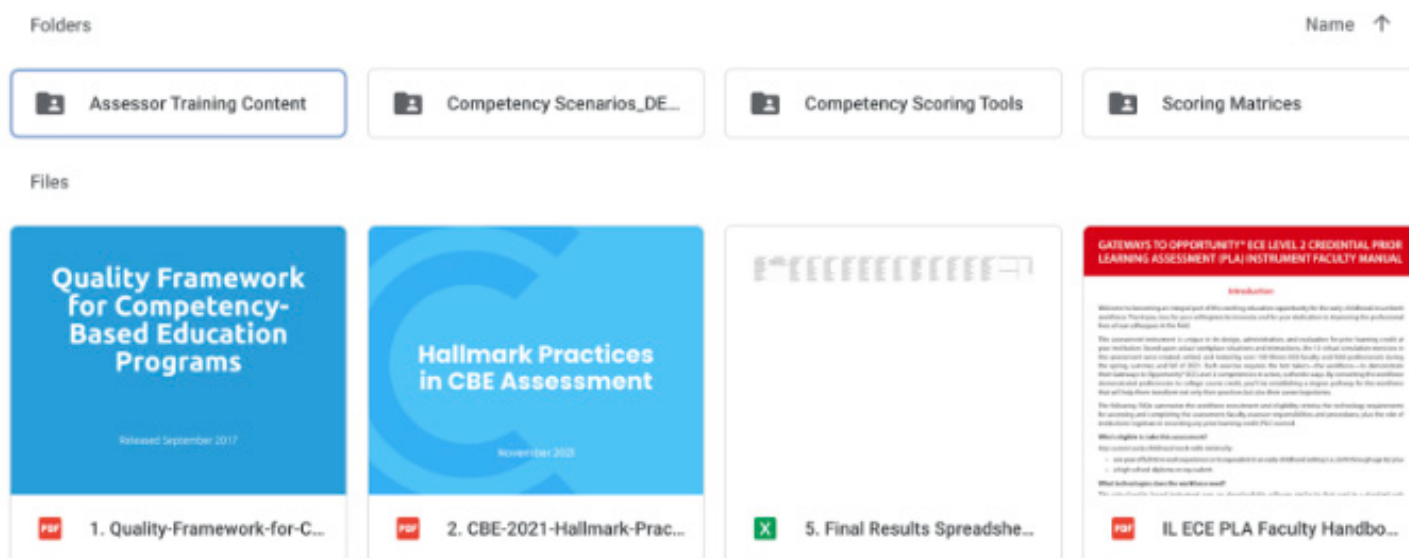
Assessor binders were created as a resource for faculty, so they would have all necessary review and scoring materials in one convenient virtual location. Assessor binders were assigned by institution and included the materials listed in Figure 9.

Pilot Faculty Observation

This type of program fits best with learners that are full-time employees, so they can pull all kinds of things based on the scenarios and questions. The scenarios are so appropriate and align with their work experiences, unlike other [PLA assessment] types like portfolio.

Figure 9. Virtual Assessor Binder Contents

1. Assessor Training Content: Video recordings of initial assessor training in 2021
2. Quality Framework for Competency-Based Education Programs: Resource released by C-BEN in 2017 and referenced in assessor training (see Appendix A)
3. Hallmark Practices in CBE Assessment: Resource released by C-BEN in 2021 and referenced in assessor training
4. Illinois ECE PLA Faculty Handbook: Faculty manual created in 2021 project that outlines policies and procedures of Illinois ECE PLA implementation (see Appendix D)
5. Competency Scenarios: Standardized delivery templates of each assessment exercise
6. Competency Scoring Tools: Rubrics designed for scoring each competency area
7. Scoring Matrices: Resource for identifying the competency areas measured in each assessment simulation exercise (see Figure 9)



Standardization of Assessment Scoring Procedures

Another significant deliverable for 2022 was the adoption of GoReact technology to conduct the scoring of the assessment video capture for each Learner. More than 800 institutions of higher education are using GoReact to streamline assessment while boosting student experience on campus or online. GoReact is being used in teacher education, nursing education, behavioral sciences, communication, sign and foreign languages, performing arts, and many other fields. This software continues to [win awards](#) for its innovative features designed to help faculty assess, coach, and provide targeted feedback to students through its platform.

For this project, the GoReact tool is used to streamline observation of Learner demonstrations, tag examples and nonexamples of Learner behavior indicative of identified competencies, and score Learner performance aligned with the predetermined criteria of the ECE Credential Level 2 competencies. This type of technology makes the behavioral scoring process much more efficient than the manual process, thus saving assessors valuable time. Additionally, an assessor's ability to tag examples and nonexamples of Learner behavior that align with the predetermined criteria indicative of successful performance of competency provides a defensible assessment process.

More specifically, each faculty assessor is registered in the GoReact system. When a Learner video demonstration is completed for their respective institution, the assessor is notified of "unviewed video submissions." The assessor logs in to their unique GoReact instance assigned to their respective institution. A list of Learner video demonstrations ready for scoring are visible to the assessor. The assessor selects a Learner demonstration for scoring and uses direct observation methodology to analyze that Learner's performance in the simulation exercise. Tagging technology, as shown in Figure 10 below, is used to timestamp examples and nonexamples of Learner behavior relative to the Gateways ECE Level 2 competencies (see labeled colored circles, e.g., H1, and their corresponding competencies on the right in the screenshot). These behavioral data are then mapped against the predetermined competency criteria to determine a rating of 'proficient' or 'not yet proficient' in each competency area (see Figure 11).

Figure 10. GoReact Tagging Technology

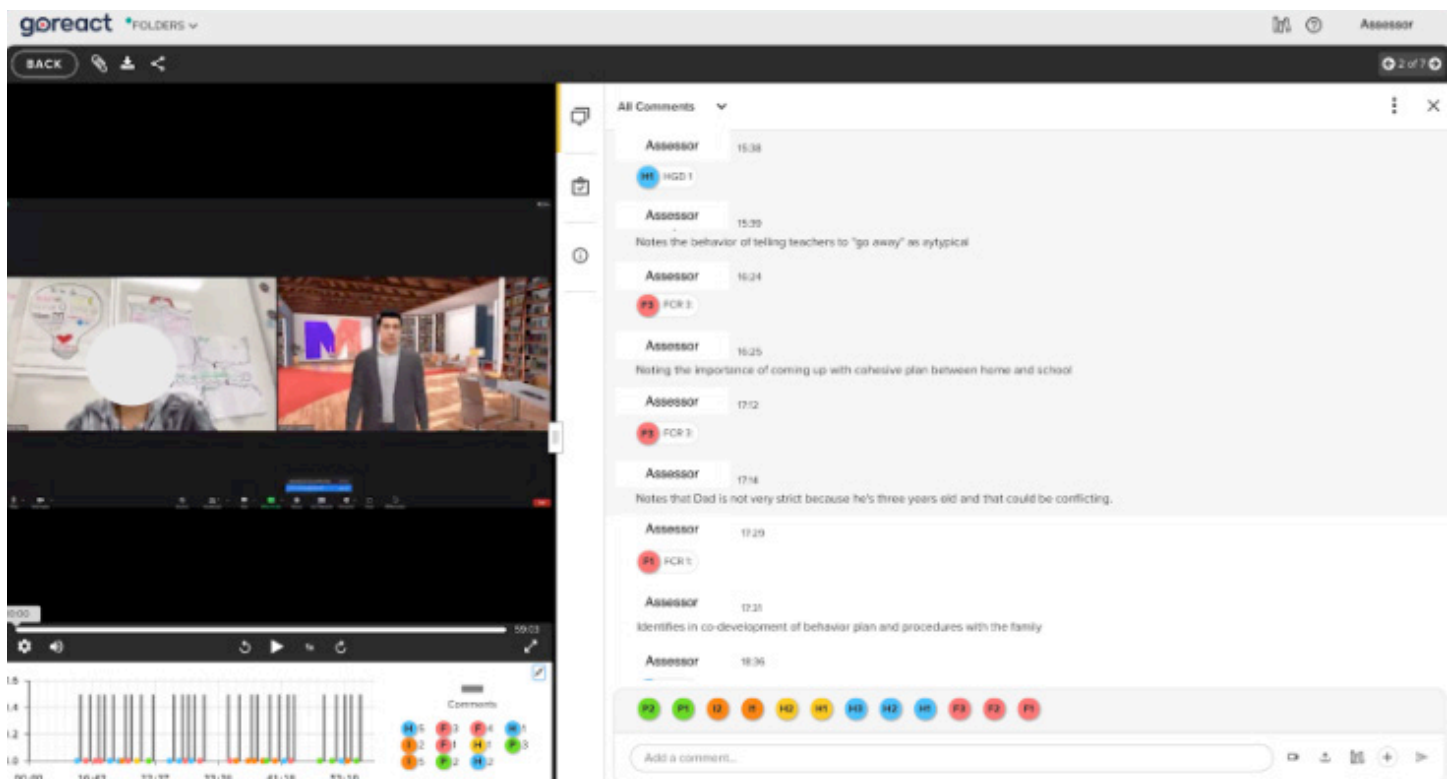
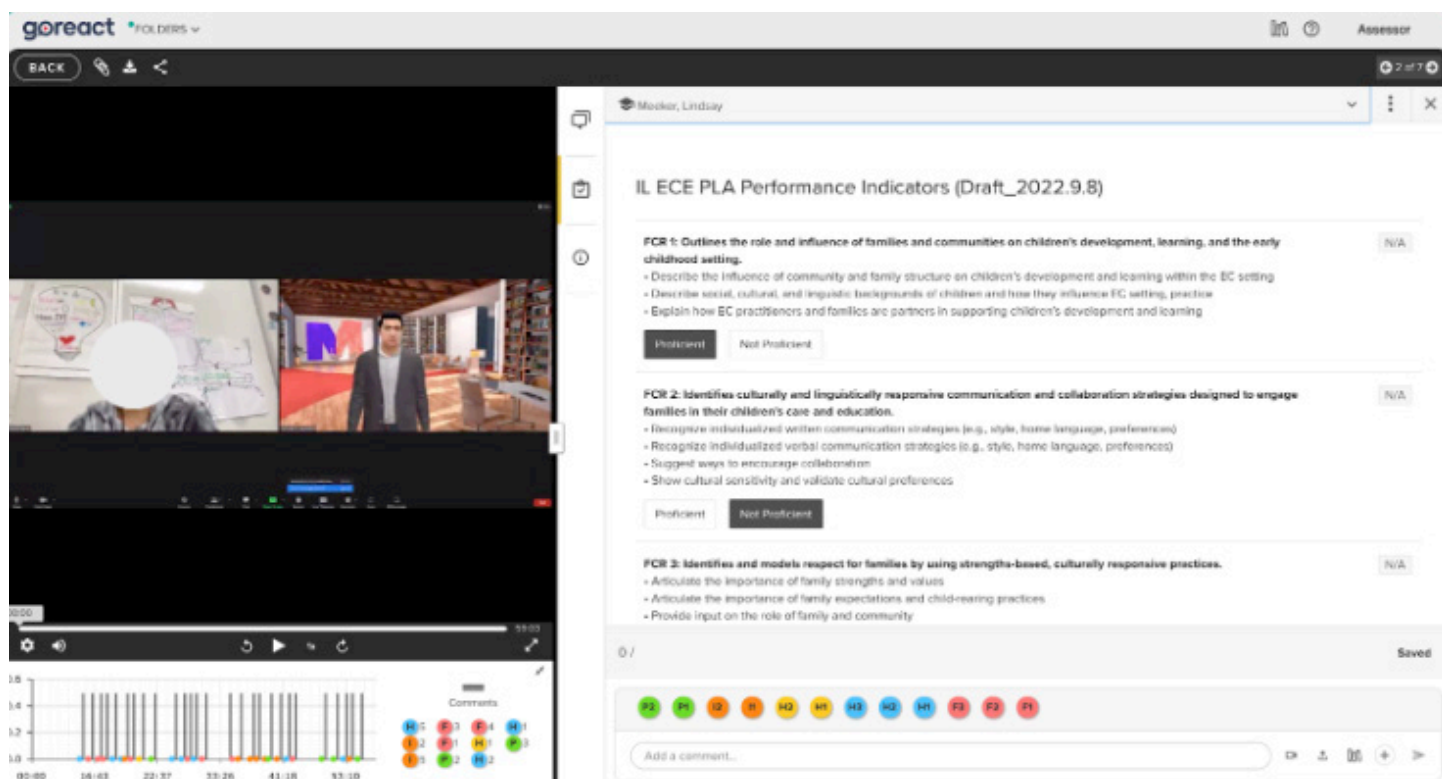


