

# ExceleRate® Illinois and Gateways to Opportunity® Credentials

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

ExceleRate Illinois has set standards for staff and director qualifications at each Circle of Quality that require staff to have Gateways to Opportunity Credentials. Use the FAQ below to navigate and understand the use of Gateways Credentials throughout ExceleRate.

### Gateways to Opportunity Credentials: The Basics

#### What is a Gateways Credential?

Gateways Credentials are symbols of professional achievement that validate knowledge, skills, and experience with early care and education, infants and toddlers, administration, as well as family child care. View Gateways Credentials at [www.ilgateways.org](http://www.ilgateways.org) for an overview of the Gateways Credentials and process.

#### How and why were Gateways to Opportunity Credentials developed?

The Gateways Credentials were created by practitioners, providers, and other related stakeholders to support and recognize progressive levels of knowledge and skills for early care and education, school-age, and youth development professionals. Specific competency standards in content areas, such as Health, Safety and Well-Being, Human Growth and Development, and Family and Community Engagement, are used to validate the knowledge early care and education professionals must have to provide high quality care.

#### What Gateways Credentials are available to early care and education professionals?

Gateways Credentials are awarded and recognized by the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) Office of Early Childhood and were signed into legislation in July 2009. Gateways offers several Credentials to professionals in the field of early care and education, school-age, and youth development:

- ECE Credential
  - Levels 1–5
- Illinois Director Credential (IDC)
  - Levels I–III
- Infant Toddler Credential (ITC)
  - Levels 2–5
- School-Age & Youth Development Credential (SAYD)
  - Levels 1–5
- Family Child Care Credential (FCC)
  - Levels 2–5

#### How do I earn a Gateways Credential?

You can earn a Credential by:

- Completing an approved degree program at a college or university or
- Submitting a portfolio that documents knowledge and skills, and experience.

### Gateways Credentials Validate Specific Skills and Knowledge

#### Why do I need a Gateways Credential if I've been working in early care and education my entire career?

Many early care and education professionals have tremendous experience, yet scientific knowledge about child development has advanced significantly in the last several years. We now know much more than we did 10–15 years ago about a child's brain development and about the most effective approaches for teaching young children. Our goal with Credentials is to ensure that there is a standard and consistent level of knowledge for all early learning professionals. Credentials have several components including: coursework, training, and work and practical experience. Contact Gateways to find out which Credential is right for you.

### **Why is it important for every early care and education professional to have Gateways Credentials?**

Providing early care and education is a profession. Like many other professions, Credentials are required to verify that an individual has attained knowledge and skills necessary to practice his or her profession. As a profession, acknowledging specific knowledge and skills to provide high quality education to young children, is important. In addition to education and experience, contributions to the field are embedded as part of its credentialing system to recognize the professional nature of the work.

### **What is the benefit of gaining a Gateways Credential?**

Gateways Credentials (i.e. ECE Credential levels 3–6, Infant Toddler Credential levels 3–6, Illinois Director Credential levels I–III, and the Family Child Care Credential levels 4–5) meet the following ExceleRate Illinois training requirements (across all circles of quality):

- Finding a Curriculum that Works for You
- Introduction to Developmental Screening Tools
- Fundamentals of Child Assessment
- Welcoming Each & Every Child
- Family and Community: Partners in Learning
- An Introduction to Transitions
- Understanding and Planning for Continuous Quality Improvement
- Basics of Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Practice
- Creating Individual Professional Development Plans

Gateways Family Child Care Credential level 3 meets the following ExceleRate Illinois training requirements (across all circles of quality):

- Finding a Curriculum that Works for You

## **Eligibility and Selecting a Credential**

### **How do I determine which Credential is right for me?**

Review the Credentials for each ExceleRate Illinois Circle of Quality, and talk with your program director. Think about the courses or training you have completed, and identify which Credential(s) you would like to obtain. The Gateways Registry at [www.ilgateways.com](http://www.ilgateways.com) provides a free Basic Transcript Review to categorize your existing coursework. You can also request a Professional Development Advisor through Gateways to help you set career goals and make a plan to achieve them. Your Credentials Specialist will also work with you to determine the Gateways Credentials for which you may want to apply.

### **How do I know if I'm eligible for a Credential?**

Eligibility is determined after an individual applies for a Credential and his/her information is reviewed. To apply, visit [www.ilgateways.com](http://www.ilgateways.com) and download the Gateways Registry Membership Form and the appropriate Direct Route Credentials Supplement Application.

### **How do I know if my coursework or training applies to a Credential?**

Many professionals working in early care and education currently have taken courses or training leading to a Credential. Some additional courses or Credential-approved training may be required. Many individuals are closer to reaching their Credential goal than they may realize. The first step is to apply and submit your official transcripts from an accredited college or university, which will be used to determine your eligibility. A Credential Specialist will be assigned to help you through the Credential process.

### **When can I expect to receive my Gateways Credential?**

Once all information has been provided to Gateways and the Credential components have been met, anticipate receiving your Credential in about six to eight weeks.

### **How can I keep track of my Gateways Credentials when or if I change jobs?**

Your Gateways Credentials are specific to you. They are tracked and reported using the Gateways Registry. If you leave your place of employment, you keep your Registry membership and any Gateways Credentials you have earned. Gateways Credentials must be renewed every 5 years. These are your Credentials throughout your career, and you take them with you if (or when) you move to another job.

