Integrating Kindergarten into the Elementary Education Endorsement Grade Band

February 3, 2026

ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Meeting Agenda

- Introductions
- Values
- Assignability Challenges
- Preparation Leads to Assignability
  - Development, Systems, Preparation and Assignability
  - Licensure Bands in Other States
- Data
- Obtaining a subsequent endorsement or approval in ECE or Kindergarten
- Questions that inform possible next steps
- Discussion
- Final Thoughts

ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Values

- Maintaining a ‘child-centered focus’ regardless of modifications to grade bands.
- Ensuring knowledge of and practices for and in support of the range of developmental needs observed in early childhood settings.
- Balancing the need for rich preparation experiences and subsequent flexibility in assignability.

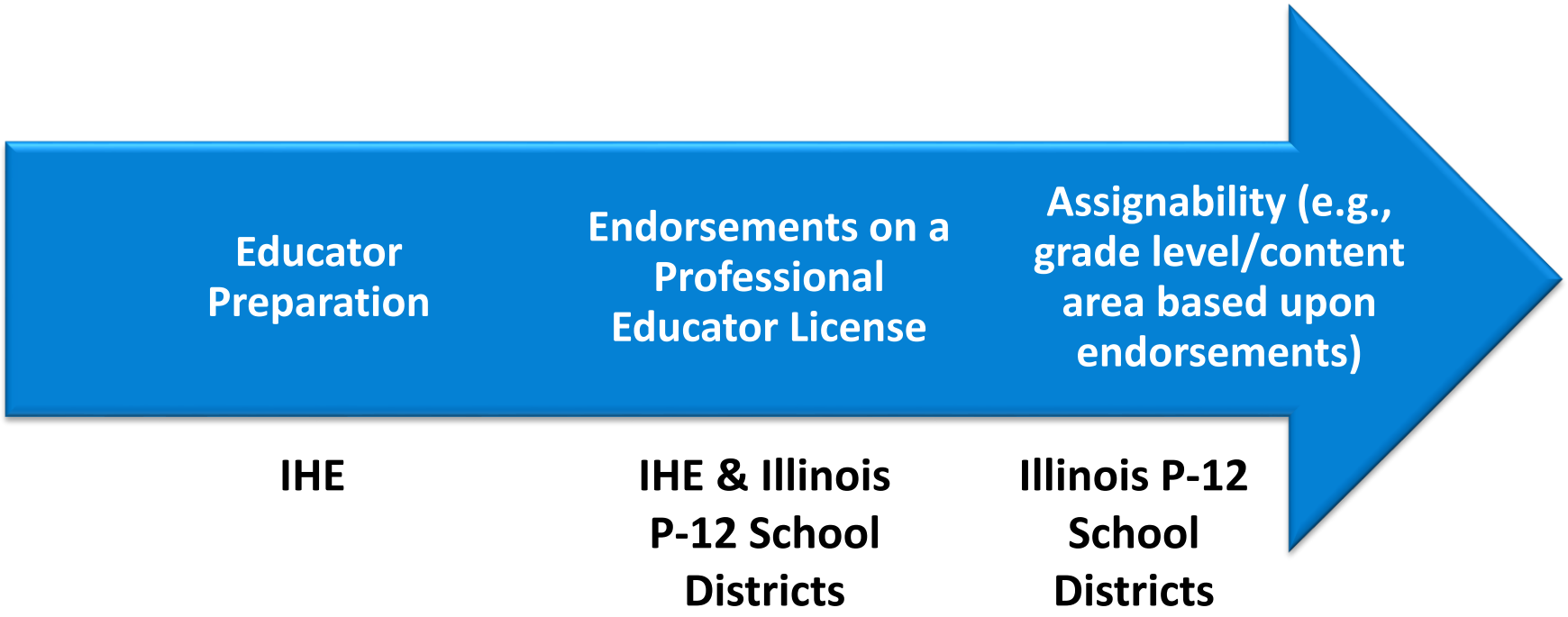
ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Assignment Challenges