Figure 11. GoReact Proficiency Rating Technology



Pilot Institution and Learner Recruitment Strategies

After the conclusion of the PLA project in 2021, all institutions involved in the creation of the PLA instrument were sent an email inviting them to continue the project into the 2022 PLA pilot implementation. A subgroup of the initial institutions who felt they had the capacity to engage in implementation stepped forward to pilot. The institutions and respective faculty involved in the 2022 PLA Project included the following:

English Version

Chicago State University	Dr. Patricia Steinhaus and Dr. Inna Dolzhenko
Eastern Illinois University	Dr. Sham'ah Md-Yunus
Governors State University	Dr. Katy Hisrich
Heartland Community College	Dr. Johnna Darragh Ernst, Julie Cotter, Teri Wilson, Joellen Scott and Margherita Davita
Kishwaukee College	Judson Curry, Meryl Kleiner and Maria Lombardo
McHenry College	Dr. Dawn A. Katz and Lisha Linder
National Louis University	Dr. Lisa Downey, Shawntay King, Kamilah Wilson, Jolene Taylor, Dr. Alicia Meno, Leslie Layman, Nathalis Mosqueda and Kimberlee Hendricks
Western Illinois University	Dr. Lindsay Meeker

Spanish Version

College of Lake County	Marcela Calderon Duran
National Louis University	Dr. Alicia Meno, Nathalis Mosqueda, Nia Duenas, and Leticia Ramirez
Western Illinois University	Dr. Lindsay Meeker, Eduardo Perez, Carla Paciotto, and Gloria Delany-Barmann

A significant component of the pilot implementation was recruitment of incumbent or previous workforce members interested in taking the assessment. Institutions approached this in a variety of ways. Some institutions recruited from their current student populations; some institutions embedded the assessment experience in their courses as an assignment; others solely recruited from employer partners. A Learner handout and orientation video were created as materials for institutions to use in their marketing strategy for the PLA opportunity. The Learner handout includes a welcome message, purpose and description of the PLA, scheduling instructions, and troubleshooting resources (see Appendix E).

A valuable suggestion resulting from a faculty meeting was the creation of an orientation video to better explain this PLA opportunity, emphasizing how it provides an alternative way to demonstrate professional knowledge and skill connected to college course content that does not involve taking a test or creating written artifacts. The goal of the Learner orientation video is to show Learners how this assessment is designed to naturally engage them in demonstrating their professional learning where and how it matters most: in facing every day, authentic workplace challenges. The video's text overlays that pop up on the screen alongside the narrator's voiceover and animation combine to lead Learners to realize how despite the assessment environment being virtual, their experiences within it will feel real. Please see Appendix A: Resources for the Learner Orientation Video link - English and Spanish Versions.

User-Friendly Enrollment and Scheduling Process

It was well understood that a user-friendly enrollment and scheduling process would be essential to the success of the PLA project. To test this process prior to the full pilot, a pre-pilot phase was implemented with approximately ten Learners invited to participate, eight of whom matriculated through the full process.

The enrollment process was as follows:

1. Faculty issue invitation to potential participants
2. Faculty share enrollment link to potential participants
 - a. [Enrollment Form - English Version](#)
 - b. [Enrollment Form - Spanish Version](#)
3. Potential PLA participants send enrollment form to
 - a. PLAinfo@inccrra.org - English Version
 - b. PLAEspanol@inccrra.org - Spanish Version
4. INCCRRA reviews enrollment form to validate pilot criteria to participate have been met
5. INCCRRA sends welcome email/workforce handout (cc faculty) to the participant
6. INCCRRA sends C-BEN the approved enrollment form

7. C-BEN sends participant an invite from Mursion to schedule their assessment session
8. Participant schedules their assessment according to the Learner Handout instructions shown below.

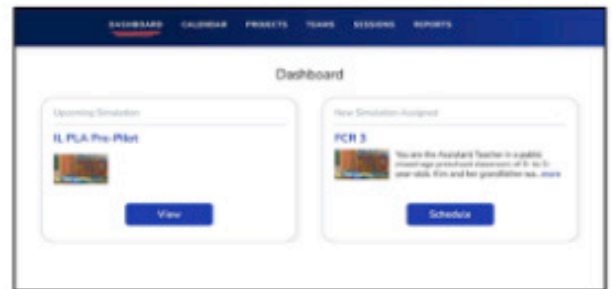
Scheduling

Option 1: When the Learner is scheduling the session



Look for an email from no-reply@mursion.com to register your account.

Click Create an Account. Read the User Agreement and Click Accept. Enter your account information. Click Save Changes. **Note:** Once your account is registered, you should always log in at portal.mursion.com. You can discard the registration email.



Click on the project that has been assigned to you under the Dashboard tab.

The project name is IL PLA Pre-Pilot.



Select the date and time that works best and click the purple Submit button.

Note: The Submit button at the bottom of the screen will turn purple after you select the date and time. You must also confirm your time zone and check the box to confirm your agreement to Mursion's simulation delivery model and code of conduct.



You will see the session on your calendar once it is scheduled.

Click on the session to review the scenario, view session resources, or cancel your session.



Look out for an email confirmation.

You will also receive a reminder for your session from this email address.



Attend Your Session

Three ways to access your session:

1. From your personal calendar:

The confirmation email contains a downloadable calendar invite.

2. Email:

Session confirmation email has a Star Session button.

3. Mursion Portal:

Click on the session in the [Mursion Portal](https://portal.mursion.com) calendar and click the Attend Session button.

The pre-pilot brought several suggestions for change in the enrollment process to make the process more user-friendly. Four of the key challenges documented are noted below.

1. Learners were not comfortable or proficient with the needed technological skills to submit the enrollment form by printing and submitting via picture or pdf.
2. Invites to schedule for the assessment were going to SPAM folders.
3. Invites to schedule for the assessment were from no-reply@mursion.com and thought to potentially be a phishing email, so they were not trusted.
4. Learners scheduled themselves for several assessment sessions when only one is needed.

To address these enrollment and scheduling barriers, the following steps were taken:

1. Faculty provided sessions with Learners to walk them through the enrollment process and support was provided as needed to successfully submit the enrollment form. Future plans involve the creation of a fillable form submitted virtually with data storage capabilities to enhance the automaticity of the enrollment process.
2. The welcome and scheduling email that participants received from INCCRRA was edited to include information about what to expect from the assessment scheduling invite. Text was added to alert participants that they must check their SPAM folders if they do not see the participation invitation email in a timely manner. Text also was added to inform participants that their assessment scheduling invite would come from no-reply@mursion.com and it was safe to open.
3. Once a participant completed their assessment, their assignment to those assessment exercises were promptly removed, in turn, removing their ability to schedule the PLA again.

Institutions reported that these changes resulting from the pre-pilot resulted in a much more efficient and user-friendly enrollment and scheduling process.

Translation of Materials into Spanish

To achieve the goal of making the PLA opportunity accessible in both English and Spanish, all materials relevant to the PLA project were created in Spanish as well, including the enrollment form, post-assessment survey, Learner handout, faculty manual, assessment delivery templates, Learner-facing emails, and any other relevant materials for the PLA project.

Using the orientation video that was developed for the English PLA project, a new version was created using Spanish translation wording on screen and voiceover work in Spanish for the Spanish PLA project. Please see Appendix A: Resources for the Learner Orientation Video Link - Spanish Version.

Pilot Faculty Observation

This [instrument] is user friendly and what the Learners are looking for.

Recommendations for Prior Learning Credit

Based on the findings of this project's initial phase, several recommendations for establishing a statewide infrastructure for awarding competency-based prior learning credit were made in late 2021. Table 3 summarizes the 2021 recommended changes and those that have been acted upon to date. As shown in the table, significant strides related to awarding prior learning credit were made during the 2022 PLA project. While some recommendations are still under continued deliberation at the statewide system level, to keep this project moving forward, institutions were given the flexibility to award credit in a manner that best serves their respective Learner populations, program needs, and institutional criteria.

Once Learner assessments were scored, institutional staff/faculty communicated the results to Learners and made the credit recommendations to their registrars. This was handled uniquely by each institution. Some had the necessary policies and procedures already in place or created them for this type of PLA at their institutions. In creating their internal systems, project faculty used the overarching policies and procedures related to the articulation of credit outlined in the project's Faculty Handbook.

Table 3. Updates to Prior Learning Credit–associated Recommendations from 2021

<i>Recommendations Made January 2022</i>	<i>Proposed Timeline</i>	<i>Potential Entities Responsible</i>	<i>Status December 2022</i>
Establish Preliminary Assessment Taker Eligibility and Attempt Policies	January-March 2022	GOECD, ECACE, and INCCRRA leadership	Established in Summer 2022
Create a Faculty Assessor Pool/ Establish an Assessor Certification and Recertification Process	January-March 2022	GOECD, ECACE, and INCCRRA leadership	Pool established Summer 2022; specific assessor recertification process steps under discussion
Establish and Test Steps for Students to Attempt PLA and Earn Badges for Competencies Evidenced	February-August 2022	GOECD, ECACE, and INCCRRA leadership	PLA instrument registration and guidance through Illinois Gateways website now readily available, in two languages (Spanish developed/added during pilot); assessors at eight institutions certified in both test versions; PLA earns credit in the ECE major; statewide badging proposal on hold
Conduct a Phased Roll-out for the Instrument and Process	February-August 2022	GOECD, ECACE, and INCCRRA leadership	Pilot completed December 2022, in both languages; registrations and completions, instrument continuous improvement process underway for both versions
Make Additional Amendments to the ICCB System Rules Manual that Allow Colleges to Conduct PLA Before 15 Credit Hours are Earned	In time for inclusion in the 2022 System Rules Manual update	For determination by the ICCB Executive Director	Recommendations for changes to Rules were approved by ICCB Board and proposed at the 10 January 2023 JCAR meeting, for final approval and inclusion in the ICCB System Rules Manual
Articulate the AAS Courses Through the IAI EC Panel	May 2023	ICCB Executive Director, IAI Director	No action
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'	For inclusion in the 2022 Rules Manual update	ICCB Executive Director	Proposal submitted to ICCB agency; no further action by agency

In creating their internal ECE program frameworks for awarding PLC from this assessment, many faculty relied upon their mapped Gateways ECE Credential Level 2 competencies and planned learning objectives within their current courses in making recommendations and awarding credit. One example of a competency-learning objective correlation map is shown in Figure 12, specific to the three Human, Growth, and Development competencies of the Level 2 Credential that are contained within this first-year ECE course. This type of mapping makes it clear how the PLA results correlate to achievement of the course learning objectives, and how the credit can be awarded.

Figure 12. Example Competency-Course Learning Objective Alignment Map

	Gateways Competency	Course Objective/s	Assignment
Human Growth & Development	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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describe the physical, psychological, social and emotional, cognitive/intellectual, and linguistic development of diverse students from birth through adolescence and apply this information to classroom situations Describe the major theories and theorists that have influenced classroom instruction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Virtual Child Project All Class Lectures
	HGD2: Describes the interrelationship between developmental domains, holistic well-being, and adaptive/living skills.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describe the physical, psychological, social and emotional, cognitive/intellectual, and linguistic development of diverse students from birth through adolescence and apply this information to classroom situations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Domain Project and Presentation Virtual Child Project Class Activity: Developmental Milestones
	HGD3: Defines how cultural, familial, biological, and environmental influences, including stress, trauma, protective factors, and resilience, impact children's well-being, and learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop an understanding of universal, ethnic, societal, and individual contributions and variations in the developmental process Support cultural understanding and diversity in the classroom and consider how a student's culture can shape their behaviors and perceptions. Explain how genes and environment experiences are mutually influential during <u>development</u> and describe how teachers can customize educational strategies according to children's unique genetic profiles. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Virtual Child Project Lecture Chapter 3 Lecture Chapter 4

Other institutions have modularized their ECE program curriculum, meaning each competency is cleanly mapped to a Learner module or unit of content. In this way, competencies can easily be recommended for credit while those not demonstrated can be developed through other module content and activities.

Project Outcomes Based on Goals

Goal 1: Conducting a diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) review, also known as a sensitivity and bias review, to ensure that the information presented within the PLA scenarios do not unintentionally offend or bias Learners on the basis of personal characteristics such as gender, race, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, disability, or geographic region.

