

ExceleRate® Illinois and Gateways to Opportunity® Credentials

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) for Licensed Child Care Centers – Revised May 2022

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.

Director and Staff Qualifications for ExceleRate Illinois

1. 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
- Infant Toddler Teaching Staff- Teacher or Assistant Teacher who works in a birth up to 23 months classroom

2. Do program staff have to attain a Gateways Credential for ExceleRate eligibility (Standard 4A and 4B)?

Staff should continue to apply for and work towards applicable Gateways Credentials. Once his/her application & documentation is reviewed, he/she will receive an eligibility letter from the Credential Department. *Please note: if staff do not have a valid CDA or college coursework, see #4 below.* If not meeting the Gateways Credential requirement for Standard 4A and 4B, the program must submit a detailed Continuous Quality Improvement Plan (CQIP), including achievable goals and action steps the staff are making towards meeting the Gateways Credential requirements. This includes actual coursework or applicable training for the Gateways Credential required that the staff person will complete over the next 12 months (prior to next ExceleRate renewal).

Staff should use the eligibility letter they receive from the Gateways Credential Team Member to select coursework from their chosen college/university. Coursework should be selected based on the content areas still needed towards the Gateways Credential, as listed in their eligibility letter. If staff have already chosen a college/university, a Gateways Credential Team Member may be able to offer suggestions of coursework that will progress them forward to Gateways Credential attainment. If specific training is needed, the eligibility letter will list the training needed.

As additional training/coursework is completed, staff should notify and submit documentation to the Credential program to update their individual Credential file. This will generate an updated eligibility letter from the Gateways Credential program or the award of a Credential. Either the updated eligibility letter or the earned Credential may be used to show evidence of progress as required for ExceleRate eligibility (see #7 below). Individuals can contact the Gateways Credential Program directly to check on their progress toward a Gateways Credential by emailing credentials@ilgateways.com.

3. What does not meet requirement of ExceleRate Standard 4A or 4B?

- A CQIP stating “we will apply for credentials”.
- Application to/completing ECE Level 1. While this is good training to have, it is not a relevant Gateways Credential to the requirements of Standard 4A and 4B. Program staff needs to apply for the applicable Gateways Credential(s) listed in 4A/4B.
- Attaining Illinois Department of Early Childhood (IDEC) training hours is not relevant to ExceleRate requirements of 4A and 4B.

4. What if staff have no college coursework (or minimal) - should they apply for applicable Credentials?

If staff have a valid CDA or any college coursework, they can apply for a Gateways Credential.

If staff do not have a valid CDA or any college coursework (as verified on an official transcript), they should not submit a Gateways Credential application. Instead, staff should review the list of entitled colleges/universities at Higher Education Programs - <https://www.ilgateways.com/docman-docs/professional-development/higher-education-programs/entitlement/259-entitled-institutions-list/file>. From there, select a college/university, and an early childhood or child development class. The program would complete their CQIP with the name of the college course and estimated completion date.

If staff have a valid CDA or any 100 level or higher college coursework (as verified on an official transcript), they can apply for Gateways Credentials. This coursework would count towards earned semester hours, general college education, and/or early childhood specific education requirements for Gateways Credentials. Once the staff person receives feedback from the Gateways Credential Department, they can follow instruction in #2 to create CQIP.

5. What funding is available to help staff complete college coursework and/or training?

The Gateways Scholarship Program is available for child care professionals interested in advancing their education. Gateways Scholarship Program will pay a portion of tuition for eligible professionals working in early care and education or school-age programs who want to earn college credit, Gateways Credentials, or degrees. The courses you take need to be in early childhood education (ECE) or child development (CD). You can be enrolled in an associate, bachelor's, or master's degree program or taking classes toward a certificate, endorsement, or Gateways Credential. Explore <https://www.ilgateways.com/financial-opportunities/scholarship> to find eligibility requirements, how to apply, and what your responsibilities are if you are awarded a Gateways Scholarship.

