

Innovation Grant – Gate Opener Project

Early Care and Education (ECE) practitioners across the state identified the following seven barriers as priority for practitioners in order to achieve Child Development or ECE degrees and/or ECE Certification: student teaching requirements, accessibility to programs, upfront payment of tuition, PRAXIS I test, only needing the ECE Certification, experience not counting toward credits, and the fear/anxiety going back to school. These are the barriers that were identified for the purposes of the grant.

Innovation Grants were awarded to the following nine institutes of higher education:

Arcadia University – will implement a certification program to meet the needs of the regional early childhood practitioners. Practitioners impacted will be 14 current and 36 new. This proposal addresses the following barriers: accessibility (courses will be offered off-campus at regional early childhood centers, with flexible scheduling, hybrid, weekend, and traditional formats offered), paying full cost of tuition upfront (tuition reduction, deferred payment plan and assistance with financial aid, textbook scholarship available), Praxis tests (offer no cost Praxis preparation workshops in reading, math and English/writing), only need ECE certification (accelerated graduate certification program that acknowledges the experience and expertise of the practitioners) and fear/anxiety of going back to school (cohort model will be used).

Carlow University – will provide access to further education and early childhood certification for teachers and staff in their region. Practitioners impacted will be 36 current and 51 new. This proposal addresses the following barriers: student teaching (three options available), accessibility (community based classes, accelerated courses in evenings and on weekends), paying full cost of tuition upfront (financial aid and admissions office will develop and disseminate information for practitioners), Praxis tests (collaborate with Butler Co CC and the Carlow Center for Academic Achievement to assure candidates have the support they need to pass the Praxis exams), only need ECE certification (a pool of qualified ECE faculty advisors will review transcripts and identify specific courses each applicant will need to complete certification requirements), practitioner experience translate into credits (develop policies about the use of portfolios to assess competencies, staff available to assist practitioners), and fear/anxiety of going back to school (provide technical and emotional support to candidates through EC faculty advising, cohort and peer support, interactive Blackboard site specifically for EC teacher certification candidates).

Eastern University – will expand their successful Praxis I prep class currently offered at its main campus to four new locations (Esperanza, 10th & Spring Garden, Harrisburg, & Pottstown) and also offer a mentor program to practitioners. Practitioners impacted will be 60 new. This proposal addresses the following barriers: Praxis tests (staff develop a Praxis I test prep class with the main focus on math and writing, Praxis I Study Guide will be provided for each practitioner) and

fear/anxiety of going back to school (mentors to work with small groups of practitioners to serve as personal advocates linking the students with resources).

Indiana University of Pennsylvania – will assist teachers to complete coursework necessary for a Bachelor of Science degree in child development and family studies. Practitioners impacted will be 10 current and 20 new. This proposal addresses the following barriers: accessibility (classes will be held at IUP's Monroeville site to enabling students in the Pittsburgh area to be enrolled in classes at a location near the workplace. The program will be hybrid classes, a combination of on-site/on-line classes with the on-site classes offered in the evenings and on weekends), paying full cost of tuition upfront (program coordinator and advisor/mentor will work with IUP's Financial Aid Office to develop installment payment plans, monies will be available to purchase books and resource materials which will be put "on-loan" for students unable to purchase course materials. These books and materials will be used in subsequent semesters), practitioner experience translate into credits (advisor/mentor will work with IUP's Transfer Credit Office to evaluate "Practicum Courses" for transfer credit), and fear/anxiety of going back to school (advisor/mentor will be assigned to work with this program, providing regular, personal contact with each participant, advisor/mentor will also plan computer orientation workshops each semester to assign students with on-line scheduling, registration, and participating in on-line classes).

Keystone College – will offer courses every Wednesday for practitioners to work on an associates or bachelors degree and early childhood certification. They will also provide substitutes for the practitioners by providing their junior and senior education students with required field experience to cover the practitioner taking classes. Practitioners impacted will be 25 current and 36 new for a total of 61. This proposal addresses the following barriers: accessibility (up to six hours of course each Wednesday, college coursework will be scheduled at Keystone, as well as on-site or near-site depending on the needs of the practitioner group enrolled in the initiative), Praxis tests (Praxis study groups and preparation classes, which will be scheduled on Wednesdays), practitioner experience translate into credits (potential for credit by assessment), fear/anxiety of going back to school (meet with an education adviser to create an individualized plan for pursuing coursework, cohort system), and substitutes (Jr & Sr Keystone Ed students will be used to substitute at the centers).

King's College – will provide fast-track preparation classes and graduate courses with individualized education plans for each practitioner which would include praxis I test prep. Practitioners impacted will be 45 current and 55 new totaling 100 for the project. This proposal addresses the following barriers: accessibility (providing fast-track preparation classes with IEP), Praxis tests (instructor hired to prepare practitioners for Praxis I test as well as test-taking techniques), only need ECE certification (Grad courses with IEP, undergraduate course will be waived for those practitioners with M. Ed or EI Ed Cert.), and fear/anxiety of going back to school.

Lock Haven University of Pennsylvania – will expand their on-line courses to include ECE graduate level coursework, have one faculty member as their dedicated advisor, and expand articulation agreements to include two more two-year colleges. Practitioners impacted will be 20 new. This proposal addresses the following barriers: accessibility, paying full cost of tuition upfront, only needs ECE certification, fear/anxiety of going back to school, and articulation. Part of their plan is to create 3 online courses.

Point Park University – will offer off-site and accelerated certification classes. Practitioners impacted will be 43 current and 18 new for a total of 61. This proposal addresses the following barriers: accessibility, paying full cost of tuition upfront, and only needing ECE certification.

Shippensburg University of Pennsylvania – will hire an early childhood recruitment specialist. Practitioners impacted will be 11 current and 11 new totaling 22 in the first grant year. This proposal addresses the following barriers: student teaching, accessibility, Praxis tests, practitioner experience translate into credits, only need ECE certification, and fear/anxiety of going back to school.