The primary objective of this project was to create an equitable PLA experience for all Learners. As a part of that goal, it was as important to ensure to the extent possible that the content of the assessment exercises met the same expectation of equity. As such, a thorough recruitment process to obtain recognized national experts in conducting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) reviews was initiated. The final panel of DEI expert reviewers included:

- Dr. Jaclyn Russo, Early Childhood Research Scientist, Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning, University of Virginia
- Dr. Sana Shaikh, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion Program Manager, Curriculum Associates
- Dr. Ginny Vitiello, Assistant Professor/Research Faculty, Curry School of Education and Human Development, University of Virginia
- Dr. Kate Zimmer, Director, BIRCH Professional Learning Center, Branch Alliance for Educator Diversity (BranchED)

Sensitivity and bias reviews are designed to ensure that the information presented within a scenario does not unintentionally offend or bias Learners on the basis of personal characteristics such as gender, race, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, disability, or geographic region. More specifically, the special goals of the sensitivity and bias review completed included the following:

- Confirm that the assessment scenarios are providing practice for the designated skills - and any irrelevant information or unrelated skill evaluation is avoided.
- Ensure that scenario content avoids angering, offending, upsetting, or otherwise distracting Learners during a session.
- Validate that scenario materials are grounded in respectful representation and treatment of all members of various cultures (ethnicity, race, nationality, language, gender, physical diversity, neurodiversity, age, sexual orientation, place of origin, beliefs, and other cultural characteristics).

The DEI panel was informed that the materials they were reviewing would be used as test items for assessing the professional development level of incumbent or former early childhood workers without credentials, in order to award prior learning credit based upon demonstration of professional competencies. The panel was aware that the scenarios under their review were based on real-life examples that ECE educators are likely to encounter in their classrooms, and were developed by Subject Matter Experts (SMEs). They knew that the descriptions in the scenarios would be used by the actors powering the PLA instrument's avatars as they interacted with the Learners completing the assessment in the virtual-reality environment. The panel was directed to consider the following in conducting their reviews:

- Avatar (Name, Physical Presentation)
 - Is there anything about the name or physical presentation of the avatar that might offend, bias, or unfairly penalize Learners on the basis of personal characteristics such as gender, race, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, physical diversity, neurodiversity, or geographic region?
 - Is there anything about the name or the physical presentation of the avatar that might portray any group or group member in a demeaning, offensive, condescending, or insensitive way?
- Scenario Vignette (i.e., the introduction to the scenario read by the Learner before starting the simulation with the avatar); Planned Challenges, Performance Objectives, Hits and Misses, Internal Vignette texts (i.e., the directions for the SimS to follow in delivering the scenario)
 - Might any of these materials offend, bias, or unfairly penalize Learners on the basis of personal characteristics such as gender, race, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, physical diversity, neurodiversity, or geographic region?
 - Do the materials include portrayals of any group or group member in a demeaning, offensive, condescending, or insensitive way?
 - Do the materials stereotype any groups with respect to activities, emotions, language, or characteristics?
 - Do the materials contain activities familiar to only one class or subset of the population or an activity that is not familiar to a broad set of diverse Learners?
 - Do the materials represent preferences or dominance of values from any one class or subset of the population?

The results of the national DEI review were shared with a group of Illinois DEI SME faculty for final determination of the changes specific to Illinois. Recommendations were provided along with specific examples from the scenario texts and included the following:

- Keep descriptions of avatar’s actions specific and behavioral
- Standardize the types of information provided in the descriptions of the avatars
- Remove specific details about adult and child avatar demographics and cultural background when unnecessary
- Use precise and inclusive language when describing race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, physical diversity, neurodiversity, family structures, etc.
- Provide careful descriptions of avatar behaviors and preferences
- Remove extraneous details that could introduce potential bias into the avatar portrayal/scenario delivery
- Use more neutral language in the suggested avatar responses
- Define subjective terms like “professional,” “supportive,” “carefree,” etc. with clear examples of related behaviors
- Incorporate avatar responses that are consonant with their perspectives and circumstances

Additionally, specific feedback, including edits and additions, from each national SME panelist were shared, reviewed, and considered by the Illinois DEI SMEs (see Illinois DEI SMEs in Table 4 below). Final edits were made to each scenario based on the national DEI review and the Illinois DEI SME’s accepted recommendations. One scenario’s entire set of avatar interactions was reworked to align with the panel’s suggestions.

Table 4. Illinois Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion SMEs

Carolyn Beal	Southwestern Illinois College
Anne Brennan	Oakton College
Dr. Marcus Brown	Illinois Community College Board
Christi Chadwick	Project Director, Early Childhood Consortium
Dr. Patricia Chamberlain	Chicago State University
Dr. Johnna Darragh Ernst	Heartland Community College
Dr. Marie Donovan	DePaul University
Dr. Lisa Downey	National Louis University
Melvin Harrison	Illinois Community College Board
Dr. Lindsay Meeker	Western Illinois University
Diane Schael	College of Lake County
Kamilah Wilson	National Louis University

Goal 2: *Providing access to a standardized, competency-based simulation instrument in both English and Spanish versions that assesses incumbent early childhood workforce members’ prior learning for awarding college credit.*

Based on their knowledge of the workforce, faculty developers knew from the start in creating this PLA instrument that ‘providing access’ to the instrument didn’t only involve creating a seamless registration and assessment completion process. This goal, then, was multifaceted. Reaching it involved building a robust registration process and platform as well as educating the workforce that the instrument was available for their use, and why it was of benefit. You can’t and won’t access what you don’t know about or understand.

Faculty realized that simply registering to take the assessment would be a ‘big step’ for many Learners (i.e., those taking the assessment) since they had not pursued any college credit in the past. It was impossible to know whether or how the virtual-reality platform used for administering it would influence Learners’ interest or enthusiasm for attempting the assessment. During the instrument’s initial workshopping phase with employers, the Project leadership team interviewed them about whether these factors might deter staff from attempting to access it and following through. It was gratifying to learn they thought their eligible staff

wouldn't be deterred from attempting the assessment, given statewide awareness of a significant college tuition scholarship opportunity for them through the Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity (ECACE). Employers shared how since one of the main barriers to accessing college—affordability—wouldn't be as significant an issue for the duration of the scholarship (ends 30 June 2024), staff buy-in could be greater than expected. These employers also noted that many staff rely upon online professional development and learning already, as well as enjoy playing video games in their off hours, so the virtual-reality environment setting for the assessment might not be a significant deterrent to deciding to access it. What they did observe as a potential snag in accessing the instrument was time. The staff being targeted for participation work long days, Monday through Friday, and so would need evening and weekend appointments to take the test.

Reflecting upon this feedback, as well as being active participants in the roll-out of the ECACE, Project faculty designed their recruitment and access approach to capitalize upon their Consortium work with local centers and schools. Sharing information about this PLA instrument option was included in the ECACE scholarship recruitment information disseminated by institutions participating in the instrument's pilot. ECACE Navigators (who are not employees of the institutions) and Recruiters (who are institutional employees) were trained in understanding the instrument and how to counsel staff (i.e., their potential students) in registering to take it. Email texts as well as online information about the instrument's availability also included links to written and video descriptions of the instrument's format, what Learners could expect to encounter when taking the test, and how to specifically determine whether they had the necessary technology interface needed to participate. All potential Learners knew they could learn more about the instrument and how to access it through multiple sources with which they were familiar—the ECACE Navigators, the institutions' Recruiters, and a dedicated page on the Gateways website where they could be linked to additional resources, including people to respond to queries. The CBEN Project lead, Dr. Tiffany Freeze, further trained the lead actor powering the avatars in the types of technology troubleshooting they should anticipate needing to do when Learners joined the Mursion site to take the assessment. That lead actor trained the other actors in ways to ensure no Learner would face any access issues during the assessment session.

The main outcome of these concerted efforts was ongoing (and now, continued), consistent delivery of a workplace-based prior learning assessment whose results can be converted to college course credit with few (or any) access hurdles for Learners. From the moment a potential Learner indicates the desire to learn more about the instrument and the process for enrolling and then taking it, communication about its purpose and how to access it is communicated thoroughly by all involved. Targeted guidance for individual access needs (e.g., determining the best device to use for the assessment appointment) is provided in a timely fashion.

One way to measure achievement of this access goal is to consider the number of Learners who registered for this pilot, and how long it took them to do so. While other factors beyond the control of the Project also influence a Learner's decision to register for an assessment session, looking at the number of days between when the Learner received the link for where to register and when the Learner registered is one proxy measure for instrument accessibility. Table 5 summarizes these data for Learners taking the English and Spanish versions. There you'll see how 95/125 Learners who requested an English registration link, and 12/12 who requested a Spanish link, followed through within a week. You'll also see that 53 of the 118, total, who registered did so the same day of link email receipt. Clearly, this instrument is accessible to the Learners it's designed to assess.

Table 5. Days to Register for a PLA Session - English and Spanish

Difference in Days between Date Invited & Date Registered	Count of English Learners
0	46
1	17
2	12
3	11
4	1
5	3
6	2
7	3
8	1
10	1
11	1
14	4
17	1
27	1
28	1
49	1
Did Not Register	19

Difference in Days between Date Invited & Date Registered	Count of Spanish Learners
0	7
1	1
2	4

Access also was tracked by monitoring No Show/Other Difficulty Log entries by the actors powering the avatars. Whenever a Learner did not appear for an appointment, or when there was a technology issue of any kind on either the Learner's or Mursion's side (the latter was rare) within a session, the actors wrote a summary of the issues and whether/how they were resolved. Perusing the Log, themes emerge relatively few had technology issues that prevented them from participating. The majority were No Shows (nine), meaning they did not appear for their assessment and did not contact anyone to explain why/reschedule. In each instance, the potential Learner was contacted via email with detailed directions for rescheduling. There were four Canceled Day-of-Session Learners who wrote either before or after the session's start to say they weren't able to make it. Most expressed their reasons—they faced work (two) or family (one) issues that prevented them from appearing. Six others in the Log experienced technology issues with their cameras, mics, or Internet access that prevented them from starting or finishing. (At least two of them have since completed.) In four instances, either the actor's connectivity was at fault (twice), or the actor became ill (twice). While it's not been possible yet to ascertain what caused the nine No Shows, seven of them rescheduled and completed the assessment. Considering these data from an access viewpoint (nine/88 No Shows), again it appears that this instrument is accessible in terms of its availability to potential Learners. An almost 10% No Show rate for an instrument pilot or even an established PLA instrument is not unusual. This 10% rate is similar to data reported by the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning - CAEL (2020) about users of their nationally available LearningCounts online subscription portfolio service for institutions to use in their PLA programming. CAEL (R. Klein-Collins, personal communication, January 20, 2023) reported that on average, 7% of Learners who enrolled in their institution's CAEL-sponsored LearningCounts platform for PLA did not submit their final product for assessment—the portfolio.

Pilot Learner Observation

I greatly appreciated being given credit for real-life experience.... I have already told several individuals about this program.

Goal 3: *Piloting the PLA instrument in a systematic, controlled manner to collect data and feedback related to the processes, procedures, assessment exercises and scoring tools, as well as recommendations for prior learning credit (PLC), at Illinois two- and four-year institutions of higher education.*

There have been two entwined aspects to this project since its inception in June 2021: (a) Developing a prior learning assessment instrument that measures incumbent workforce members' Gateways ECE Credential Level 2 competencies to use in awarding prior learning credit for ECE program degree coursework plus (b) researching how Illinois colleges and universities are using prior learning assessments and awarding credit that reduces students' time to degree. Throughout this project's pilot phase reported here, the connectedness of these two aspects became even more obvious, as described below.

Piloting the PLA Instrument

Refining the Instrument—During the instrument development phase of the project last year, a series of workshop sessions were held with employers and staff, as well as current early childhood students, to test each of the scenarios in the simulation environment. Feedback from those sessions was used by the faculty developers and the project lead faculty to rework the 15 scenarios used by the actors in delivering the simulations. Subsequently, as explained above, during this project pilot phase the Mursion company convened a panel of national experts to analyze the revised scenarios through a DEI lens. That analysis resulted in further editing of all the scenarios along with development of a replacement scenario by some of the Illinois DEI faculty consultants to meet the panel's criteria. The next stage of editing involved reworking certain planned challenges and the prompts used by the actors, to provide Learners additional opportunities to evidence behaviors demonstrating related competencies. A subset of four resulting scenarios that would elicit all 12 competencies (most more than once) was selected to start the pilot, as shown in Table 2 above. Initially using the same four scenarios with all pilot Learners provided assessors the multiple scoring opportunities necessary for developing their acuity in identifying evidence of the subcompetencies within each of the 12 competencies, as well as when to anticipate certain Learner behaviors within a scenario. Comparing Learner results on the same four scenarios within and across institutions was necessary for establishing baseline reliability of the instrument and between the assessors. Using this subset of scenarios also enabled the actor team powering the avatars to further develop their proficiencies in eliciting Learner behaviors in efficient, effective ways they will use in delivering all future scenarios.