- Requests from field – difficulty assigning properly licensed teachers to kindergarten positions
- Additional approaches to obtaining an EC endorsement or approval could:
  - allow more flexibility in teacher assignability across grades
  - provide a greater pool of qualified potential applicants
  - increase applications in rural or hard-to-staff schools
  - reduce substitute teachers or other means of temporarily assigning educators to roles due to lack of qualified teachers

ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Preparation Leads to Assignability



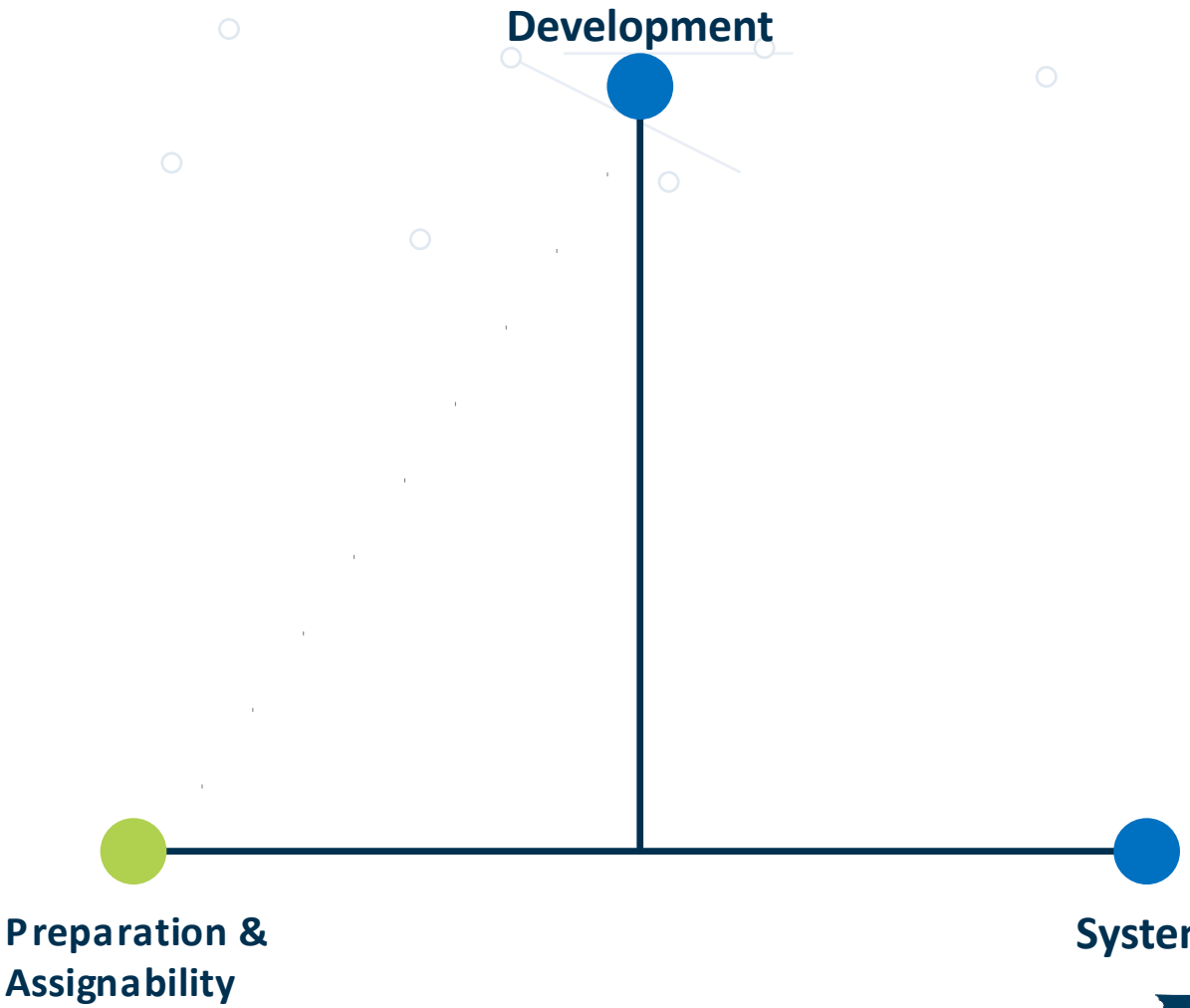
ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Preparation Leads to Assignability