## Support and Assistance

### What support is available for early care and education professionals as they go through the Credential process?

Gateways assigns a Credentials Specialist to each person who applies for a Credential and that specialist is available throughout the Credential process to review transcripts, training and coursework and help the applicant with gaps that need to be filled to attain the Credential. You may also request to work with (at no cost) a Gateways Professional Development Advisor to set career goals and a plan to achieve them.

### What scholarships are available?

The Gateways Scholarship Program is an individual-based scholarship opportunity for eligible practitioners working in early care and education or school-age care programs. The Gateways Scholarship Program will pay a percentage of tuition based on availability of funding. The Scholarship Program enables practitioners to continue education in Early Childhood Education and to earn degrees, Gateways Credentials, certificates, and endorsements. Program Administrators and Teaching staff who work at a site that hold a valid ExceleRate Illinois Circle of Quality can apply to the Gateways Scholarship Program after 90 days of employment.

## Director and Staff Qualifications for ExceleRate Illinois

### How are staff defined by ExceleRate Illinois?

For ExceleRate Illinois Standards and Applications the below staff definitions can be used.

- Program Administrator- Director, Assistant Director, Director/Teacher (when spending 50% or more time in administration role)
- Teaching Staff- Teacher, Assistant Teacher, School-Age Worker or School-Age Assistant

### Do program staff have to attain their Gateways Credential prior to applying to ExceleRate?

All staff should continue to apply for and work towards applicable Gateways Credentials. ExceleRate system administrators recognize that achieving the required Credentials in some cases is a major leap in an environment where programs are struggling to maintain DCFS qualified teachers, managing staff turnover, and more. For this reason, the enforcement of Standards 4A and 4B is delayed. Programs are asked to complete a detailed Continuous Quality Improvement Plan (CQIP) including concrete, achievable goals and action steps the program is making towards meeting the Credential requirements. Programs will also need to describe their progress within the program's annual report.

### What are the qualifications for staff and directors at each ExceleRate Illinois Circle of Quality?

#### Bronze Circle of Quality

##### Staff Qualifications

At least 30% of teaching staff have a minimum of Gateways ECE Credential Level 2 (the ECE Credential at Level 2 does not require an Associate's degree).

For example:

- If the center has 10 teaching staff, at least 3 teachers would need to have a minimum ECE Credential Level 2;
- If the center has 30 teaching staff, at least 9 teachers would need to have a minimum ECE Credential Level 2;
- If the center has 50 teaching staff, at least 15 teachers would need to have a minimum ECE Credential Level 2.

#### Silver Circle of Quality

##### Staff Qualifications

At least 30% of teaching staff have a minimum of a Gateways ECE Credential Level 3 AND, 30% of teaching staff in infant-toddler classrooms have a Gateways Infant Toddler Credential Level 2.

For example:

- If the Center has 10 teaching staff, at least 3 teachers would need to have a minimum of the ECE Credential Level 3.
  - If the center has 3 infant-toddler teaching staff, at least 1 teacher would need to have a minimum of the Infant Toddler Credential Level 2.
- If the Center has 30 teaching staff, at least 9 teachers would need to have a minimum of the ECE Credential Level 3
  - If the center has 10 infant-toddler teaching staff, at least 3 teachers would need to have a minimum of the Infant Toddler Credential Level 2.

- If the center has 50 teaching staff, at least 15 teachers would need to have a minimum of the ECE Credential Level 3.
  - If the center has 15 infant-toddler teaching staff, at least 4 teachers would need to have a minimum of the Infant Toddler Credential Level 2.

### Directors Qualifications

Directors will need a Gateways Illinois Director Credential Level I or higher.

## Gold Circle of Quality

### Staff Qualifications

At least 20% of teaching staff have a minimum of Gateways ECE Credential Level 5 and an additional 20% of teaching staff have a minimum of a Gateways ECE Credential Level 4. 40% of teaching staff in infant-toddler classrooms must have a Gateways Infant Toddler Credential Level 3.

For example:

- If the center has 10 teaching staff, at least 2 teachers would need to have a minimum of the ECE Credential Level 5 AND 2 additional teachers would need to have a minimum of the ECE Credential Level 4.
  - If the center has 5 infant-toddler teaching staff, at least 2 teachers would need to have a minimum of the Infant Toddler Credential Level 3.
- If the center has 30 teaching staff, at least 6 teachers would need to have a minimum of the ECE Credential Level 5 AND 6 teachers would need to have a minimum of the ECE Credential Level 4.
  - If the center has 10 infant-toddler teaching staff, at least 4 teachers would need to have a minimum of the Infant Toddler Credential Level 3
- If the center has 50 teaching staff, at least 10 teachers would need to have a minimum of the ECE Credential Level 5 AND 10 teachers would need to have a minimum of the ECE Credential Level 4.
  - If the center has 15 infant-toddler teaching staff, at least 6 teachers would need to have a minimum of the Infant Toddler Credential Level 3.

### Director Qualifications

Directors will need a Gateways Illinois Director Credential Level II or higher.

### How can I learn more, or get further assistance?

Call toll-free (866) 697-8278 and ask to speak with a Credentials Specialist, or for answers to your questions email [info@excelerateillinois.com](mailto:info@excelerateillinois.com).



1226 Towanda Plaza | Bloomington, IL 61701 | p. 866.697.8278 | f. 309.828.1808 | [www.excelerateillinois.com](http://www.excelerateillinois.com)

ExceleRate® Illinois is administered through INCCRRA under the joint direction of the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development, the Illinois Department of Human Services, and the Illinois State Board of Education.

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