Based on the workshoping, the DEI reviews, and other reviews by project faculty, another four scenarios were reworked to incorporate short, live-action classroom video into each. Scripts for these videos were developed by the videographer and the project lead faculty, who collaborated in their recording production and editing. Experienced preschool teachers and nonprofessional preschool-age children were recruited to act in the videos. An urban child care center in Illinois provided a classroom space for the recording. The videos were edited to capture only essential actions and condense their lengths, so that Learners would focus on observing behaviors related to the competencies that would be assessed during their interactions with the avatar after viewing. Example video stills are provided in Figure 13.

Figure 13. Example Live-action Video Stills



In conjunction with the pilot faculty who scored their institutions' Learners' assessments in GoReact, the project lead faculty scored or reviewed all Learners' video captures throughout the pilot's duration. Those findings and observations were used to further refine all the scenario templates used by the avatar actors in delivering the simulations. All templates then were amended to reflect pilot faculty's ongoing suggestions for rewording certain prompts or types of prompts; the language used to express planned session outcomes to the Learners; and in certain cases, the order of prompts used to elicit a Learner's application of a competency. All revised scenarios created by project faculty are now ready to launch.

As of this writing, 52 of the 106 registered pilot Learners have completed their assessments and received their scores. There are 36 pilot candidates whose video captures are pending scoring and two candidates whose assessments are in the assessment process. The remaining 16 Learners enrolled after the data collection cutoff date.

To date, Learner proficiency results indicate that the four scenarios used in the pilot presented Learners the multiple opportunities needed to exhibit their Level 2 competencies. Available scoring data were analyzed to detect whether certain competencies were evidenced more readily than others. All competency areas were able to be demonstrated with proficiency by at least 68% of the Learners in either the English or Spanish cohort. In terms of specific competencies, both cohorts scored highly on Personal and Professional Development (PPD) 1 (English, 95% evidenced proficiency; Spanish, 100%). There were no similarities between the cohorts for the other competencies, however. For the English language Learners, exhibited competencies of relative strength were Family and Community Relationships (FCR) 2 (80%) and Interactions, Relationships, and Environment (IRE) 1 (80%). Spanish language Learners exhibited strength in PPD 2 (100%), FCR 3 (100%), as well as Health, Safety, and Well-Being (HSW) 1 and HSW 2 (100% each). Less-exhibited competencies for the English language Learners were Human Growth and Development (HGD) 3 (68%) and PPD 2 (68%), whereas IRE 2 was lowest for the Spanish language Learners (75% exhibited).

One particular competency sparked much discussion among all faculty: PPD 2. Some noted that the setting of the main scenario where this competency is assessed (a staff recruitment fair at a local college campus) was an atypical one for an incumbent Level 2 worker to encounter. Others noted that while the setting was realistic, the prompts for eliciting the subcompetencies of PPD 2 needed to be more explicit, since some Learners appeared to become distracted from focusing on the intended sub competencies of PPD 2 in the avatar's prompting. Based on this faculty feedback plus Learner video capture observations for this particular simulation, the scenario was revised to more naturally situate the Learner in the setting as well as provide the avatar more competency-focused prompts to pose.

Of the 52 scored assessments, competency ratings show a range of 0 to 12 competencies successfully demonstrated across learners. It is important to note that only 13% ($n = 7$) of total Learners successfully demonstrated fewer than five competencies, while 87% ($n = 45$) successfully demonstrated five or more competencies. With the exception of one Learner, all who took the assessment are being awarded at least some credit; 22 Learners were awarded all 12 credit hours. A range of 2-12 credit hours is being awarded to Learners in this pilot by faculty in the participating institutions. Given the experience and education backgrounds of these Learners (Tables 6 and 7), this range was expected and similar to award rates for other types of PLA instruments.

Recruiting Learners—Recruiting diverse Learners from as broad a geographic, racial, and workplace role range as possible was the focus of this project phase. All trained faculty assessors hail from institutions that represent the geographic and student demographic diversity of our state. In conducting this pilot, the project team aimed to secure a similarly representative range of institutions and Learners to match the overall known demographics of the targeted Learner population (i.e., the incumbent workforce without any college or credentials). The eight institutions piloting the English version, and the three piloting the Spanish (two of whom are also piloting the English), are geographically diverse in setting (i.e., urban, suburban, rural) and locations around the state. In toto, their student/prospective student population demographics are representative of the target Learner populations (i.e., the thousands of incumbent workforce members

without credentials or college) in race, age, and primary language. Table 6 summarizes how the racial and linguistic diversity of the pilot Learners taking the English, and Table 7 the Spanish, language versions matches that of the target Learner population in race and age.

The Learner demographics in the pilot show the rich diversity in the Illinois early childhood field. Faculty from partnering institutions identified and helped recruit Learners and as such, a range of educational backgrounds and years of experience are represented. The impetus for this project was to address the need to upskill the incumbent workforce in Illinois—those veteran early care and education staff without any credentials or college. Tables 6 and 7 show how approximately half the registered pilot Learners who self-reported their tenure in the field are relatively new to it (less than a year to three years, $n = 45$), compared to other participants who reported a more veteran status (four to ten plus years, $n = 47$). This finding indicated a pilot project goal was reached: Recruit mostly Learners with one or more years in the field to try this assessment designed specifically for them.

As shown in Table 8, 48% of Learners taking the English language assessment hold either an associate's ($n = 25$) or a bachelor's ($n = 14$) degree of some kind. As shown in Table 9, five registrants for the Spanish language assessment are known to have an associate's degree ($n = 5$) and two a bachelor's ($n = 2$), or 23% of that cohort. These demographics are partly the result of how institutions were able to recruit pilot participants, as well as which type of institutions are in the pilot. Participant Learners often were recruited by the ECACE Navigators and institutional ECACE recruiters or the ECE faculty themselves from childcare centers with which they've historically worked. As word spread around the state about the ECACE college scholarship opportunity for incumbent or recently incumbent ECE staff, child care centers were able to leverage that opportunity to recruit/retain staff who either had started ECE degrees or had wanted to build upon their non-ECE associate's degrees to earn their bachelor's in ECE. Since there are more universities in the pilot (five, total) than community colleges (three), and universities are not able to recruit scholarship students without associate's degrees (or junior-level credit), it's not surprising to see so many degree-holding Learners in this pilot.

Nevertheless: This demographics' finding leads to a new set of questions and conclusions about entry-level early childhood professionals in Illinois: Who is drawn to working in our field? How are they entering? What are their professional learning needs? Seeing so many ECE-employed Learners in the pilot who have coursework or degrees, yet no ECE credentials further demonstrates the utility of this PLA instrument. Two incumbent worker populations will be served by it, not only the one it was intended for: (a) those who start working in the field without any college and (b) those with college who find their professional purpose after college and now need credentialing and/or degrees.

Table 6. Pilot Implementation Project Learner Demographics–Race, Age, Years in ECE Field–English Version

Race	Count	Percentage
Hispanic/Latino	23	28.05%
African American/Black	23	28.05%
Caucasian/White	18	21.95%
Other	18	21.95%
Grand Total	82	100.00%

Age Groups	Count	Percentage
20-29	32	39.02%
30-39	23	28.05%
40-49	15	18.29%
50-59	8	9.76%
60-69	3	3.66%
70-79	1	1.22%
Grand Total	82	100.00%

Years in Field	Count	Percentage
Not Yet a Year	6	7.32%
1	14	17.07%
2	8	9.76%
3	12	14.63%
4	6	7.32%
5	4	4.88%
6	9	10.98%
7	5	6.10%
8	4	4.88%
9	1	1.22%
10	5	6.10%
11	2	2.44%
16	2	2.44%
22	1	1.22%
N/A	3	3.66%
Grand Total	82	100.00%

Table 7. Pilot Implementation Project Learner Demographics–Race, Age, Years in ECE Field–Spanish Version

Race	Count	Percentage
Hispanic/Latino	14	87.50%
Caucasian/White	1	6.25%
N/A	1	6.25%
Grand Total	16	100.00%

Age Groups	Count	Percentage
26-30	3	18.75%
31-35	4	25.00%
36-40	4	25.00%
41-45	3	18.75%
46-50	2	12.50%
Grand Total	16	100.00%

Years in Field	Count	Percentage
0	2	12.50%
1	1	6.25%
2	1	6.25%
3	1	6.25%
4	4	25.00%
5	1	6.25%
6	1	6.25%
7	1	6.25%
10	1	6.25%
11	1	6.25%
14	1	6.25%
N/A	1	6.25%
Grand Total	16	100.00%

Table 8. Pilot Implementation Project Learner Demographics–Highest Level of Education–English Version

Highest Level of Education	Count	Percentage
Associate's Degree (Any)	20	24%
High School Diploma	19	23%
Bachelor's Degree (Any)	13	16%
Some Coursework Associate's Degree (Any)	8	10%
Community College Certificate	4	5%
G.E.D.	4	5%
Associate's Degree in Early Childhood Education	3	4%
Some Coursework Associate's Degree in Early Childhood Education	3	4%
Some Coursework Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood Education	2	2%
Some Coursework in Bachelor's in Elementary Education	2	2%
Associate's Degree in Education	1	1%
Associate's Degree in Elementary Education	1	1%
Bachelor's Degree in Elementary Education	1	1%
Master's Degree in Inner City Studies	1	1%
Grand Total	82	100%

Table 9. Pilot Implementation Project Learner Demographics–Highest Level of Education–Spanish Version

Highest Level of Education	Count
High School	10
G.E.D.	6
Associate's	5
Bachelor's	2
Not Reported	8
Grand Total	31

Recruiting Institutions to Pilot–It is important to highlight the demands placed upon an institution to be part of this pilot. In addition to needing a trained faculty assessor team, considerable 'buy-in' across internal administrative departments and an infrastructure (i.e., policies, procedures, roles and responsibilities) for awarding PLC needed to be in place or in process. Table 10 outlines the roles and responsibilities of institutional stakeholders during the piloting process.

Table 10. Pilot Implementation Project Institutional Responsibilities

Piloting Activity	Institutional Stakeholders
Recruit Learners to take the assessment	Faculty (with employer and ECACE Navigator partners)
Support Learners in understanding the assessment process and purpose, as well as in registering for it	Faculty
Score all Learners' assessment session video captures in their institution's GoReact portal	Faculty
Communicate results, including PLC earned, to Learners	Faculty, administration
Keep updated Learner results in the Project's protected Google site	Faculty
Convert competencies evidenced on the assessment to specific course credit	Faculty, administration
Award the prior learning credit (PLC) earned on official student records	Administration

In perusing this table, you notice how many of these activities were initiated and sustained by the faculty assessors themselves. Project lead faculty interviews, regular team meetings with the assessors (see meeting schedule in Appendix F), and impromptu communications from assessors to project leads surfaced the time pressures these faculty felt as they worked to support Learners before and after they completed the assessment; evaluate their video captures; determine the exact credit to be awarded, based on the evidenced competencies; and then ensure the credit was awarded. As noted previously, PLA policies, practices, and procedures varied widely across institutions (for all majors) at the start of this project phase. While all pilot institutions had PLA systems in place, and one (NLU) a highly developed system at the institution level, the project leads were aware that no institution had been awarding much, if any, PLC for early childhood majors previously. Therefore, a significant portion of work devoted by these institutions involved establishing new internal policies, practices, and procedures within and across their academic and operational units for this particular credit.

At the midpoint of this project phase, ICCB gave the community colleges in the pilot permission to waive the PLA rules regarding admission and students earning 15 credits prior to awarding them any PLC. This welcomed relief enabled those affected institutions to continue forging ahead in their course redesigns and awarding of credit in a timely fashion. While universities were not subject to the same rule, they too needed to revamp or otherwise modify some of their PLA policies and credit-awarding procedures across their campuses before the ECE faculty could proceed in filing their credit recommendations.