Other funding opportunities for early care and education individuals and programs are available at: <https://www.ilgateways.com/index.php/financial-opportunities/additional-funding-programs>

6. Are new staff members required to have attained a Gateways Credential?

New staff members (counting towards the percentage of Gateways Credentials needed), those hired within 90 days of the program's application to ExceleRate Illinois, are required to have a Gateways Credential application, for the applicable credential in process with Gateways Credential Department. No CQIP is required for these staff members to meet the requirement.

Please Note: It would be good practice for programs to include application to Gateways Credentials as part of a new staff Orientation. In the event that turnover within the program occurs, the director/staff will already know where other staff stand in terms of meeting the applicable Gateways Credential.

7. How is progress toward a Gateways Credential determined?

Standard 4A evidence at Silver and Gold:

- Administrator must hold the applicable Gateways Illinois Director Credential (IDC) or have a pending IDC application on file. If the applicable Gateways Credential has not been earned, the program must write a CQIP, using the eligibility letter received from the Gateways Credential Program, to outline goals and action steps needed to earn the applicable Gateways Credential. Updated CQIP of detailed accomplishments towards the needed Gateways Credential will be required yearly and progress must be shown. Evidence of progress will include either an updated letter from the Gateways Credential Program outlining what items still need to be met or an earned Credential.

Standard 4B evidence at Bronze, Silver and Gold:

- The percentage of teaching staff (as noted on the Standards Overview chart) must hold the applicable Gateways ECE Credential or Infant Toddler Credential (ITC) or have a pending Credential application on file. If the applicable Credential has not been earned, the program administrator must write a CQIP to outline goals and action steps, including specific coursework/training, the individual can accomplish over the year to work towards the applicable Gateways Credential. The program administrator/staff should use the individualized eligibility letter(s) received from the Gateways Credential Program to guide CQIP development in what coursework/training must be completed. Updated CQIP detailing accomplishments towards Gateways Credential attainment will be required yearly and progress must be shown. Evidence of progress will include either an updated letter from the Gateways Credential Team outlining what items still need to be met or an earned Gateways Credential.

8. 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). Again, if staff do not hold the applicable Credentials, the expectation is that the noted percentage of teaching staff have a pending Credential application with Gateways and are working towards the applicable Credential.

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 (Birth up to 23 months) have a Gateways Infant Toddler Credential Level 2. Again, if staff do not hold the applicable Credentials, the expectation is that the noted percentage of teaching staff have a pending Credential application with Gateways and are working towards the applicable Credential.

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 (Birth up to 23 months) must have a Gateways Infant Toddler Credential Level 3. Again, if staff do not hold the applicable Credentials, the expectation is that the noted percentage of teaching staff have a pending Credential application with Gateways and are working towards the applicable Credential.

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.

9. How can I learn more, or get further assistance related to Gateways Credentials?

If a director/teacher has a general question about a Gateways Credential, they can email credentials@ilgateways.com or call 866-697-8278.

Once an application is submitted and reviewed by the Gateways Credential Team, an email will be sent to the applicant that includes the contact information for their Gateways Credential Team member. If there are questions about whether a specific training/coursework will count towards the Gateways Credential needed, contact can be made with that specific Gateways Credential Team member.

Gateways Credential Team members respond to inquiries in order received. An immediate response to email/call may be slightly delayed, but a timely response will occur. We want to emphasize the need for staff to apply for the applicable Gateways Credentials well in advance of the program's ExceleRate renewal month.

**CCR&R Quality and Infant Toddler Specialists cannot provide technical assistance related to Gateways Credentials. They are available to assist with other ExceleRate items- ERS, PAS, self-assessment, policy review, etc.*

If a program has a question specific to Credential requirements as it pertains to ExceleRate eligibility, please call (866) 697-8278 and ask to speak with an ExceleRate Specialist, or email your questions to info@excelerateillinois.com.



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