

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION, ASSOCIATE OF APPLIED SCIENCE (703)

About Our Program

The field of early childhood education is filled with many exciting opportunities! Potential careers include working directly with young children and their families through teaching in public and private schools, Head Start programs, child care centers, and family child care homes. The program is committed to addressing the needs and interests of young learners of diverse ethnicity, race, socio-economic background and ability. There are opportunities both in the classroom as well as field workplace experience to practice skills learned. The field of early childhood covers children, birth through eight years of age.

At Highland Community College, we have a variety of pathways designed to support your professional growth. Whether you are interested in earning a Gateways Credential (<http://www.ilgateways.com/en/credentials>) (<https://www.ilgateways.com/credentials/?start=0>) or are planning to transfer to a four-year program, we have the courses and opportunities to meet your education and career needs. Our courses are designed around the following three Pathways: Direct Exit, Credential Continuing, and Credential Transfer.

The Credential Continuing Pathway is designed for students who are seeking employment and/or working in the field and who plan on progressing through each of the credentials with the goal of attaining their AAS. Courses are laid out in a four-semester sequence, with milestones of credential attainment marked along the way. This program contains 38 required ECE semester hours, 15 required related semester hours consisting of general education courses, and 9 ECE elective semester hours. The program of study must be taken in its entirety to meet degree requirements. Courses within the curriculum are based on the Illinois Professional Teaching Standards, the Gateways to Opportunity ECE Competencies, and the Early Childhood Special Education standards. As a "blended" program, the courses integrate knowledge and effective practices from the fields of early childhood education and early childhood special education, which prepares students to recognize, support, and enhance the vast diversity of child and family development and learning needs. The early childhood certificates are wholly contained in the Early Childhood Education degree.

Each of our pathways is designed to support the attainment of Gateways Credentials. The Gateways Credential is recognized by the Illinois Department of Human Services Bureau of Child Care and Development. Credentials are required for varied Circles of Quality in ExceleRate Illinois and can be used as a prerequisite for employment within early learning programs. To earn your Level 2-4 ECE, Level 2-4 Infant/Toddler, or Illinois Director Credential Level I at Highland Community College, you are required to follow a prescribed course of study. These credentials promote access to varied career opportunities within the field, as well as opportunities to transfer to a four-year program to continue courses of study. Students interested in pursuing a Gateways to Opportunity Credential need to speak with the Coordinator of the ECE program regarding specific course requirements to qualify for credentials.

Nature of Work and Employment

Early Childhood graduates with an AAS degree are qualified to be employed as teachers and directors in child development centers licensed by the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), Head Start, preschools, family child care providers, and in agencies providing family support. Career opportunities also include supporting those who work directly with young children in occupations that include administration, curriculum development, policy advocates and lobbyists, coaches and mentors, licensing representatives, and providers of professional development. Our state and nation are currently facing critical needs for well-prepared early childhood practitioners. Employment is projected to grow 10% from 2016 to 2026 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Outlook Handbook). Graduates must demonstrate good physical and emotional health as well as submit to and pass a current background check.

Special Considerations

This degree does NOT prepare students for Illinois State Board of Education teacher certification and does NOT prepare students for transferring, though some general education courses are transferable. Some of the early childhood education courses will be transferable at some colleges. Please check with your advisor regarding specific requirements. Students must take either Introduction to Early Childhood Education (ECE 121 Intro to Early Childhood Ed) or Child Growth and Development (ECE 122 Child Growth & Development) and earn the grade of "C" or better to proceed through the early childhood program. They must maintain a "C" or better in all early childhood courses to graduate. A workplace experience is required for successful completion of this program.

Requirements

Code	Title	Hours
Required ECE Courses		
Fall Courses:		
ECE 121	Intro to Early Childhood Ed	3
ECE 124	Lang & Literacy Dev in ECE ¹	3
ECE 125	Assessment in EC Settings ¹	3
ECE 126	Observation/Guidance Yng Child ¹	3
ECE 128	Practicum ¹	2
ECE 203	Home,Sci,ComRelations ECE ¹	3
ECE 205	Intro to Infant/Toddler Care ¹	3
Spring Courses:		
ECE 122	Child Growth & Development	3
ECE 123	Hlth,Safety,Nutrition Yng Chil ¹	3
ECE 204	Exceptional Child ECE ¹	3
ECE 202	Curriculum in EC Settings ¹	3
ECE 207	Math/Science for Young Child ¹	3
ECE 212	Early Childhood Assessment Sem ¹	3
Required Rel. Courses		
BUSN 125	Math of Business ¹	3
INFT 180	Intro to Information Systems ¹	3
SPCH 191	Fund of Speech Communication	3
Select one of the following communication courses:		3
BUSN 141	Business Communications	
ENGL 121	Rhetoric and Composition I	

Select one of the following:	3
PSY 161 Introduction to Psychology ¹	
General Education Elective	
ECE Required Electives	
Select 9 credits from the following:	9
ECE 127 Music/Movement Young Child ¹	
ECE 206 Creative Activities Yng Child ¹	
ECE 208 Supervision & Admin of CC Prog ¹	
ECE 210 Legal & Fiscal Mgmt of CC ¹	
ECE 211 ECE Staff Management Practicum ¹	
ECE 209 ECE Internship ¹	
ECE 213 Incl Environ for Inf/Tod ¹	
ECE 215 Mentoring in Early Childhood ¹	
Total Hours	62

¹ Course has a prerequisite. See course description.

Recommended courses for specific credentials:

Infant/Toddler Credential Level 3-4 – ECE 213 Incl Environ for Inf/Tod
 Illinois Director Credential – ECE 208 Supervision & Admin of CC Prog
 and ECE 211 ECE Staff Management Practicum

Program Outcomes

Students who complete this program of study will be able to:

- Evaluate children's unique developmental patterns, utilize assessments to inform instruction, and identify appropriate resources for those who may require further support.

- Develop and implement teaching strategies, materials, and content to support varied learning styles and abilities, incorporating evidence-based practices such as universal design and children's interests.
- Create and maintain safe, healthy, and engaging environments that promote each child's learning and development through inclusive practices and high-quality, responsive interactions that support their sense of belonging and well-being.
- Interpret and utilize assessment data to guide instructional planning, adapt environments, and individualize learning experiences.
- Demonstrate ethical standards, professional conduct, and effectively collaborate with colleagues, families, and community partners.
- Advocate for the early childhood education profession and actively support families—including those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds—through informed, respectful engagement and community-focused advocacy.
- Implement high-quality, responsive learning experiences that align with children's needs, feedback, and the Illinois Early Learning and Development Standards.

Program Contacts

Call Highland at 815-235-6121 for the following program contacts:

- Rae Schupbach-Roe, Dean, Humanities, Social Sciences, and Fine Arts
- Melissa Johnson, Coordinator of Early Childhood Education
- Vicki Schulz, Student Advisor/Transfer Coordinator