



March 2006

## Happy 1st Birthday Gateways to Opportunity!

Believe it or not, it was one year ago this month we launched our new name and look as well as our [Web site](#). [Take our survey](#) and let us know how we can improve this new resource for early care and education professionals in Illinois. As you know, Gateways to Opportunity is our state's first comprehensive professional development network. Gateways addresses one of the most critical aspects of the early care and education field - the [professional competence](#) of those who provide the care and education to our youngest children in Illinois.

We are pleased to announce the addition of a few new items to our Web site. Networking has become easier for you through our newly created [professional listservs](#). Higher education faculty and administrators of programs can now share resources and solutions to challenges encountered in their daily work. Feel free to [subscribe](#) to one of our new listservs. We also want to hear your needs or ideas for additional listservs, so feel free to share them using our [online form](#).

In addition, we have added a user survey to the Web site to gain your input. We hope you will tell us what you find useful and what other resources you would like to see added. Take the new Gateways to Opportunity Web site [user survey](#) now.

I hope you will help us spread the word about Gateways by [telling a friend](#) today.

Enjoy!

**Karen Bruning**  
Professional Development Director  
Gateways to Opportunity

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## Professional Development

A central goal of Gateways to Opportunity is to increase the professional development and career opportunities available to those who work in the early care and education field in Illinois. To that end, Gateways has developed a framework to illustrate the various [career pathways and options](#) for professional preparation available in Illinois.

The early care and education workforce is quite varied in Illinois. Education levels of the workforce range from high school through graduate school completion, with specializations in infant and toddler care, preschool education, school-age care, elementary education, parent education, or family support. [Career opportunities in early care and education](#) are equally varied. Practitioners work in a wide variety of settings, including child care centers, family child care settings, pre-kindergarten at-risk programs in public schools, home visiting programs, Head Start, early intervention, child care resource and referral agencies, and early childhood teacher education.

Navigating the system of professional development options available to those interested in entering or already employed in early care and education in Illinois can be challenging. Those navigating the system have a wide range of questions: What degree programs will provide the preparation I need? Will my past coursework count toward a particular degree or credential? What career opportunities are available to me? Do I need specific credentials to qualify for a different position? Is financial assistance available to help cover the cost of my coursework or training?

These are just some of the questions commonly posed by those pursuing a professional development path in early care and education. Until recently, answers to these questions were difficult to find. However, now [Professional Development Advisors](#) (PDAs) are available through the Gateways to Opportunity system to assist those who are starting out and those who are already working in the field with their professional development goals.

PDAs are experienced professionals working in all types of early care and education settings who are given advanced training to enhance their mentoring skills, to learn about the higher education system and new professional development initiatives in Illinois, and to become familiar with the current and new credentials available to those in early care and education.

## Experience at Work

Janice Moenster's experience as a PDA illustrates the range of professional development challenges practitioners struggle with around the state. Janice works in the southwestern region of Illinois. In addition to her varied [education and work experience](#), Janice's experience with the Child Care Resource & Referral service in Granite City equips her to respond to the majority of the questions she receives as a PDA. "Access and funding questions come up time and again. Often providers can't afford to take the college courses they need or wish to take. Through my work at the CCR&R, I'm aware of various funding avenues and scholarships available to help pay for college coursework. I'm also aware of traditional and nontraditional class offerings available in the colleges in our area."

"I am working with a family child care provider in a very rural area near us. She needed a three-hour college credit class to renew her CDA and National Association for Family Child Care accreditation. Her family child care business closes at 6:00 pm, and the class she needed at the nearest community college—which was still quite a drive from her rural home—started at 6:00 pm. Together we located an Internet-based course available through an area community college that met the accreditation and CDA requirements. The flexible online format worked very well for this provider, who is now preparing to take another Internet-based class on Excel spreadsheets to assist with her family child care business practices."

"Another situation I respond to a lot as a PDA involves practitioners who want to obtain their Child Development Associate (CDA) credential quickly so that they can become 'teacher-qualified.' I try to help these individuals think about what they wish to do in 3 or 5 years' time. A CDA may be helpful in meeting short-term professional development goals, but it may not be in their best long-term interest. The training they receive to complete the CDA may not articulate to degree-granting programs—yet they may need a degree in order to work in other early care and education settings."

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[Tammy Notter](#), a PDA in the northeast part of the state, devotes much of her time to advising practitioners about their range of career choices. "Practitioners will often say to me, 'I'm working in this setting now. Where can I go in the future in this field and what do I need to do to get there? Should I stick with an AA degree or pursue a BA degree? What kind of a BA degree should I get?' The skill I use most often in my work as a PDA is reflective listening. Many of the practitioners I talk to work alone in family child care settings. They don't have colleagues nearby to discuss their career options. I spend a lot of time listening to their experiences and reiterating what I hear them saying about their own career development interests."

"Reflective listening also helps me to build trusting relationships with those I advise. In doing so, I find out about obstacles that can seem insurmountable. For example, one provider I'm working with lacked the confidence to enroll in a college class. She was confused by the various degree programs offered and the paperwork she needed to complete to enroll in the class. The cost in taking the college course presented another barrier. My encouragement and assistance provided the help she needed to enroll in the college class and to apply for a TEACH scholarship to help pay for it, an option she wouldn't have contemplated in the past."

"I've been in the field of early care and education for nearly 25 years. I still am amazed at the range of stories I hear from those I work with as a PDA. The paths that lead people to the field of early care and education are so varied.

Our Professional Development Advisor services help practitioners get the education and training they need to move along their chosen career path.”

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PDA services similar to the ones provided by Janice and Tammy are free of charge and available in every region of the state through [Gateways to Opportunity](#).

To find out how you can talk with a Professional Development Advisor call 888.548.8080

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## Lilian Katz: Reflections

### Professional Development Advisors

Many studies conducted during the last few years indicate that the quality of early childhood provisions is related to the level of education and, in particular, to the amount of specific early-education-related training of the staff ([Kontos & Wilcox-Hertzog, 2002](#)).

With this in mind, the Illinois Gateways to Opportunity system is designed to address the whole range of issues associated with helping Illinois early childhood personnel find the best options for professional development and training.

The new role of the Professional Development Advisors (PDAs) includes not only helping those who work in the state's early childhood programs to navigate training programs, but it also includes what is now frequently referred to as mentoring—that is, offering support, insights, recommendations, and suggestions for how to cope with the practical, technical, and ethical day-to-day challenges that frequently arise in the context of working with young children and their families.

The PDAs will strive to establish relationships that will enable their advisees to rely upon and trust the PDAs as sources of understanding and encouragement in their efforts to maintain high-quality provisions for the children they serve. Research on the roles of mentors suggests a number of principles that account for the appropriateness and effectiveness of mentors. It is generally agreed, for example, that more meaningful learning occurs when individuals seek advice and assistance when they experience the need for it—rather than when the need for help is identified by outsiders. In addition, mentors are most likely to be helpful when they encourage their advisees to define their own goals and purposes, and when they help advisees define the obstacles to achieving their goals in their own unique situations. PDAs will be in a good position to identify and understand the uniqueness of the wide variety of communities in our state, and to take these variations into account as they mentor their advisees.

#### Reference

Kontos, Susan, & Wilcox-Hertzog, Amanda. (2002). *Teacher preparation and teacher-child interaction in preschools*. Champaign, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education. (Available at <http://ceep.crc.uiuc.edu/eecearchive/digests/2002/kontos02.html>)

[Learn more about Dr. Lilian Katz](#)