

EDUCATION ADVANCEMENT INITIATIVES FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS

Elements of an Education Advancement Initiative Overview

This document is intended to help communities determine the feasibility of establishing an initiative by introducing terminology and areas of consideration for development and implementation.

Illinois seeks to provide children with high needs quality early care and education by increasing the number of ECE professionals and trained caregivers, including those from diverse populations, and creating clear pathways to increasing career opportunities. Education advancement initiatives are a key component of preparing the State's workforce to achieve these goals.

Education advancement initiatives include a variety of models and approaches that are used to support the current and future ECE workforce in earning the degrees and credentials necessary to improve their skills, knowledge, and career opportunities. These include a wide range of potential models that provide the structure, resources, and funding to support the success of adult learners, such as:

- **Cohorts** – Structured partnerships between school districts, community-based organizations, or other entities and institutions of higher education to support a group of educators through a credential or degree program. Educators generally take the same courses together at the same pace, ensuring a critical enrollment mass for courses and allowing courses to be scheduled for convenient times and locations to accommodate working adults. The group provides a support structure to participants to support completion.
- **Education Reimbursement** – Flexible funding available to support educators to achieve their education goals. The educator works directly with the institution of higher education to design a course of study and select coursework. Each educator proceeds at their own pace, based on their availability and capacity, and takes the courses that they need to obtain their next degree or credential. Funding may support expenses outside of tuition that help participants overcome barriers to continuing education, such as debts to an institution that prevent release of transcripts or expenses for textbooks.

The following elements of an education advancement initiative are designed to help communities, states, territories, and others discuss and build cohort initiatives that meet the needs of their region.

- **Identify early childhood program hiring needs**
 - Review data regarding the qualifications of current ECE teachers and directors and compare with program hiring needs to determine the preparation goals of individual cohorts.
 - Communities may have multiple hiring needs that may include additional licensed ECE teachers, Special Education Approvals, and Bilingual/ESL Endorsements.
 - Use the Questionnaire form to help gather feedback and critical information particularly from early childhood providers, including community organizations with early childhood programs and from teachers to determine scope of need.
 - Critical information includes;
 - Credentials or degrees that program directors require and are trying to hire for.
 - Number of candidates with current level of preparation that would make them eligible to enter a cohort.
 - Determining what other support services would be needed for a successful cohort – i.e. early childhood services for candidates, reading/writing/computer supports, transportation, etc.

■ Develop Concept

- Write out your conceptual framework for any potential idea.
- Identify the timeframe for the education advancement initiative participants to complete the target education level.
- Identify Higher Education Institutions with the curricula to meet the preparation needs.

■ Pursue Funding

- Develop a description or short narrative to share with funders and other interested groups.
- Determine if applicants should be/are capable of contributing a portion of the cost.
- Identify if potential funders have target populations or communities who could be served.
- Identify existing sources of state or federal funding that could be directed to supporting individuals within a cohort or an entire cohort initiative such as new federal Child Care Development Funding funding, Early Childhood Block Grant monies, Title II professional development dollars within a school district, or Grow Your Own funds.

■ Seek Partners

- Reach out to potential partners and gauge their interest and potential participation.
 - Higher education
 - Early childhood programs
 - Local government
- How can each partner contribute / support – can anyone provide convenient space?

■ Implement

- Create a checklist for administration of the project.
 - Identify and address administrative checkpoints (re: determining a point person, how information should be collected, and what it will be used for, etc.).
- Determine how information will be distributed to recruit participants.
 - Create an overview of the initiative to give the potential participants an idea of what to expect (re: how long the program will run, what the outcome will be, what their costs and/or investment might be).
 - Consider having the applicant pay a percentage of the cost (a minimal percentage). This helps with a higher rate of success or retention.
 - Consider if the hosts can accommodate spacing (if needed).
- Develop a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document.
 - This document will help answer many pertinent questions upfront. This is also a document that supplies enough information for potential participants to self-select in or out of the opportunity.

■ Evaluate

- Regularly monitoring the education advancement initiative or cohort helps to ensure a feedback loop is in place and can help to document progress. Information should be shared back regarding progress.
 - Set regular meetings to determine progress and if adjustments are needed to timeline or goals.
- Upon receipt of the final information/report from participants or sub-grantees:
 - Evaluate the education advancement initiative for effectiveness.
 - Identify any trends (including barriers to success).
- Include all measures monitored are in the final report to funders.