- When considering modifications to the EC and ELEM grade bands:
  - Issues of preparation must consider the means through which this occur.
  - These means should:
    - Provide that candidates can show what they know in ways that honor their experiences and align with standards and evidence-based practices and recognized theories within the content area.
    - Recognize the ‘tensions’ between the delivery of preparation experiences, system requirements (e.g., state and federal requirements), and theories upon which the practices within the content area are grounded.
    - Be durable enough to reflect current realities as well as anticipated future needs of assignability.

ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Preparation Leads to Assignability and…



ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Preparation Leads to Assignability and…

Rationale	State	EC Grade Band	ELEM Grade Band	Explanation/Justification
Development	Texas	PK-6	PK-6	**Developmental continuum/unique needs of early learners; narrowing grade bands to improve educator effectiveness, and to align preparation to early learners' developmental needs.**
Development, *System* and Assignability	Rhode Island	PK-2	1-6	**NAEYC definition used as anchor for proposed early childhood span (incl. Grade 3).** *Shows a standards-based justification for where K is placed (elementary vs. early childhood) in grade-span design.* Staffing shortage realities referenced in grade-span discussion to support adjusting spans while maintaining quality expectations.
Development & Assignability	Pennsylvania	PK-4	K-6 (no longer issued)	**Age-appropriate pedagogy used to argue for grade-span structures that better align teacher prep to developmental stages (while acknowledging practical constraints).** Broader grade spans increase employment opportunities for candidates and improve LEA staffing flexibility.
Development & *System*	Mississippi	PK-3	K-6	**Developmental preparation as a valued component of licensure.** *Passing score on a rigorous test of scientifically research-based reading instruction for initial elementary licensure.* *Example of literacy mandate operating as a licensure gate; can indirectly influence boundary discussions by raising preparation expectations.*
Development & Assignability	New York	Birth-2	1-6	References typical early childhood range and the case for expanding EC to Grade 3. Supply/demand data and field feedback.
Development *& System*	Virginia	PK-3	PK-6	**Developmental arguments used to support expanding EC coverage (B-3) while retaining a separate Childhood band (1-6).** *Reading instructional assessment requirement as a condition for certain endorsements (including early/primary and elementary).*

ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Licensure Bands in Other States

Early Childhood

- Birth–Grade 2: DE, **IL**, NV, NY
- Birth–Grade 3/Age 8: AZ, CO, HI, ID, IA, KS, MN, MO, NE, NH, NM, ND, OR, SD, VT, WA, WI, WY
- Birth–Grade 2 **or** 3: AK
- Birth–K: AR, CT, GA, ME, MI, NC
- Birth–Primary: KY
- K–Grade 3: UT
- PK–Grade 2: MA, RI
- PK–Grade 3: AL, CA, IN, LA, MD, MS, MT, NJ, OH, OK, SC, TN, VA, WV
- PK–Grade 4: PA
- PK–Grade 3 **or** 4: FL

Elementary

- 1–5: LA
- 1–6: DC, **IL**, MD, MA, MO, NY, RI
- 1–8: ND, OK
- 2–6: SC
- Early Childhood–6: TX
- K–5: OH, TN
- K–6: AL, AR, CA (multiple subject typically K-6), CO, DE, FL, HI, IN, IA, KS, MI, MN, MS, NE, NH, NJ, NC, UT, VT, WV, WY
- K–8: AK, AZ, ID, ME, MT, NV, NM, OR, SD, WA
- K–9: WI
- PK–3: MI
- PK–4: PA
- PK–5: GA, KY
- PK–6: CT, VA

ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Data

- This analysis uses data from Educator Licensure Information System (ELIS), Employment Information System (EIS), and Student Information System (SIS).
- The EIS and SIS data corresponds to the SY24 and SY25 **final data** used for the Illinois Report Card.
- The ELIS data for SY24 and SY25 corresponds to the ELIS **snapshot data**, which is taken in June of the appropriate school year.
- Endorsements and course/employment data are contemporaneous.
- This analysis does not include any SY26 data aside from the STA-Kindergarten data as STA did not exist until SY26.
- Course information is limited to courses in which one student received a 'grade.' This follows a Report Card business rule for the Teacher Out of Field metric eliminating erroneous course assignments.

ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Data

SY24 and SY25 – individuals with an ECE endorsement and employed in an Illinois Public School

School Year	Individuals with PEL and Active Endorsement in ECE*	Individuals with ECE Endorsement and Employed in Illinois Public Schools	Individuals with ECE Endorsement and Employed in Illinois Public Schools in a Teaching Position
2024	24,100	13,880	12,475
2025	25,846	15,025	13,529

- Only individuals whose license and endorsement were active in SY24/SY25 are included.
- Individuals are only counted once even if they hold multiple of these endorsements.
- Among the individuals who are employed by Illinois public schools in a position that is reported to ISBE (positions that require a license to fill), not all are teachers (e.g., paraprofessionals or principals) and are not all are given course assignments. **This is particularly the case with Early Childhood educators, as course assignments in the Student Information System are not required for pre-K teachers.**
- The number of ECE teachers is a subset of those who have PELs with an active ECE endorsement. There were 2,501 of these endorsed and employed individuals with an **employment-related grade level** assignment of pre-K in 2024, and 2,637 in 2025. Of these 2,637 individuals in 2025, 1,785 were employed as classroom teachers, and 684 as special education teachers.

ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Data

Grade levels in which licensed ECE teachers the instructor of record.

Grade Level	School Year 2024	School Year 2025
Kindergarten	7,049	6,850
Grade 1	7,806	5,716
Grade 2	7,958	5,625
Grade 3	7,749	5,522
Grade 4	7,793	5,490
Grade 5	7,886	5,464
Grade 6	7,811	5,453
Grade 7	7,884	5,375
Grade 8	7,317	5,032
Grade 9	1,602	1,484
Grade 10	1,640	1,512
Grade 11	1,640	1,504
Grade 12	1,608	1,470

- If an individual teaches in multiple grade levels, they will be counted once for each grade level for which they have a course assignment.
- Pre-K courses are not required to be uploaded to SIS, thus this is not data for pre-K.

ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Data

How many non-ECE licensed teachers are currently teaching in K and PK?

NOTE: This analysis assumes that 'non-ECE licensed' means teachers with a PEL but not an ECE endorsement of STA.

- There were 1,018 kindergarten teachers in SY24 and 1,082 of these teachers in SY25 (SIS).
    - This analysis does not include VIT (Visiting International Teacher) or a TBE (Transitional Bilingual Educator).
    - In SY24, there were 547 pre-K teachers (e.g., individuals with a position code in EIS of regular/special ed instructor or a resource teacher, and a grade level assignment of pre-K) who did not have an active/issued **STA in Early Childhood** or **PEL** with EC endorsements, compared to the 2,501 employed individuals with a PEL an ECE endorsement, and the pre-K grade assignment.
    - In SY25, there were 685 of these pre-K teachers without the **STA in Early Childhood** (EIS), compared to the 2,637 with the **PEL**.

ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Data

Number of educators who are teaching kindergarten and hold a sub license or STA content knowledge/STA early childhood.

Early Childhood Approval Assignment				
Total Issued	PK	K	1	2
200	N/A*	65	18	13

- Grade levels are derived from assigned **courses**, which are not required for pre-K.
- *Pre-K classes taught are not reliably represented and are therefore not listed.

ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Data

Number of STA issued for early childhood education and elementary education for teachers assigned in any of the Grades 1-3 – self-contained general education.