The chart shown in Appendix G compares how seven of the pilot institutions are awarding credit for the competencies evidenced in this assessment, in both English and Spanish versions. As also noted above, you see in this chart the effects of variance in educational background from those for whom the instrument was initially designed (e.g., Western Illinois University). These variations necessitated the faculty assessors to alter the planned course credit awards so these Learners would not earn inappropriate coursework. The awarding of credit by these institutions is expected to change as they recruit incumbent childcare workers with no college credit, the intended target of this assessment.

Goal 4. *Making recommendations to refine the Gateways ECE Credential Level 2 Prior Learning Assessment in preparation for a full launch to all institutions interested in using this instrument in awarding prior learning credit.*

As described above, recommendations for refining the instrument plus the processes, procedures, and policies surrounding its use were secured from project stakeholders (including Learners) as well as institutional administrators responsible for awarding PLC, throughout the pilot's duration:

Further Refining the Instrument—As the first PLA instrument of its kind—a standardized, competency-based evaluation of Learners in a virtual-reality environment simulating the EC workplace—the Illinois faculty designers and assessors keenly sought to give and receive feedback from each other as well as the Learners. Recommendations for improving the instrument itself were crucial to receive during this development phase, for they informed systematic revisions that increased the validity and reliability of the instrument. For example, a pre-pilot phase of the first subgroup of 4 scenarios was conducted with a small group of learners (<10) in early fall 2022. Revisions were made to the scenarios based on faculty and Learner feedback from the pre-pilot and before the full pilot. These recommendations were also applied to the remaining scenarios that were not actively being delivered, as applicable. During the full pilot, Learners' perceptions of the instrument were solicited through surveys and informal interviews with faculty at their target institutions. Relevant, appropriate observations they expressed about the instrument's design or content while in simulations also were cataloged and incorporated into the continuous revamping of remaining scenarios. Assessor insights and suggestions for improving scenario content or delivery language were solicited during the scheduled project team meetings (see Appendix F), discussions with the project leads, along with end-of-pilot interviews. The project leads carefully communicated the message that these stakeholders' impressions and ideas were a welcomed, essential part of the pilot's activities. As use of this instrument grows, a system and people who will conduct the necessary, ongoing revisions to its scenarios and other underlying elements must be established to maintain its reliability as part of a strategic continuous improvement process.

Establishing the Statewide Infrastructure Supporting Institutional Use of the Instrument—From the beginning of this almost two-year project, the leads and the participating faculty shared insights and made recommendations for sustaining this instrument's use. As innovative and promising an approach to honoring the prior learning of incumbent EC workers that this is, its future use relies upon having in place obvious systems, policies, and practices that ensure the awarding and transferability of the credit earned by Learners. Appendix G contains a summary table of the different ways that assessors and their institutions will be awarding credit earned through this assessment instrument.

One theme that emerged in surveying the assessors concerns a curricular barrier to converting demonstrated competency proficiency to specific course credit. An institution whose ECE curriculum is modularized and leveled in alignment with the Gateways Credential levels, or which offers a competency-based program, found it less difficult to do the necessary conversions for learners. Since the majority of institutions are neither modularized nor leveled, nor yet offer a competency-based strand of their degrees, a main recommendation from assessors is to find a way to provide intensive support to ECE faculty around the State to accomplish these critical tasks.

Another theme that emerged during project meetings is the potential loss of this PLA credit in transfer. Students today switch colleges and universities frequently. Currently, Illinois is not alone among the states in having a credit-loss-in-transfer issue, especially for that awarded through PLA. While there are movements in some states (e.g., Arizona, New York) to secure legislative safeguards for PLA credit in transfer through statewide articulation agreements, they are in an incipient phase of development. A recommendation made during this project's initial phase (see Table 3) is a potential solution to the transfer credit loss problem: Convert each of the 12 Illinois Gateways ECE Credential Level 2 competencies to a badge (or other microcredential). Badges 'lock down' the recognition of the Learner's competency in a way that transcends the course context in which the badges were earned. When a student transfers, in addition to the transcript of various courses successfully completed, the list of earned and verified badges will tell the reviewer the specific competencies related to the ECE major the student has demonstrated proficiency in, which can be used as a common currency to then convert to the receiving institution course credit scheme. One pilot institution already has established an ECE competency badging system of its own—Heartland Community College (HCC). Supporting faculty at institutions using this PLA instrument as they adopt and adapt HCC's badging system to their programs would ensure wider use of this PLA instrument. It also might increase the rate of transfer from community colleges to universities especially, since students could rely upon their PLA-earned credit maintaining its recognition.

One more recommendation made during the project's previous phase merits further discussion and follow through: Amending the Illinois Administrative Code and the ICCB System Rules Manual to include the type of credit being awarded by this PLA method—standardized, competency-based credit (SCBC). Presently, Code Section 1501.311: Credit for Prior Learning, b) Awarding Credit for Prior Learning, only recognizes standardized tests, college examinations, published guides (e.g., the American Council on Education—ACE—military training PLA conversions), and portfolios for awarding course-based credit at institutions. The SCBC definition recommended during the previous phase of this project is the college credit resulting from using a PLA instrument based on (a) workforce/industry-regulated credentials composed of (b) professional competencies that are (c) aligned and assessed in a standardized way across evaluators. Incorporating this definition and option for awarding college credit into the Code acknowledges the unique nature of this project's instrument and establishes a State-sanctioned foundation for further innovation in assessing and awarding PLC in fields beyond ECE

Proposed Definition—Standardized, Competency-based Credit—for Inclusion in Illinois Administrative Code Section 1501.311: Credit for Prior Learning

E) Standardized competency-based credit (SC-BC) methods:

Any prior learning assessment (PLA) 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 these workforce/industry-regulated competencies are documented in the terminal objectives.

Summary of the Final Recommendations

To meet Illinois' urgent and growing need for a skilled early care and education workforce that provides high-quality care for our youngest citizens, it is imperative that we:

- 1. EXPAND statewide access to and utilization of the newly developed, technology-based prior learning assessment** tool developed and tested by Illinois early childhood faculty with national experts. This innovative tool determines and validates existing skill sets and knowledge through the awarding of college credit for incumbent workforce members that acts as a catalyst for the attainment of industry-recognized credentials and college degrees.
- 2. Grow our higher education institutional capacity to offer, award, and recognize prior learning for college credit** as a key entrance point into college, to increase equity through supporting and engaging our diverse adult learner population in Illinois.
- 3. Meet employer demands and hiring deficits** by building upon this, and other, innovative prior learning assessment practices and policies that lead to standardized, competency-based college credit or state-recognized credentials. Such innovative practices must be designed and tested at a state level to mitigate potential transferability challenges that are apparent in isolated, unique-to-institution previous PLA efforts.

Background Information Regarding the Final Recommendations

During this pilot phase, the leads presented this project's work at various national conferences, statewide meetings of PLA administrators and ECE faculty, and in local campus settings (Appendix H highlights some of these events). As word spreads about the development of this instrument, the first of its kind for the ECE professional community nationwide, keen interest in learning more about it and its development has been expressed by other states (e.g., Vermont, Pennsylvania) as well as other fields. Attendees of these presentations quickly identify the salient advantages of this instrument—its authentic engagement of adult learners; its harnessing of virtual reality to establish a 'natural' yet 'neutral' setting in which these adults can demonstrate their competence; and its potential for setting the almost 13,000 incumbent Early Childhood workforce without credentials or college credit on a pathway to degrees.

Creating and then vetting this instrument in 18 months has been a monumental enterprise for over 300 stakeholders in the Illinois early childhood field—incumbent workers, employers, campus administrators, faculty, students, and state agency administrators, among others. The next phase of its development must focus upon sustaining its reliability, validity, and access. Since this instrument is far more than an assessment tool, the next phase also must focus on growing its use by the adult learners for whom it was designed: the almost 13,000 incumbent EC staff without credentials or degrees. To achieve these goals, establishing an administrative center in our state where the instrument can be maintained and deployed is crucial. A clearinghouse-type operation with joint oversight by ICCB, IBHE, and other relevant state agencies would be ideal. This center would be responsible for providing the instrument for statewide use, which would include holding the requisite licenses for the assessment delivery platforms; conducting continuous improvement check of the instrument; plus training (and retraining) faculty assessors, PLA administrators, and the actors delivering the simulations.

Although this instrument was developed for use with incumbent EC members of the EC field, the virtual reality architecture and competency-based metric approach upon which it was built are used by other fields and professions (e.g., health care, insurance, teacher preparation programs) in assessing on-the-job learning. Adopting and adapting this PLA instrument to other degree or certificate programs in Illinois is worth consideration, given the relative paucity of PLA awarded (or consistently awarded) in our state.

Performance- and competency-based methods to assess prior learning for credit are growing in utility and feasibility across disciplines and institution types in the United States. Concurrently, national student mobility rates are growing—45% of those with associate degrees, and 67% of those with bachelor's, hold transcripts from multiple institutions (Pingel, Lin, and Kurzweil, 2022). Postsecondary learning is no longer a two- or four-year endeavor pursued immediately after high school in a lockstep fashion. More adults than ever before are stepping in and out of formal education as they explore jobs and careers, learning much as they move around. In Illinois, colleges and universities need both policies and an inter-institutional system for validating adult students' prior learning and ensuring their holistic credit mobility over time (Pingel, Lin, and Kurzweil, 2022). The Illinois Articulation Initiative model is a proven one to consider in developing a coordinated system for Illinois PLA, as is Ohio's statewide higher-education PLA for a Purpose Network.

In the introduction to the Equity Strategies section of the 2021 IBHE Strategic Plan for Higher Education, A Thriving Illinois, the decisive need for institutions to shift their attention to educating the incumbent workforce was laid out clearly:

We have untapped potential in the adults who haven't yet received a postsecondary degree/credential. It is both an equity imperative and an economic imperative that the higher education system works to bring back working adults as students, while recognizing and valuing their unique family, work, and community experiences and needs.

This project's ultimate goal has been reached: Create a standardized instrument and process for faculty that bring the almost 13,000 EC workforce members without credentials or college credit back to school by first acknowledging what they know and can do professionally, based on the identified competencies of the field, so they can build upon yesterday for tomorrow. Illinois' next step is to honor its early childhood and other workforces by developing an aligned statewide system that supports institutions in recognizing prior learning in more standardized ways; awarding the resulting credit consistently; and ensuring that all credit awarded remains accounted for and valued.

Pilot Faculty Observation

It [the instrument] makes our program so much richer. Gives us a lot of choices and options, this is what we're looking for. Not just paper-pencil, this is a technology era and this PLA fits very, very well.

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Appendix A: Resources

To view the Gateways ECE Credential Level 2 Prior Learning Assessment report, visit

<https://www.ilgateways.com/docman-docs/professional-development/2266-gateways-to-opportunity-ece-level-2-credential-prior-learning-assessment-report/file>

To view C-BEN's Quality Framework for Competency-Based Education Programs, visit

<https://www.cbenetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Quality-Framework-for-Competency-Based-Education-Programs-Updated.pdf>

To view the Diverse Workforce Supports for Equity Project report, visit

<https://www.ilgateways.com/professional-development/incrra-reports-and-papers>

To view information and research regarding persuasive suspension of disbelief, visit <https://www.mursion.com/vr-encyclopedia/how-virtual-reality-learning-unlocks-the-power-of-presence-and-plausibility/>

To view the Learner Orientation Video - Spanish Version, visit <https://vimeo.com/759991896/e24de02a87>

To view the Learner Orientation Video - English Version, visit <https://vimeo.com/747424881/9aeaa267a1>

To view the full Learner Testimony - Spanish Version, visit <https://flip.com/s/PW8vfSzKf7-C>

Appendix B: Customized Mursion Environments for Illinois ECE PLA Implementation Project

(Avatars are for preview purposes only.)











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

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

The Child Development Associate Preschool (CDA) meets HSW1, HSW2, IRE1, IRE2, FCR1 and PPD1.

The North American Montessori Center (NAMC) Credential meets HGD2, IRE1, IRE2, FCR1, FCR2, FCR3, and PPD1.

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.



GATEWAYS TO OPPORTUNITY®
Illinois Professional Development System

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Gateways to Opportunity is administered through INCCRRA and funded by the Illinois Department of Human Services' Division of Early Childhood and the McCormick Foundation.



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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 D: Gateways to Opportunity® ECE Level 2 Credential Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) Instrument Faculty Handbook

GATEWAYS TO OPPORTUNITY® ECE LEVEL 2 CREDENTIAL PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT (PLA) INSTRUMENT FACULTY MANUAL

Introduction

Welcome to becoming an integral part of this exciting education opportunity for the early childhood incumbent workforce. Thank you, too, for your willingness to innovate and for your dedication to improving the professional lives of our colleagues in the field.

