



Early Childhood Education Advisory Committee

Meeting Date: Thursday, March 19, 2026

External Participants:

Lin Zhu – Assistant Professor, Department of Special and Early Education, Northern Illinois University (NIU)

Aaron Confer – Youth Development Director, Kishwaukee YMCA

Rachel Engel – Director, Walnut Street Daycare Center

Michelle Sands – Assistant Professor, Department of Special and Early Education, NIU

Shannon Alamia - Executive Director, Children’s Learning Center of DeKalb

Tina Holtz – Teacher, Family and Consumer Sciences, DeKalb High School (DHS)

Malia Jones – Family and Community Engagement Specialist, Birth to Five Illinois

Internal Participants:

Jud Curry – Dean of Instruction

Steve Arves – Associate Dean of Instruction

Terry Lynn Funston - Director of Curriculum and Program Development

Laura Gregory – Coordinator of Employment and Job Placement Services

Lauren Duval – Academic Advisor

Courtney Walz – Director of Development

Anna Harvey – Instructor, Early Childhood Education (ECE)

Maria Lombardo – Director, Early Learning Center, and Instructor, ECE

- I. College Updates
 - A. Minutes from last meeting approved.
 - B. Spring enrollment is down slightly from last spring, overall totaling to a less than 1% drop. The College hopes to continue seeing enrollment increases.
 - C. The College Board of Trustees voted to keep tuition at its current price of \$160 per semester-hour in addition to continuing with the All-In program that removes fees and includes coursework materials and books in tuition costs.
 - D. The College continues to work on building and grounds maintenance, such as roof replacement, the construction of a new greenhouse, and the demotion of the A1300 wing.
 - E. Summer and Fall 2026 course catalogs are live and visible to students. Enrollment begins April 6th.
 - F. The College has been recognized for its All-In Tuition program and has been nominated as one of the top 200 community colleges for the Aspen Prize.
- II. Department Updates



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- A. Revisions made to the ECE 280 practicum have improved the experience overall for students completing the AAS degree. Of the nine students taking the practicum, all are expected to successfully complete it. Due to large enrollment, the college will be offering another practicum for the SU26 semester.
 - B. The College continues to investigate ways to implement and improve upon assessments for prior learning credits. The College will be working with Dr. Samantha Murray of South Suburban College to deliver scenario assessments and trainings to students in place of the previous virtual assessments.
 - C. Anna Harvey and Rina Lopez participated in the Council of Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) workshop on Assessing Prior Learning, a program that focuses on developing and improving the methods of awarding credit for prior learning.
 - D. 4C and the College will be collaborating again this year to host a family fun and resource night on Thursday, April 16th from 5 – 7pm for the Week of the Young Child.
- III. Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity (ECACE) Updates
- A. Goals and goal-setting process
 - i. Maintain enrollment at 85% of average enrollment, persistence, and completion rates for the last 3 years, starting 2026-27 AY.
 - ii. Identify alternate prospective student pipelines beyond incumbent workers.
 - iii. Improve pathways for advancing credentials and local implementation of consortium goals.
 - B. ECACE Scholarship
 - i. The scholarship continues to allocate \$5 million with a maximum of \$7500 per student.
 - ii. FY26-27 open date for applications to be determined, and the scholarship continues to prioritize current and past recipients.
- IV. Partner Updates and Discussion
- A. Lombardo discussed and re-emphasized the importance of in-person learning and experiences for students after receiving positive feedback on the in-person sections of a hybrid class. Curry noted that hybrid format may offer the best compromise for students with obligations outside of coursework and proposed future collaboration with instructors to find where more hybrid options could be implemented.
 - B. Confer, Kishwaukee YMCA, and Sands, NIU, agreed with Lombardo's assessment, stating that new hires and students working toward bachelor's degrees have demonstrated better clinical preparedness as opposed to those who do not have hands-on work experience.
 - C. Gregory and Curry discussed the potential to present to ECE courses on employment and job placement resources with the College.



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- D. Jones, Birth to Five, will be reaching out to external and internal members regarding upcoming opportunities for guest speakers to highlight the importance of early childhood education in settings beyond the classroom.
 - E. External members report a shift in student interest from pursuing careers focused on early childhood classroom teaching toward other areas related to families and child development, such as Counseling, Social Work, Occupational Therapy, and Speech Therapy.
- V. Next Meeting – Fall 2026