



Illinois Eastern Community Colleges

Early Childhood Education Program

Student Handbook

Academic Years 2026–2028

6/1/2026

Welcome

Welcome to the Early Childhood Education (ECE) Program at Illinois Eastern Community Colleges. This handbook has been developed to provide students with clear expectations regarding academic requirements, professional conduct, regulatory compliance, credential alignment, and field experience requirements necessary for successful program completion.

Students are responsible for carefully reviewing this handbook in conjunction with the [Illinois Eastern Community Colleges Academic Catalog](#). These documents contain important information regarding college policies, student rights and responsibilities, academic standards, available support services, and program requirements.

Information contained in this handbook is subject to change in order to remain compliant with Illinois Eastern Community Colleges Board of Trustees policies, Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) requirements, Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) regulations, Gateways to Opportunity credential standards, and other applicable state or federal regulations. When changes occur, the program will make reasonable efforts to notify students; however, students are responsible for remaining informed of current policies and requirements.

Enrollment in the program signifies the student's responsibility to understand and comply with all institutional policies, program standards, professional expectations, and applicable regulatory requirements outlined in this handbook and the college catalog.

Because Early Childhood Education professionals are entrusted with the care, safety, and development of young children, students are expected to demonstrate professionalism, ethical behavior, reliability, and sound judgment throughout their coursework and field experiences. Failure to meet professional conduct expectations may impact a student's ability to continue in field experiences or successfully complete program requirements.

Program Mission & Institutional Alignment

The Early Childhood Education Program supports the mission of Illinois Eastern Community Colleges by promoting workforce development, student success, community engagement, and regional economic growth. The program is designed to prepare highly qualified early childhood professionals who are equipped to meet local and regional workforce needs while supporting high-quality learning environments for young children.

Through academic preparation, field experience, and credential alignment, the program contributes to the college's commitment to providing accessible education, strengthening community partnerships, and developing a skilled workforce that supports the educational and economic vitality of the region.

Professional Disposition Statement

In addition to academic performance, students in the Early Childhood Education Program are expected to demonstrate professional dispositions consistent with the expectations of the early childhood profession. Professional dispositions reflect the attitudes, values, and behaviors expected of individuals working with young children, families, and colleagues.

The Early Childhood Education Program is committed to student success and will make reasonable efforts to support students in meeting academic and professional expectations. However, because Early Childhood professionals work in positions of trust with vulnerable populations, students must demonstrate the ability to meet professional standards required by the field.

Students are expected to demonstrate the following dispositions:

- Professional and ethical behavior
- Dependability and punctuality
- Respect for diversity and inclusion
- Positive communication skills
- Confidentiality and professionalism
- Willingness to accept feedback
- Collaboration with peers, faculty, and field supervisors
- Appropriate judgment when working with children and families

Professional dispositions are evaluated throughout coursework and field experiences. Students who demonstrate behaviors inconsistent with professional expectations may be subject to corrective action, including remediation plans or removal from field experiences when necessary.

Fitness to Work with Children

Students enrolled in the Early Childhood Education Program must be able to meet the physical, emotional, and professional demands required to safely work with young children. This includes the ability to:

- Maintain appropriate supervision of children
- Respond appropriately in emergency situations
- Demonstrate emotional stability and professionalism
- Maintain appropriate boundaries with children and families
- Follow safety and health procedures

Students must also demonstrate the ability to work in environments that require patience, flexibility, problem-solving skills, and professional communication.

The college reserves the right to require documentation of a student's ability to safely participate in field experiences if concerns arise regarding safety, professional conduct, or the well-being of children.

Gateways to Opportunity Credential Alignment (Levels 2–4)

Coursework within the Early Childhood Education Program is aligned with the **Illinois Gateways to Opportunity Early Childhood Education Credential Levels 2–4**, ensuring students develop the competencies required for professional advancement within the early childhood workforce. Students are responsible for applying to the **Gateways Registry** to obtain the appropriate credential once all requirements have been successfully completed.