This assessment instrument is unique in its design, administration, and evaluation for prior learning credit at your institution. Based upon actual workplace situations and interactions, the 15 virtual simulation exercises in this assessment were created, vetted, and tested by over 100 Illinois ECE faculty and field professionals during the spring, summer, and fall of 2021. Each exercise requires the test takers—the workforce—to demonstrate their Gateways to Opportunity® ECE Level 2 competencies in active, authentic ways. By converting the workforce demonstrated proficiencies to college course credit, you'll be establishing a degree pathway for the workforce that will help them transform not only their practices but also their career trajectories.

The following FAQs summarize the workforce recruitment and eligibility criteria; the technology requirements for accessing and completing the assessment; faculty assessor responsibilities and procedures; plus the role of institutions' registrars in recording any prior learning credit (PLC) earned.

Who's eligible to take this assessment?

Any current early childhood work with minimally:

- one year of full-time work experience or its equivalent in an early childhood setting (i.e., birth through age 8y) plus
- a high-school diploma or equivalent.

What technologies does the workforce need?

This virtual-reality based instrument runs on downloadable software similar to that used in a standard web conferencing call (e.g., Zoom, WebEx). Typically, individuals whose devices (i.e., tablets, desktops, laptops) contain an internet-connection camera, speakers, and microphone that work well for Zoom, etc. have sufficient technology. For more detailed information about system requirements, those listed at [Zoom Support](#) are an accurate guide.

How is the workforce recruited and registered?

Eligible workers are recruited through word of mouth, faculty, employer partners, and marketing materials. Complete the following steps:

1. Click on this link: [Prior Learning Assessment Pilot - Gateways to Opportunity \(ilgateways.com\)](#) (provided in the marketing material or by faculty, employer partners, State agencies) to the Gateways to Opportunity website where the enrollment form will reside.
2. At the Gateways to Opportunity site, complete a request-to-enroll form found at [file \(ilgateways.com\)](#).

Upon receipt of the enrollment form and after review to ensure eligibility criteria are met, the workforce is sent an email with further instructions to register for an appointment to take the assessment, including:

- a) Receive an email with instructions to register for the PLA assessment.
- b) Register as a learner in the Mursion portal.
- c) Schedule their simulation day/times.

GATEWAYS TO OPPORTUNITY® ECE LEVEL 2 CREDENTIAL PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT (PLA) INSTRUMENT FACULTY MANUAL

- d) Receive session confirmation email(s) and follow-up reminder emails.
- e) Attend their scheduled session(s) including from email or Mursion portal.
- f) Receive their results and potential pathways from faculty at the institution requested in the enrollment form.
- g) If competency is not demonstrated on the first attempt, the student may retake the assessment for one additional attempt (a maximum of two attempts).

The workforce receive their results and suggested/potential degree pathways from faculty at the institution they requested in the enrollment form. The workforce may retake the assessment if incomplete competency (i.e., less than 12) or none is demonstrated on the first attempt. Only two attempts are permitted.

How long does it take to complete the assessment?

Each simulation takes approximately 10 minutes to run through. Presently, for the pilot testing of the instrument, there are approximately 4 simulations that may take the workforce approximately 45 to 60 minutes to finish.

The assessment session starts with a warm-up conversation between the host avatar (a real actor—a simulation specialist who powers all the avatars in the simulations) and the workforce. At the end of each simulation, the workforce debriefs with the host who asks the workforce to share what they think went well and what they would do differently next time, along with a few other questions about specific aspects of the scenario in the simulation.

For the pilot, the workforce will be asked to participate in a follow-up interview to gather data about their perceived assessment experiences.

What is the faculty assessor's role?

During the registration and assessment process, the assessor faculty will:

1. Receive a notification from the system when learner assessment materials have been added to the shared virtual drive for their institution.
2. Review the workforce performance video(s). You will use the tools found in the designated shared drive folder labeled Scoring Materials to score the workforce performance in the five Level 2 ECE Credential competency areas. (The respective competency areas for each scenario can be found in the assessor manual.) Record the final competency determination on the designated scoring form in the shared drive. (The designated form is labeled Final Result.)
3. Enter the Final Result in the shared spreadsheet for your institution. (The shared spreadsheet is labeled Final Results Spreadsheet.)
4. The faculty assessor will follow the institution's process and procedures for recommendation of PLA credit to their Registrar.
5. Advise the workforce who do not evidence complete competency (i.e., 12) that they may retake the assessment once more.

How long does scoring an assessment take?

With practice using the scoring tools and learning from your initial reviews of the workforce performance videos, the evaluation process will become more fluent and efficient. For the pilot, faculty will assess video captures of the approximately 4 simulations completed by the workforce. Observing and scoring these performances will take approximately 1 to 1.5 hours.

GATEWAYS TO OPPORTUNITY® ECE LEVEL 2 CREDENTIAL PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT (PLA) INSTRUMENT FACULTY MANUAL

What is the role of the registrar at my institution?

The registrar will be expected to follow the institution's policies, process, and procedures for awarding prior learning credit (PLC). It is expected that this assessment's competence-based credit (i.e., 1-12 semester- or .66-18 quarter-hour credits) will be awarded for courses in which the Gateways to Opportunity Level 2 ECE Credential competencies are embedded. It's anticipated that the workforce who take this assessment might earn less than the 12 credits represented by the 12 Level 2 competencies. Presently, colleges and universities are changing their curriculum structures whereby the workforce can be awarded partial credit and complete only needed versions of courses once they enroll in the institution.

In the pilot, while we await some requested changes in the Illinois Community College Board administrative rules, this PLC can be recorded as test credit or as portfolio credit, categories found in most colleges' current PLA options. The intention is to standardize this credit and award it as Standardized Competency-Based Credit (SC-BC), a new type of PLA category that connects all industries' workforce credentials and college coursework credits using a competence framework.

Conclusion

Thank you for committing to learning and using this instrument that acknowledges the knowledge and skill of our early childhood colleagues and creates smoother pathways to credentials and degrees at your institution.

MANUAL PARA PROFESORES DEL INSTRUMENTO PARA LA EVALUACIÓN DEL APRENDIZAJE PREVIO (PLA) PARA LA CREDENCIAL DE NIVEL 2 DE ECE DE GATEWAYS TO OPPORTUNITY®

Introducción

Le damos la bienvenida a convertirse en una parte integral de esta emocionante oportunidad de formación para el personal a cargo de la primera infancia. Además, le agradecemos su voluntad de innovar y su dedicación para perfeccionar la vida profesional de nuestros colegas de este campo.

Este instrumento de evaluación es único en su diseño, su aplicación y su valoración para el crédito de aprendizaje previo en su institución. Sobre la base de situaciones e interacciones en el lugar de trabajo real, los 15 ejercicios de simulación virtual de esta evaluación fueron creados, revisados y puestos a prueba por más de 100 profesores y profesionales del campo de la ECE de Illinois durante la primavera, el verano y el otoño de 2021. Cada ejercicio requiere que quienes toman la prueba —el personal— demuestren sus competencias para el nivel 2 de ECE de Gateways to Opportunity® de manera activa y auténtica. Al convertir las competencias demostradas del personal en crédito académico de colegio universitario, usted establecerá para ellos un programa de estudios que los ayudará a transformar no solo su práctica sino también la trayectoria de su carrera.

Las siguientes preguntas frecuentes resumen los criterios de incorporación y elegibilidad del personal; los requerimientos tecnológicos para acceder y completar la evaluación; los métodos y las responsabilidades del evaluador docente, más el papel de los secretarios académicos de las instituciones para registrar cualquier crédito de aprendizaje previo (PLC) obtenido.

¿Quién es elegible para tomar esta evaluación?

Cualquier trabajador de la primera infancia con un mínimo de:

- un año de experiencia de trabajo a tiempo completo o su equivalente en un entorno de la primera infancia (es decir, desde el nacimiento hasta los 8 años), más
- un diploma de escuela secundaria o equivalente.

¿Qué tecnología necesita el personal?

Este instrumento basado en la realidad virtual funciona con un programa descargable similar a los que se usan en las videoconferencias convencionales (p. ej., Zoom, WebEx). Por lo general, es suficiente la tecnología que poseen las personas cuyos dispositivos (es decir, tabletas, y computadoras de escritorio y portátiles) contienen una cámara con conexión a internet, parlantes y micrófono que funcionen bien con Zoom, etcétera. Si desea obtener información detallada sobre los requisitos del sistema, puede hallar una guía precisa en [Soporte de Zoom](#).

¿Cómo se incorpora y se registra el personal?

Los trabajadores elegibles se incorporan mediante comentarios de boca en boca, profesores, socios empleadores y materiales de mercadotecnia. Se completan los siguientes pasos:

1. Haga clic en este enlace: [Prior Learning Assessment Pilot - Gateways to Opportunity \(ilgateways.com\)](https://ilgateways.com) (proporcionado en el material de mercadotecnia o por los profesores, los socios empleadores o las agencias estatales) para ingresar en el sitio web Gateways to Opportunity, donde se encontrará el formulario de inscripción.
2. En el sitio Gateways to Opportunity, complete el formulario de pedido de inscripción, que se encuentra en [file \(ilgateways.com\)](https://ilgateways.com). Tras la recepción del formulario de inscripción y después de su revisión para garantizar que se cumplen los criterios de elegibilidad, se le envía al personal un correo electrónico con instrucciones adicionales para registrarse para una cita para tomar la evaluación, que incluye:
 - a) Recibir un correo electrónico con instrucciones para registrarse para la PLA.
 - b) Registrarse como estudiante en el portal Mursion.
 - c) Programar los días y horarios de las simulaciones.

MANUAL PARA PROFESORES DEL INSTRUMENTO PARA LA EVALUACIÓN DEL APRENDIZAJE PREVIO (PLA) PARA LA CREDENCIAL DE NIVEL 2 DE ECE DE GATEWAYS TO OPPORTUNITY®

- d) Recibir correo(s) electrónico(s) de confirmación de las sesiones y de recordatorios de seguimiento.
- e) Asistir a la(s) sesión(es) programada(s) desde el correo electrónico o el portal Mursion.
- f) Recibir los resultados y los programas potenciales de parte de los profesores de la institución solicitada en el formulario de inscripción.
- g) Si el estudiante no demuestra competencia en el primer intento, puede volver a tomar la evaluación por segunda vez (dos intentos como máximo).

El personal recibe los resultados y los programas de estudios sugeridos/potenciales de parte de los profesores de la institución solicitada en el formulario. Si el personal demuestra competencia insuficiente (es decir, menos de 12) o nula en el primer intento, puede volver a tomar la evaluación. Solo se permiten dos intentos.

¿Cuánto tiempo lleva completar la evaluación?

Cada simulación dura aproximadamente 10 minutos. En este momento, para la prueba piloto del instrumento, hay aproximadamente 4 simulaciones para cuya finalización el personal puede requerir unos 45 a 60 minutos.

La sesión de evaluación comienza con una conversación preliminar entre el avatar anfitrión (un actor real, especialista en simulación que representa todos los avatares de las simulaciones) y el personal. Al final de cada simulación, el personal analiza el ejercicio con el anfitrión, quien le pregunta qué cree que funcionó bien y qué haría de otra manera la próxima vez, junto con otras preguntas sobre aspectos específicos de la situación hipotética de la simulación. Para el piloto, se le pedirá al personal que participe en una entrevista de seguimiento para reunir datos sobre sus experiencias percibidas en la evaluación.

¿Cuál es el papel del evaluador docente?

Durante el proceso de registro y evaluación, el evaluador docente:

1. Recibirá una notificación de parte del sistema cuando los materiales de evaluación del estudiante hayan sido incorporados a la unidad virtual compartida para su institución.
2. Revisará el(los) video(s) de desempeño del personal. Usará las herramientas que se encuentran en la carpeta de la unidad compartida designada, etiquetada Materiales de calificación, para calificar el desempeño del personal en las cinco áreas de competencia de la Credencial de nivel 2 de ECE. (Las respectivas áreas de competencia para cada situación hipotética pueden encontrarse en el manual del evaluador.) Registrará la determinación final de las competencias en el formulario de calificación designado de la unidad compartida. (El formulario designado está etiquetado Resultado final.)
3. Ingresará el Resultado final en la hoja de cálculo compartida para su institución. (La hoja de cálculo compartida está etiquetada Hoja de cálculo de resultados finales.)
4. El evaluador docente seguirá el proceso y los procedimientos de la institución para la recomendación del crédito de la PLA a su secretario académico.
5. Aconsejará al personal que no evidencie competencia suficiente (es decir, 12) que puede volver a tomar la evaluación una vez más.

¿Cuánto tiempo lleva calificar una evaluación?

Con práctica en el uso de las herramientas de calificación y el aprendizaje surgido de las revisiones iniciales de los videos de desempeño del personal, el proceso de evaluación se volverá más fluido y eficiente. Para el piloto, los profesores evaluarán capturas de video de aproximadamente 4 simulaciones completadas por el personal. Analizar y calificar estos rendimientos llevará alrededor de 1 hora a 1 hora y media.

MANUAL PARA PROFESORES DEL INSTRUMENTO PARA LA EVALUACIÓN DEL APRENDIZAJE PREVIO (PLA) PARA LA CREDENCIAL DE NIVEL 2 DE ECE DE GATEWAYS TO OPPORTUNITY®

¿Cuál es el papel del secretario académico de mi institución?

Se espera que el secretario académico siga las políticas, el proceso y los procedimientos de la institución para otorgar el crédito de aprendizaje previo (PLC). Se espera que este crédito basado en las competencias de la evaluación (es decir, créditos de 1 a 12 horas semestrales o de 0.66 a 18 cuartos de hora) se otorgue para cursos que involucren las competencias de la credencial de nivel 2 de ECE de Gateways to Opportunity. Se anticipa que el personal que tome esta evaluación podría obtener menos de 12 créditos representados por las 12 competencias del nivel 2. En este momento, los colegios universitarios y las universidades están modificando su estructura curricular por la que el personal puede recibir un crédito parcial y puede completar solo las versiones necesarias de cursos una vez que se inscriba en la institución.

En el piloto, mientras esperamos algunas modificaciones solicitadas en las reglas administrativas de la Junta de Colegios Universitarios Comunitarios de Illinois, este PLC puede registrarse como un crédito de examen o como crédito por currículum, categorías que se encuentran en las actuales opciones de PLA de la mayoría de los colegios universitarios. La intención es estandarizar este crédito y otorgarlo como Crédito estandarizado basado en las competencias (SC-BC), un nuevo tipo de categoría de PLA que relaciona las credenciales del personal de todos los sectores y los créditos de las asignaturas cursadas en colegios universitarios usando un marco de competencias.

Conclusión

Gracias por comprometerse a aprender y usar este instrumento que valora el conocimiento y las habilidades de nuestros colegas de la primera infancia y crea programas menos complicados para las credenciales y los títulos en su institución.

Appendix E: Gateways to Opportunity® ECE Level 2 Credential Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) Learner Handout

Illinois ECE Prior Learning Assessment

About the Illinois ECE Prior Learning Assessment

Welcome to this opportunity for the early childhood workforce in Illinois! This is a virtual assessment where you demonstrate your competence as an early childhood educator. This assessment is not a pencil-paper type test. It is a virtual work-based simulation that requires you to demonstrate your competence at handling situations similar to those you likely face in your daily activities at work. You will be able to show off the knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviors you have learned and refined through your Early Childhood workplace experiences.

Through this opportunity, you could earn up to 12 college credit hours, equivalent to an Illinois Gateways to Opportunity Level 2 credential. You may not earn the full 12 hours, but you could also earn a portion of those college-level credits, creating a pathway to the Gateways Level 2 credential. If this happens, you will not take coursework for the competencies that you demonstrated through the assessment, and only take coursework for the competencies that you need to develop.

Thank you for considering this exciting opportunity to show what you know!

Customized Environments and Avatars



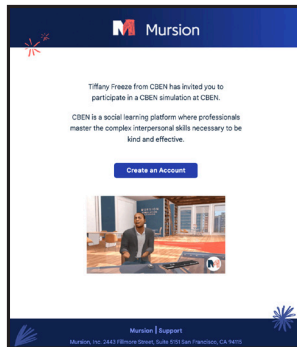
ECE Level 2 Domains:

- Human Growth and Development
- Health, Safety, and Well-Being
- Interactions, Relationships, and Environments
- Family and Community Relationships
- Personal and Professional Development

Illinois ECE Prior Learning Assessment

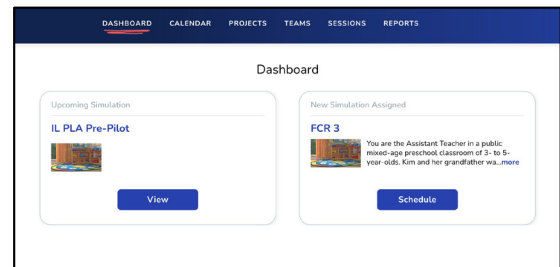
Scheduling

Option 1: When the Learner is scheduling the session



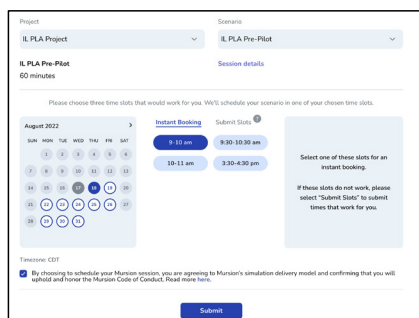
Look for an email from no-reply@mursion.com to register your account.

Click Create an Account. Read the User Agreement and Click Accept. Enter your account information. Click Save Changes. **Note:** Once your account is registered, you should always log in at portal.mursion.com. You can discard the registration email.



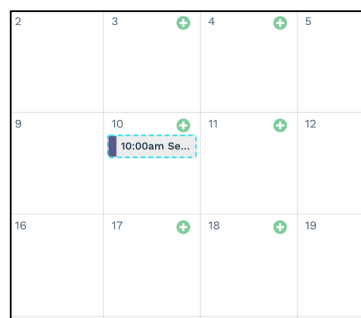
Click on the project that has been assigned to you under the Dashboard tab.

The project name is IL PLA Pre-Pilot.



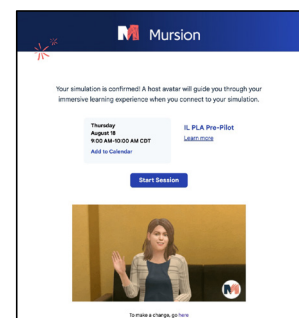
Select the date and time that works best and click the purple Submit button.

Note: The Submit button at the bottom of the screen will turn purple after you select the date and time. You must also confirm your time zone and check the box to confirm your agreement to Mursion's simulation delivery model and code of conduct.



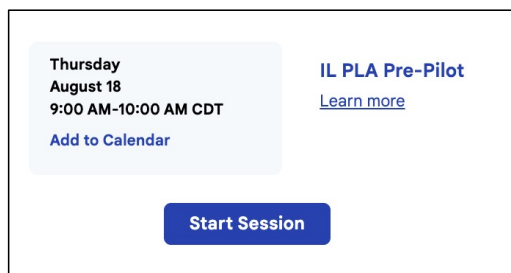
You will see the session on your calendar once it is scheduled.

Click on the session to review the scenario, view session resources, or cancel your session.



Look out for an email confirmation.

You will also receive a reminder for your session from this email address.



Attend Your Session

Three ways to access your session:

1. From your personal calendar:

The confirmation email contains a downloadable calendar invite.

2. Email:

Session confirmation email has a Star Session button.

3. Mursion Portal:

Click on the session in the [Mursion Portal](https://portal.mursion.com) calendar and click the Attend Session button.

Illinois ECE Prior Learning Assessment

Frequently Asked Questions

- [How do I register my account?](#)
- [When do registration links expire?](#)
- [How do I schedule a session?](#)
- [How do I cancel a session?](#)
- [How do I reschedule a session?](#)
- [Which browser should I use?](#)



This project was made possible by grant number 90TP0057. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official view of the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families

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Illinois ECE Prior Learning Assessment

Evaluación del Aprendizaje Previo para la ECE de Illinois

Acerca de la Evaluación del Aprendizaje Previo para la ECE de Illinois

¡Bienvenido a esta oportunidad para el personal de la primera infancia de Illinois! Se trata de una evaluación virtual donde usted demostrará su aptitud como educador de la primera infancia. No es un tipo de prueba de lápiz y papel. Es una simulación virtual basada en el trabajo, que requiere que demuestre su aptitud para manejar situaciones similares a las que probablemente enfrenta en sus actividades diarias en el trabajo. Podrá resaltar los conocimientos, destrezas, habilidades y comportamientos que ha aprendido y perfeccionado a lo largo de sus experiencias con la primera infancia en su lugar de trabajo.

Mediante esta oportunidad, podrá obtener hasta 12 horas de crédito de colegio universitario, equivalentes a una credencial de nivel 2 de Gateways to Opportunity de Illinois. Quizás no obtenga las 12 horas completas, pero también podría obtener una porción de esos créditos de nivel de colegio universitario, lo que crearía un acceso a la credencial de nivel 2 de Gateways. Si esto sucede, no tendrá que cursar las asignaturas para las competencias que demostró a través de la evaluación y solo cursará las asignaturas para las competencias que necesite desarrollar.

¡Gracias por considerar esta interesante oportunidad para demostrar sus conocimientos!

Ambientes y avatares personalizados



Campos del nivel 2 de la ECE:

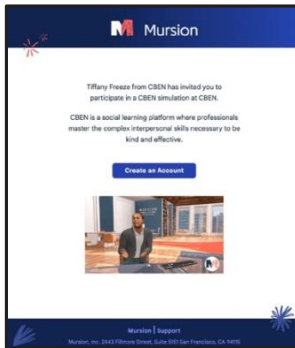
- Crecimiento y desarrollo humanos
- Salud, seguridad y bienestar
- Interacciones, relaciones y ambientes
- Relaciones con la familia y la comunidad
- Desarrollo personal y profesional

Illinois ECE Prior Learning Assessment

Evaluación del Aprendizaje Previo para la ECE de Illinois

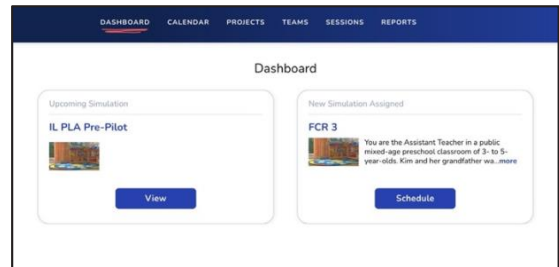
Programación

Opción 1: Cuando el estudiante está programando la sesión



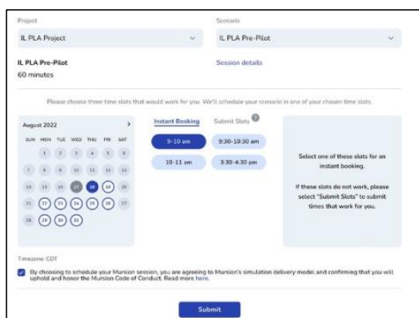
Busque un correo electrónico de no-reply@mursion.com para registrar su cuenta.

Haga clic en Create an Account. Lea el User Agreement y cliquee en Accept. Ingrese la información de su cuenta. Haga clic en Save Changes. Nota: Una vez registrada su cuenta, siempre debe iniciar sesión en portal.mursion.com. Puede eliminar el correo electrónico de inscripción.



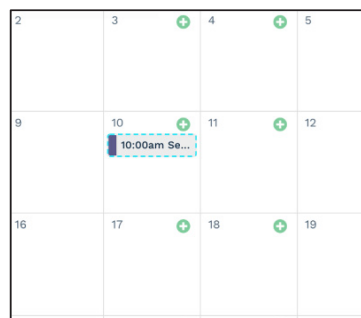
En la pestaña Dashboard, haga clic en el proyecto que se le ha asignado.

El nombre del proyecto es IL PLA Pre-Pilot.



Seleccione la fecha y la hora más convenientes y haga clic en el botón morado Submit.

Nota: El botón Submit, que está en la parte inferior de la pantalla, se pondrá de color morado después de que seleccione la fecha y la hora. También debe confirmar su zona horaria y marcar la casilla para dar su conformidad al modelo de entrega de simulaciones y al código de conducta de Mursion.



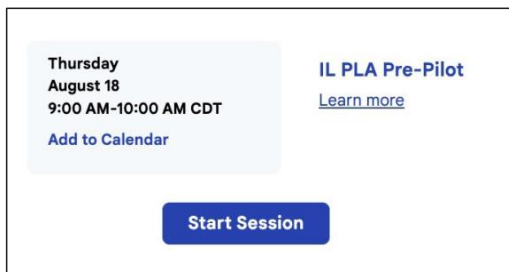
Verá la sesión en su calendario una vez que esté programada.

