

Spotlight on Early Learning Indiana's Partnerships for Early Learners

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Overview

Early Learning Indiana is a statewide nonprofit that advocates for early childhood education (ECE) services in Indiana. Their work includes operating and connecting families to high-quality child care centers, strengthening and supporting the ECE workforce, and advocating for expanded access to ECE services for families across Indiana.¹

In 2014, Early Learning Indiana received a five-year \$20 million Lilly Endowment grant to improve ECE quality and expand statewide ECE access through the creation of a new initiative, Partnerships for Early Learners.² Three million dollars from this grant was set aside to support and strengthen the ECE workforce in Indiana.

Partnerships for Early Learners established a goal of helping 300 or more ECE professionals pursue and earn higher education degrees and credentials. They set out to achieve this goal through a series of strategies and initiatives, including:

- Creating the Day Early Learning Scholars program, which provides funding to expand the Teacher Education and Compensation Helps (T.E.A.C.H.) Early Childhood® INDIANA scholarship program³ and supports to ECE providers, allowing them to advance their education and enroll in programs to earn a bachelor's degree or master's-level certificate
- Establishing a partnership with Ball State University to create a master teacher certificate program
- Offering Child Development Associate (CDA) credential classes in Spanish
- Providing scholarships for college seniors pursuing ECE teaching degrees.

These strategies and initiatives offered through the Partnerships for Early Learners are described in the sections below.

Day Early Learning Scholars

Early Learning Indiana created and currently operates nine high-quality child care centers across the state, called Day Early Learning centers. With funds from the Partnerships for Early Learners initiative, Early

¹ For more information, see: <https://earlylearningin.org/about/>

² For more information, see: <https://partnershipsforearlylearners.org/>

³ For more information, see: <http://secure.iaeyc.org/programs-research/teach-early-childhood-indiana/>

Learning Indiana has been able to offer an expanded T.E.A.C.H. scholarship program, called Day Early Learning Scholars, for staff working in these Day Early Learning centers. The goal of the Day Early Learning Scholars program is to help staff at Day Early Learning centers pursue additional education in the form of a credential, bachelor's degree, or master's-level certificate.

Scholars are eligible for the program once they have received a T.E.A.C.H. scholarship, been admitted to the degree program they plan to pursue, and demonstrated that they are able to complete their desired credential or degree by the end of the grant period in 2019. In addition to receiving a T.E.A.C.H. scholarship, the Scholars receive a \$250 stipend for each semester they complete. Previously, training opportunities on work-life balance and goal setting were also available to the Scholars.⁴ To date, a total of 34 Scholars have participated in this initiative, with eight Scholars working toward an Administrator credential, three working toward a Transition to Teaching certification, 15 working toward a bachelor's degree, and eight working toward a master teacher certificate.

Ball State University's master teacher certificate program

Partnerships for Early Learners partnered with Ball State University to create a master teacher certificate program specifically geared toward ECE providers with bachelor's degrees looking to advance their education. The master teacher certificate consists of five courses (15 credit hours), completed online, that can be counted toward a master's degree in early childhood education (which would require at least 15 additional credit hours). Upon successful completion of the certificate, T.E.A.C.H. scholarship recipients receive a 5% salary increase from their employer. The master teacher certificate includes the following five courses:

- Early Childhood Education
- Educational Programs for Young Children
- Education in a Diverse Society
- Observation and Assessment in Early Childhood (created specifically for the master teacher certificate)
- Mentoring Early Childhood Professionals (created specifically for the master teacher certificate)

To date, 11 ECE professionals have completed the master teacher certificate. Partnerships for Early Learners anticipates that by the end of 2019, a total of 39 ECE professionals will complete the certificate.

CDA courses in Spanish

To support more ECE staff statewide in earning their CDA credential, Partnerships for Early Learners created a program offering CDA classes in Spanish in two locations—one in central Indiana, and one in northern Indiana. A needs assessment survey was used to gauge interest and determine the best locations for the CDA classes. Partnerships for Early Learners recruited staff statewide, using existing networks and supports for Spanish speaking providers. In the first year of offering the CDA in Spanish program, 47 staff earned their CDA credential. The program is currently in its second year, with 36 staff enrolled and working toward earning their CDA.

⁴ These training opportunities are no longer available due to low attendance rates.

Scholarships for undergraduate students pursuing ECE degrees

To support undergraduate students to complete their ECE degrees, Partnerships for Early Learners created partnerships with Purdue University and Ball State University to offer scholarships to seniors to ease the financial burden of pursuing their degrees in ECE and completing their student teaching requirements. Eligible undergraduate students receive a scholarship of \$4,000 per semester for up to two semesters. To be eligible, students must maintain a 3.0 GPA. Over the course of two years, a total of 58 students from Purdue University and Ball State University have received these scholarships to help them finish their ECE degree requirements with less financial stress.

Successes and Challenges

Successes

Partnerships for Early Learners was created with the goal of helping 300 or more ECE professionals pursue and earn higher education degrees and credentials by the end of 2019. The program is on track to exceed this goal, with staff anticipating that nearly 400 ECE professionals will have pursued and earned a credential or degree through the various Partnership for Early Learners initiatives before the end of 2019. Partnerships for Early Learners has received positive feedback from ECE professionals who have been able to advance their education through one of the Partnerships for Early Learners' initiatives. ECE professionals have expressed their excitement and gratitude for these funds and the opportunity to pursue higher education in their field.

Challenges

One challenge for Partnerships for Early Learners has been balancing the sustainability of the program with the goal of expanding it to help more ECE professionals earn a higher education credential or degree. Early Learning Indiana staff acknowledge that it is challenging to plan for and invest in longer-term, sustainable, systems-level program changes while also trying to allocate as much funding as possible toward individual scholarships for ECE professionals. While the intention is to scale up the program so that every child in Indiana has access to a qualified ECE provider, doing so poses some difficulties; within a primarily rural state like Indiana, it can be challenging to reach providers in all regions. In striving to realize their goal of reaching 300 ECE professionals, partnership staff worked hard to reach providers outside of the traditional early learning hubs to expand the reach of Partnership for Early Learners.

Another challenge Partnerships for Early Learners experienced was low attendance at the cohort training component of the Day Early Learning Scholars program. Originally this program offered trainings to Scholars on goal setting and work-life balance. Staff ultimately decided that funds for those trainings would be better spent to create additional scholarship opportunities for ECE professionals, and thus decided to cancel the training component of the Day Early Learning Scholars program.

Next Steps

Partnerships for Early Learners' funding through the Lilly Endowment is scheduled to end at the end of 2019. However, the Lilly Endowment has given Early Learning Indiana a one-year planning grant to reflect on the successes and challenges from the Partnerships for Early Learners initiative and create a plan for next steps. During this time, Early Learning Indiana will convene a variety of thought leaders and

stakeholders to help them consider effective and innovative strategies for moving forward, including thinking through possible future funding opportunities to support the ECE workforce.

Additional Information

For more information on Early Learning Indiana, please visit their website: <https://earlylearningin.org/>

For more information on Early Learning Indiana’s Partnerships for Early Learners initiative, please visit their website: <https://partnershipsforearlylearners.org/>

Project Overview

This project aims to understand how state policies, funding, and practices support the strengthening of the early childhood education (ECE) workforce.

The purpose of this series of “Spotlights” is to highlight strategies and initiatives being implemented by state and local agencies designed to support the development of the ECE workforce.

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