The program prepares students for the following credential levels:

Level 2 – Foundations

Coursework focuses on foundational knowledge and skills necessary for entry-level early childhood professionals, including:

- Health, safety, and well-being practices
- Human growth and development
- Interactions, Relationships, and Environments
- Family and Community Relationships
- Personal and Professional Development

Level 3 – Curriculum and Family Engagement

Coursework emphasizes instructional practices and relationship-building skills, including:

- Introduction to observation and documentation techniques
- Curriculum and Program Design
- Child assessment and evaluation strategies
- Inclusive practices and supporting children with special needs

Level 4 – Associate Degree Completion

Coursework builds advanced competencies necessary for effective classroom practice and program support, including:

- Foundations of program organization and leadership
- Comprehensive field and practicum experiences
- Reflective teaching and continuous improvement practices
- Ethical decision-making and professional leadership skills

Completion of program coursework does not automatically result in Gateways credential issuance. Students must submit all required documentation through the Gateways Registry and meet all state requirements for credential approval.

Field Experience

Field experiences are a required component of the Early Childhood Education Program and provide students with supervised opportunities to apply course concepts in real-world settings.

Mandatory Program Orientation

All Early Childhood Education (ECE) students are required to attend the annual **Mandatory Program Orientation** prior to beginning any field experience or practicum placements. This orientation is designed to review program expectations, compliance requirements, professional standards, safety requirements, and field experience procedures necessary for program participation.

Students will receive official notification of the orientation date, time, and location through college communication channels. It is the student's responsibility to ensure their contact information is current and to monitor college communications.

Failure to attend the required orientation may result in a delay in program progression, postponement of field experience placement, or inability to enroll in practicum courses until the requirement is completed.

Attendance at the scheduled orientation session is mandatory. Alternative arrangements will only be considered in documented extenuating circumstances and must be approved by the Program Coordinator or Dean. Students who miss the orientation without prior approval may be required to wait until the next scheduled session to continue in the program.

DCFS and Illinois Regulatory Compliance

Students participating in field experiences are required to comply with applicable **Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) licensing standards**, including regulations governing Day Care Centers (89 Ill. Adm. Code 407), Group Day Care Homes (89 Ill. Adm. Code 408), and Day Care Homes (89 Ill. Adm. Code 406), as applicable to their placement site.

As part of these requirements, students must complete all required background checks, safety trainings, and health documentation prior to participating in field experiences. These requirements are established to ensure the safety and well-being of children and to maintain compliance with state regulations.

Compliance requirements may include, but are not limited to:

- Fingerprint-based criminal background check

- Child Abuse and Neglect Tracking System (CANTS) clearance
- Mandated Reporter Training in accordance with the *Abused and Neglected Child Reporting Act (325 ILCS 5/)*
- Shaken Baby Syndrome prevention training
- Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) prevention training
- Trauma-informed care training
- Current physical examination and required immunizations
- CPR and First Aid certification (if required by the field placement site)

Students are responsible for completing all required documentation by program deadlines. Failure to complete required compliance items may result in delayed placement, inability to participate in field experiences, or inability to complete program requirements.

Additional requirements may be established by individual field placement sites, and students must comply with all site-specific policies.

Completion of Early Childhood Education program requirements does not guarantee eligibility for employment in licensed childcare settings. Employment eligibility is determined by DCFS regulations, background check results, and individual employer hiring policies. Students are responsible for meeting all regulatory requirements established by the State of Illinois and prospective employers.

Background Checks and Mandated Reporter Requirements

Students participating in field experiences may be required to complete background checks, fingerprinting, health documentation, TB testing, and other compliance requirements as required by field placement sites, the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), or other regulatory agencies. Students are responsible for any costs associated with these requirements unless otherwise specified.

Students in the Early Childhood Education Program will also complete Mandated Reporter Training as required by Illinois law. As future professionals working with children, students are expected to understand their legal and ethical responsibility to report suspected child abuse or neglect in accordance with the **Abused and Neglected Child Reporting Act (ANCRA)**.

Failure to successfully complete required compliance items may prevent a student from participating in field experiences, which may delay or prevent program completion.

Professional Conduct

Students enrolled in Early Childhood Education courses with field experiences are expected to present themselves in a professional manner consistent with the expectations of the early childhood profession and the policies of the field placement site.

Students must:

- Follow all policies and procedures of the field placement site

- Maintain confidentiality regarding children, families, and staff
- Accept supervision and feedback professionally
- Demonstrate initiative and engagement
- Complete all required documentation and assignments
- Represent Illinois Eastern Community Colleges in a professional manner

Students are guests at their assigned field sites. Failure to follow site expectations may result in removal from the placement.

Field placement sites reserve the right to request removal of a student whose behavior is deemed unprofessional or inappropriate. If this occurs, the program will review whether an alternative placement is appropriate. In some cases, removal may result in inability to complete program requirements.

Professional Dress Code

Students participating in field experiences are expected to maintain a professional appearance that reflects the standards of the early childhood profession and the policies of their assigned field placement site.

Students must:

- Wear clean, appropriate, and modest clothing suitable for working with young children
- Wear closed-toe shoes for safety purposes
- Follow any additional dress code requirements established by the field site
- Maintain good personal hygiene
- Avoid clothing with inappropriate language or images
- Limit jewelry that could present a safety concern
- No harsh perfumes

Students may be asked to remove facial piercings or cover tattoos depending on site policies.

Because early childhood environments often require sitting on the floor, active movement, and participation in play activities, students should dress accordingly.

Failure to comply with dress code expectations may result in removal from the field site for the day and may count as an absence.

Attendance

Attendance and punctuality are essential professional expectations in the Early Childhood field. Students are expected to demonstrate the same level of responsibility required in employment settings.

Students must:

- Arrive on time and remain for the full scheduled field experience
- Notify both the instructor and field site supervisor if an absence is unavoidable
- Follow course attendance policies outlined in the syllabus

Excessive absences or tardiness may result in:

- Loss of field experience hours
- Required make-up hours (if permitted)
- Removal from the field placement
- Inability to successfully complete course requirements

Grounds for Removal

Because student participation in field experiences involves the safety and well-being of young children, students may be removed from a field placement for reasons including, but not limited to:

- Violation of confidentiality
- Unprofessional or unethical behavior
- Failure to follow site policies
- Excessive absences or tardiness
- Safety concerns
- Inappropriate interactions with children or staff
- Failure to complete compliance requirements
- Academic dishonesty related to field documentation

Removal from a field placement may result in failure of the course and may require a meeting with the Program Coordinator or Dean to determine whether the student may continue in the program.

The college reserves the right to make final determinations regarding a student's continuation in field experiences based on safety, professional standards, and program requirements.

Students may submit a written appeal within five (5) business days of removal. The Program Coordinator will review the appeal and issue a determination. Further appeal may follow institutional academic grievance procedures.

Small World Learning Center (Lab School Experience)

Small World serves as the on-campus early learning laboratory environment supporting the ECE program. Students may complete observation hours, practicum experiences, and applied assignments within Small World under the supervision of qualified early childhood professionals.

While participating at Small World, students are expected to demonstrate professional conduct, confidentiality, appropriate dress, punctuality, and adherence to all safety and supervision guidelines.

Student Support & Advising

IECC offers academic advising, tutoring services, financial aid support, disability services, and career counseling. Students are encouraged to meet regularly with their advisor to ensure progress toward graduation and credential attainment.

Student Acknowledgment

Students are responsible for reviewing and understanding the policies and expectations outlined in this handbook. Questions regarding handbook content should be directed to the Program Coordinator or Dean.

Student Acknowledgement Statement:

I acknowledge that I have received and reviewed the Early Childhood Education Program Handbook. I understand that I am responsible for complying with the policies, procedures, and professional expectations outlined in this document. I understand that failure to comply with program requirements may affect my ability to participate in field experiences and successfully complete the program.

I agree to uphold the professional standards expected of individuals preparing to work in the Early Childhood Education profession.

Student Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____