School Year	Approval Endorsement Code	Total Issued During SY	Teaching Grades 1-3
2024	ELEM	138	57
	ECE	205	46
2025	ELEM	147	48
	ECE	220	46

- This table shows the number of individuals with a Short-Term Approval in SY24 or SY25 in issued/active status, with an Elementary Education or Early Childhood endorsement associated with that STA.
- If an individual taught more than one grade level, they will be included for each in the fourth column but will only count once in the “Total Issued” column.

ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Data

Number of educators issued the **STA for kindergarten**

- 87 issued since July 1, 2025.
- Locations for where these individuals are assigned will not be available until the conclusion of the school year when districts report this information to ISBE.

ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Data

Number of unfilled positions in **early childhood education**

- In SY25 there were **319** unfilled ECE positions (SY25 Unfilled Positions Report).
  - Unfilled positions for Grades 1 and 2 are not available as the Unfilled Positions Report includes only PreK and Kindergarten grade levels.
  - Grades 1 and 2 cannot be included separately from Grades 3-8, as Grades preK-8 are reported as the elementary grade band (i.e., tied to the endorsement grade bands) in EIS.
  - A district may include unfilled FTE with either the pre-K only or the elementary grade band, and **if the FTE is included in the elementary grade band** there is no way for ISBE to distinguish between pre-K and non-pre-K unfilled FTE.

ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Data

Counties with Highest Unfilled Position FTE in SY25 for Pre-K and Kindergarten Only

County	FTE
Cook	145
Kane	13
Lake	13
DuPage	12
Vermilion	11
St. Clair	8

ROE/ISCs with Highest Unfilled Position FTE in SY25 for Pre-K and Kindergarten Only

ROE	FTE
North Cook ISC 1	87
South Cook ISC 4	33
City of Chicago	14
Kane ROE	13
Lake ROE	13

ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Data

Number of unfilled positions in **kindergarten**

- In SY25, there were 49 unfilled positions in kindergarten (SY25 Unfilled Positions Report).
  - There may be individuals teaching kindergarten who do not appear properly licensed to do so based upon current requirements (e.g., the 'grandfathering' for those who were teachers of record prior to the changes in the system and the then 'new' grade bands) or districts not completely submitting data on positions filled by individuals in a permanent position.
  - Districts may report some kindergarten unfilled positions using the 'elementary' grade band, which includes preK-8, instead of kindergarten alone.
  - If a district reports unfilled FTE for kindergarten with the elementary grade band instead of the kindergarten grade band, there is no way for ISBE to distinguish kindergarten from non-kindergarten FTE.

ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Data

Counties with Highest Unfilled Position FTE in SY25 for Kindergarten Only

County	FTE
Cook	15
Vermilion	6
Iroquois	3
Lake	3
Sangamon	2.5

ROE/ISCs with Highest Unfilled Position FTE in SY25 for Kindergarten Only

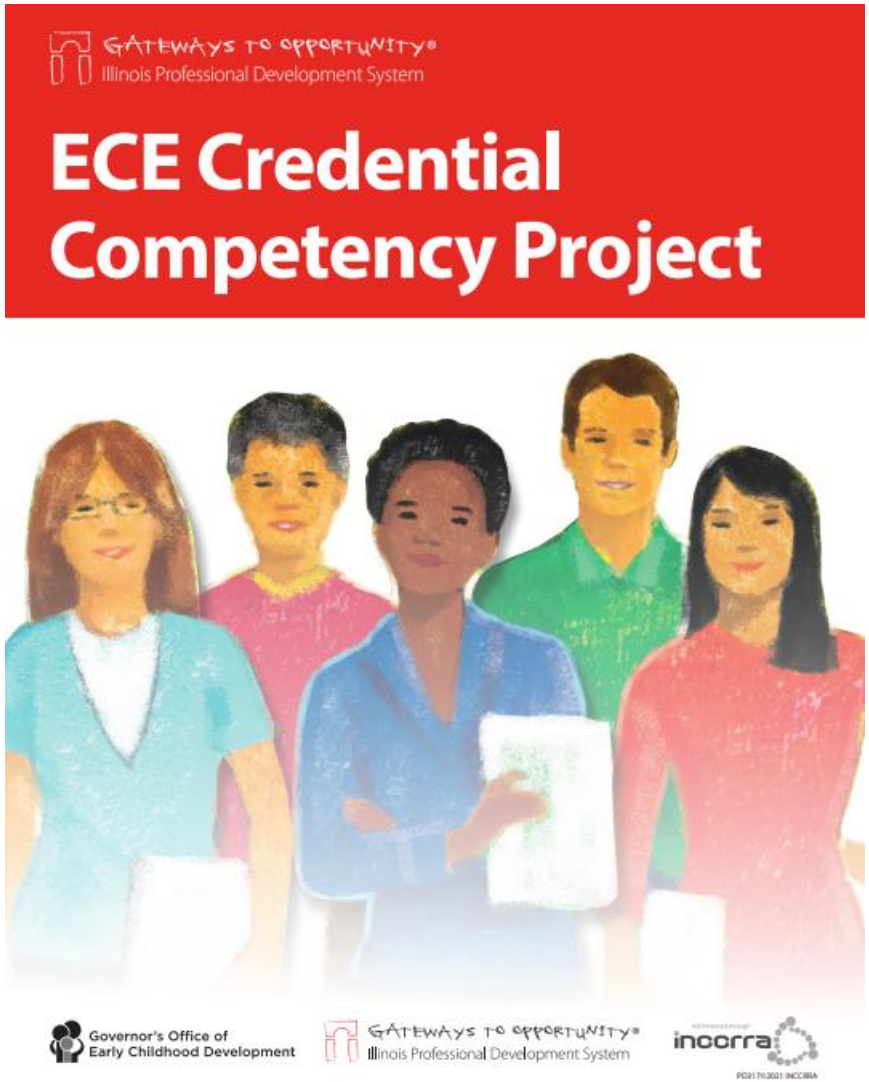
ROE	FTE
South Cook ISC 4	9
West Cook ISC 2	6
Vermilion ROE	6
Iroquois/Kankakee ROE	5
Lake ROE	3

ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Obtaining a Subsequent Endorsement or Approval in ECE

- Microcredential
- Evidence of prior experience (i.e., submission of videos or artifacts)
- Working with a mentor
- Observations/evaluations

ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION



ILLINOIS
STATE BOARD OF
EDUCATION

Obtaining a Subsequent Endorsement or Approval in ECE or Kindergarten

- Microcredential (MC)
  - ECE Competency Project provides a framework from which to build MCs.
  - Aligned to/emerged from standards.
  - Are ‘stackable’ (e.g., for purpose of a subsequent endorsement, the requirements could be to complete one MC tied to a competency or a suite of competencies).
  - Not tied to seat time but can be used to meet a course requirement(s).
  - The ‘lift’ is the need for multiple evaluators and development of the suite of resources necessary for the completion of the MC.

ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Obtaining a Subsequent Endorsement or Approval in ECE or Kindergarten

- Evidence of prior experience (i.e., submission of videos or artifacts)
  - The Gateways to Opportunity Credential Framework also recognizes evidence of prior experience via verified hours worked.
  - 'Prior work experience' is a current allowance for IHEs
  - ISBE also issues CTE licenses though verified work experience.

ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Obtaining a subsequent endorsement or approval in ECE or Kindergarten

- Working with a mentor
  - What is a/the length of the mentorship?
  - What might be 'evidence' to ensure that one does more than 'meet an hour requirement'?
- Observations/evaluations
  - Assuming that formal/informal observations and evaluations are tied to working with a mentor, what is the cadence for each?
  - Since this would be a subsequent endorsement, is there a need for a 'model evaluation template' for districts and IHEs to use?