Haga clic en la sesión para repasar la situación hipotética, ver los recursos de la sesión o cancelarla.



Busque un correo electrónico de confirmación.

De esta dirección de correo electrónico, recibirá también un recordatorio de su sesión



Asista a su sesión

Tres maneras de acceder a su sesión:

- Desde su calendario personal:
El correo electrónico de confirmación contiene una invitación descargable para el calendario.
- Correo electrónico:
El correo electrónico que confirma la sesión tiene un botón Start Session.
- Portal de Mursion:
Haga clic en la sesión en el calendario del [Mursion Portal](https://portal.mursion.com) y haga clic en el botón Attend Session.

Illinois ECE Prior Learning Assessment

Evaluación del Aprendizaje Previo para la ECE de Illinois

Preguntas frecuentes

- [¿Cómo registro mi cuenta?](#)
- [¿Cuándo expiran los enlaces de inscripción?](#)
- [¿Cómo programo una sesión?](#)
- [¿Cómo cancelo una sesión?](#)
- [¿Cómo reprogramo una sesión?](#)
- [¿Qué navegador debo usar?](#)



[Link to English Version of Document](#)

Este proyecto ha sido posible por la subvención número 90TP0057. Su contenido es única responsabilidad de los autores y no representa necesariamente el punto de vista oficial de la Administración para Niños y Familias del Departamento de Salud y Servicios Humanos de los Estados Unidos.

Appendix F: 2022 Illinois Prior Learning Assessment Pilot Implementation Project Meetings

English Version of Illinois PLA - Leadership Team Meetings

February 22, 2022

May 2, 2022

June 22, 2022

August 18, 2022

September 15, 2022

October 13, 2022

November 10, 2022

December 8, 2022

English Version of Illinois PLA - Faculty Meetings

May 25, 2022

June 23, 2022

July 21, 2022

August 29, 2022

September 27, 2022

November 22, 2022

December 13, 2022

Appendix G: PLA Pilot Implementation-Credit Recommendation Process, by Institution

Gateways Level 2 Competencies							
	EIU Semester Credits	GSU Semester Credits	Heartland Semester Credits	MCC Semester Credits	NLU Quarter Credits (displayed as semester credits for comparison)	WIU Semester Credits	Kishwaukee Semester Credits
HGD1	HSL 1800 Human Development 1 Credit	EDUC 2330 Educational Psychology 1 Credit	CHLD 121 Foundations of Child Development (2 credits with HDG2 and HDG3) With CHLD 122 (1 credit) = CHLD 102 3 credits	ECE 120 Child Growth & Development 1 Credit	EDU 210 Educational Philosophy A Historical Account .55 credit	ECH 481 or ECH 380 depending on student track (licensure or nonlicensure) - practicum courses - this does not assist in Gateways credentialing so we will need to do something different with this, which will likely be ECH 271 but we need to work on it.	ECE 111 The Developing Child 1 credit
HGD2	HSL 1800 Human Development 1 Credit	EDUC 2330 Educational Psychology 1 Credit	CHLD 121 Foundations of Child Development (2 credits with HDG1 and HDG3) With CHLD 122 (1 credit) = CHLD 102 3 credits	ECE 120 Child Growth & Development 1 Credit	EDU 210 Educational Philosophy A Historical Account .55 credit	ECH 481 or ECH 380 depending on student track (licensure or nonlicensure) - practicum courses - this does not assist in Gateways credentialing so we will need to do something different with this, which will likely be ECH 271 but we need to work on it.	ECE 110 Foundations of ECE 1 credit
HGD3	HSL 1800 Human Development 1 Credit	EDUC 2330 Educational Psychology 1 Credit	CHLD 121 Foundations of Child Development (2 credits with HDG1 and HDG2) With CHLD 122 (1 credit) = CHLD 102 3 credits	ECE 120 Child Growth & Development 1 Credit	EDU 210 Educational Philosophy A Historical Account .55 credit	ECH 481 or ECH 380 depending on student track (licensure or nonlicensure) - practicum courses - this does not assist in Gateways credentialing so we will need to do something different with this, which will likely be ECH 271 but we need to work on it.	ECE 111 The Developing Child 1 credit

	EIU Semester Credits	GSU Semester Credits	Heartland Semester Credits	MCC Semester Credits	NLU Quarter Credits (displayed as semester credits for comparison)	WIU Semester Credits	Kishwaukee Semester Credits
PPD1	HSL 3220 Introduction to Early Childhood Program 1.5 Credit	EDUC 2310 Foundations of Education – partial credit	CHLD 101 Introduction to Early Childhood Education 3 Credits (with PPD2)	ECE 115 Early Childhood Education 1 Credit	EDU 200 Applied Educational Psychology .55 credit	C&I 110 (not currently a Gateways course so we need to revisit this one - likely will be ECH 271 moving forward but we may need to add a project) - will be combined with HGD to get 271 in full but we are figuring out if we need a project/summative as well. (.5 hours)	ECE 112 Guiding Young Children 1 credit
PPD2	HSL 3220 Introduction to Early Childhood Program 1.5 Credit	EDUC 2330 Educational Psychology 3 Credits	CHLD 101 Introduction to Early Childhood Education 3 Credits (with PPD1)	ECE 115 Early Childhood Education 1 Credit	EDU 210 Educational Philosophy A Historical Account .55 credit	C&I 110 (not currently a Gateways course so we need to revisit this one - likely will be ECH 271 moving forward but we may need to add a project) - will be combined with HGD to get 271 in full but we are figuring out if we need a project/summative as well.(.5 hours)	ECE 110 Foundations of ECE 1 credit
HSW1	NTR 2100 Personal Nutrition 1.5 Credit	PSU-HLTH Health or one of these: HLSC 2100, 4100, 4130 Health & Safety 1.5 Credits	CHLD 228 Foundations of Health, Safety and Well-Being (2 credits with HSW2) With CHILD 229 (1 credit) = CHLD 202 3 credits	ECE 125 Early Childhood Nutrition, Health, and Safety 1.5 Credits	EDU 200 Applied Educational Psychology .55 credit	Currently HSW is applied differently depending on student needs in their degree pathway. Some students are able to receive credit for NUTR 203 with the completion of a summative assessment and non-licensure receive additional ECH 481 credit.	ECE 222 Child Nutrition and Health 1 credit
HSW2	NTR 2100 Personal Nutrition 1.5 Credit	PSU-HLTH Health or one of these: HLSC 2100, 4100, 4130 Health & Safety 1.5 Credits	CHLD 228 Foundations of Health, Safety and Well-Being (2 credits with HSW1) With CHILD 229 (1 credit) = CHLD 202 3 credits	ECE 125 Early Childhood Nutrition, Health, and Safety 1.5 Credits	EDU 200 Applied Educational Psychology .55 credit	Currently HSW is applied differently depending on student needs in their degree pathway. Some students are able to receive credit for NUTR 203 with the completion of a summative assessment and non-licensure receive additional ECH 481 credit.	ECE 222 Child Nutrition and Health 1 credit

	EIU Semester Credits	GSU Semester Credits	Heartland Semester Credits	MCC Semester Credits	NLU Quarter Credits (displayed as semester credits for comparison)	WIU Semester Credits	Kishwaukee Semester Credits
FCR1	HSL 4854 Leadership in Family Life Education 1 Credit	EDUC 2310 Foundations of Education – partial credit 1 Credit	CHLD 238 Foundations of Child, Family and Community (2 credits with FCR2, FCR3) With CHLD 239 (1 credit) = CHLD 209 3 credits)	ECE 155 Child, Family, and Community Relationships 1 Credit	EDU 200 Applied Educational Psychology .55 credit	ECH 276 (.5 hour) - however this includes completion of a project as well.	ECE 161 Family-Community Relationships 1 credit
FCR2	HSL 4854 Leadership in Family Life Education 1 Credit	EDUC 2310 Foundations of Education – partial credit 1 Credit	CHLD 238 Foundations of Child, Family and Community (2 credits with FCR1, FCR3) With CHLD 239 (1 credit) = CHLD 209 3 credits)	ECE 155 Child, Family, and Community Relationships 1 Credit	EDU 210 Educational Philosophy A Historical Account .55 credit	ECH 276 (.5 hour)	ECE 161 Family-Community Relationships 1 credit
FCR3	HSL 4854 Leadership in Family Life Education 1 Credit	EDUC 2310 Foundations of Education – partial credit 1 Credit	CHLD 238 Foundations of Child, Family and Community (2 credits with FCR1, FCR2) With CHLD 239 (1 credit) = CHLD 209 3 credits)	ECE 155 Child, Family, and Community Relationships 1 Credit	EDU 210 Educational Philosophy A Historical Account .55 credit	ECH 276 (1 hour) - this includes completion of a project to get the whole 2.0 credit courses for the FCR competencies.	ECE 161 Family-Community Relationships 1 credit
IRE1	HSL 4859 Resiliency in Family 1.5 Credit	EDUC 2330 Educational Psychology 1.5 Credits	CHLD 103 Environmental Design to Support Children's Play 3 Credits (with IRE2)	ECE 229 Early Childhood Curriculum and Activities 1 Credit	EDU 200 Applied Educational Psychology .55 credit	C&I 110 (not currently a Gateways course so we need to revisit this one - likely will be ECH 271 moving forward but we may need to add a project) (.5 hours)	ECE 111 The Developing Child 1 credit

	EIU Semester Credits	GSU Semester Credits	Heartland Semester Credits	MCC Semester Credits	NLU Quarter Credits (displayed as semester credits for comparison)	WIU Semester Credits	Kishwaukee Semester Credits
IRE2	HSL 4859 Resiliency in Family 1.5 Credit	EDUC 2330 Educational Psychology 1.5 Credits	CHLD 103 Environmental Design to Support Children's Play 3 Credits (with IRE1)	ECE 229 Early Childhood Curriculum and Activities 1 Credits	EDU 200 Applied Educational Psychology .55 credit	C&I 110 (not currently a Gateways course so we need to revisit this one - likely will be ECH 271 moving forward but we may need to add a project) (.5 hours)	ECE 110 Foundations of ECE 1 credit
Total Possible Credit (listed as semester credit for comparison purposes)	12-15 Credits	12-15 Credits	12 Credits	12-13 Credits	6.77 Credits	9-12 credits depending on when student is taking the assessment in their degree pathway and what they have already completed - after revamp on how we are taking it, it will be 13 hours but likely include completion of some projects or summative assessments but we are working to improve that.	12 Credits

Please note: WIU is currently able to award up to 12 credit hours, however, we are working in January and February to change the way that we are awarding the credit to align more appropriately to PLA Level 2. Printed guidance on suggestions for how to award would be ideal as we navigate this in our university systems and start working to unbundle when our courses cover across Levels 2-5. We are looking to change the way we receive it to take it for ECH 271, ECH 276, C&I 110, and potentially partial credit for Nutrition 203 with a project or summative assessment. We could use ECH 380 but for those in the workforce, we already have options to provide proficiency credit for that through their work experience so that's not the best fit moving forward.

Appendix H: PLA Pilot Implementation Project Presentations

Between July and November 2022, Dr. Donovan and Ms. Brennan presented at educational conferences about this initiative to both statewide and national audiences involved in PLA, college attendance, and ECE. The multipronged purpose of the presentations included:

- Spread knowledge of this EC statewide PLA instrument being developed in IL
- Promote the acceptance of college credit through prior learning assessment
- Promote competency-based education in colleges
- Connect with other educational professionals engaged in similar work to enhance the project

Major Presentations:

1. 2022 College Changes Everything Conference, Tinley Park IL and Virtually, sponsored by The Illinois Student Assistance Commission, ISAC, July 11, 2022. Statewide audience.

Title: Changing PLA Practices and Policies Can Change Everything About College-Going

2. 2022 Council of Adult Education and Learning, CAEL, Conference, Chicago IL, November 16, 2023. National Audience.

Title: The Early Childhood Competency-Based Virtual Reality PLA Project

3. Following the 2022 CAEL presentation, Donovan and Brennan were contacted by Melissa Bessette DeBlois, Director, Prior Learning Assessment for the Vermont State Colleges System, Community College of Vermont about meeting with a statewide ECE group in Vermont, chaired by Susan Titterton, Project Coordinator, VTAEYC's Advancing ECE as a Profession Committee. They presented the project's aim, process, and accomplishments to the Committee on January 19, 2023 in a virtual meeting.

Title: The Illinois ECE Prior Learning Assessment Project



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