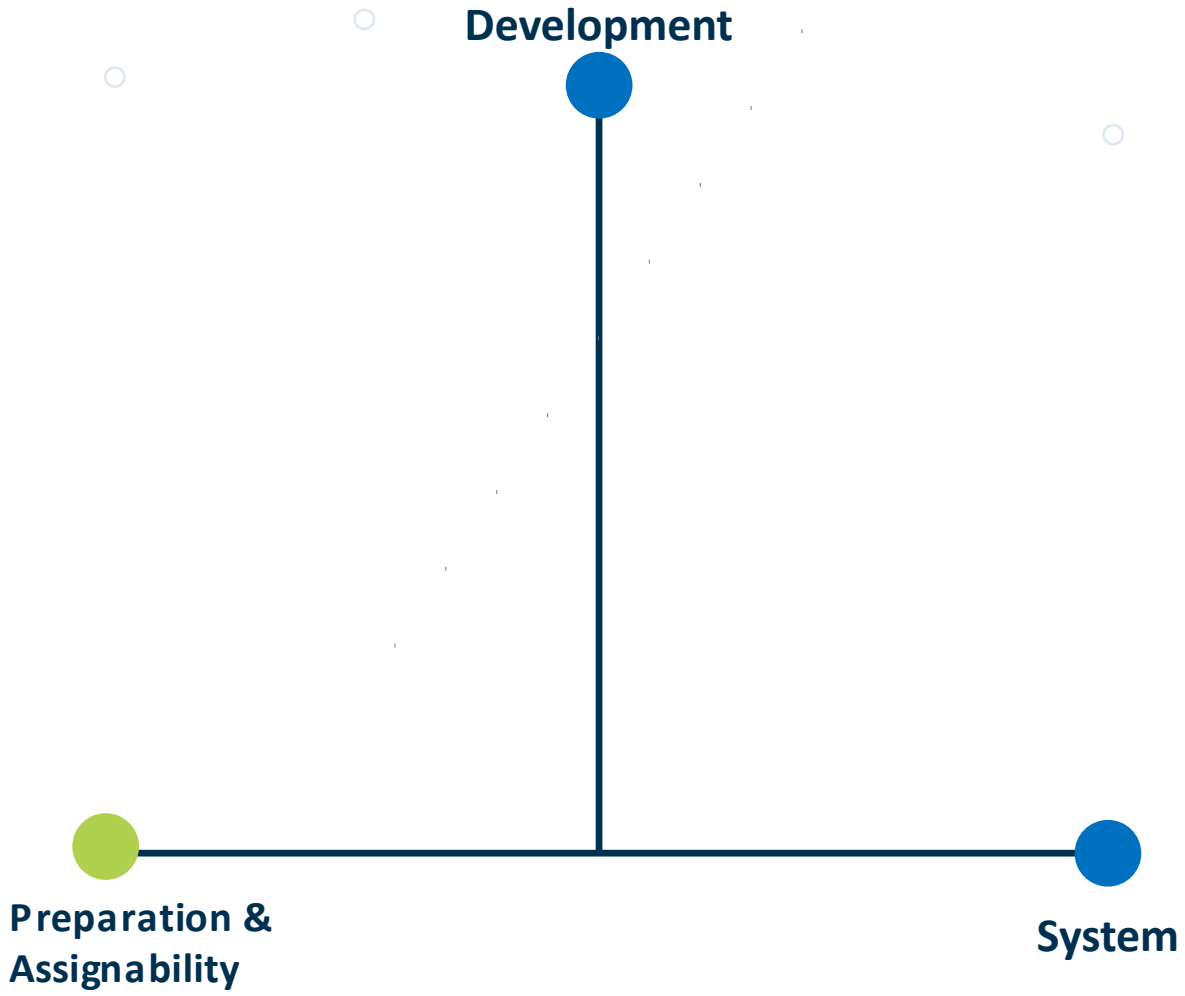
ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Questions That Inform Possible Next Steps

- Building off the ECE Credential Competency Project and balancing preparation and assignability, development, and system tensions, how might MC, previous experience, mentoring, and observations/evaluations lead to a subsequent endorsement or approval to serve as a teacher of record in kindergarten?
    - Individually?
    - A ‘mix/match’ approach?
    - Other?
- How might the tensions and need for balance between preparation and assignability, development, and system inform further considerations of modification of the current grade bands?

ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Questions That Inform Possible Next Steps



ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Discussion

ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION