

Erikson Institute

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Media Contact:

Mariane Leon

Manager of Strategic Communications

mleon@erikson.edu

Erikson Institute Launches New PhD in Child & Family Studies, Building on More Than 40 Years of Doctoral Education

*Program offers guaranteed tuition awards covering 25% to 75% of tuition,
plus a flexible model for working professionals.*

(CHICAGO) October 6, 2026 – [Erikson Institute](#) announced today that it is launching a [PhD in Child & Family Studies](#), rooted in more than four decades of doctoral education. The program builds on Erikson’s decades-long doctoral partnership with Loyola University Chicago while introducing a new model centered on applied research and flexible study for working professionals. A central feature of the new program is a funding model designed to reduce financial barriers to doctoral study without requiring students to commit to employment with the Institute or reduce or leave their current jobs. Applications are now open for the inaugural cohort of Erikson Institute’s independent PhD in Child & Family Studies. The application deadline is January 15, 2027.

As policy decisions, funding priorities, and changing expectations reshape the systems that support children and families, the need for rigorous, applied research has never been more consequential. From early childhood education and family services to the institutions and policies that shape development, today’s challenges demand scholars who can translate research into meaningful knowledge and practice. Erikson’s redesigned doctoral program responds to this moment by preparing researchers and leaders to examine complex challenges, advance the field, and inform the decisions that shape children’s lives.

“Children and families deserve research that takes their lives, knowledge, and possibilities seriously. Through Erikson’s PhD in Child and Family Studies, we are preparing scholars who will advance knowledge, challenge inequities, and work alongside communities to shape more just futures. This program reflects our conviction that rigorous scholarship and responsibility to children and families belong together,” said Mariana Souto-Manning, PhD, president of Erikson Institute.

The new PhD in Child & Family Studies prepares students to create knowledge and lead across a variety of settings that touch the lives of children, youth, and families. Grounded in modern developmental science, the program emphasizes applied research and scholarship that places children’s development, health, and well-being at the center. Students examine development within the multiple ecological contexts that shape children’s lives, including families, educational institutions, intervention programs, neighborhoods, policies, and culture.

Substantial, guaranteed financial support

Admitted students will receive a guaranteed [Doctoral Scholars Award covering at least 25% and up to 75%](#) of tuition and fees, with an average award of 50%. Students who are eligible to complete the FAFSA may also qualify for additional need-based scholarship support of up to 25% of tuition and fees.

PhD students will also receive “right of first refusal” (ROFR) for available work on faculty projects, creating opportunities for additional research experience while allowing students greater flexibility in determining whether and how employment fits into their doctoral education.

Designed for the next generation of child and family scholars

The redesigned program reflects Erikson’s distinctive commitment to bridging knowledge, research, and practice. Students complete an innovative sequence in research methods and practices, gain experience through internships in research and higher education teaching, and progress through five major program milestones, including a qualifying paper and dissertation. The program uses a small cohort model and a moderate pace, with typically no more than six to seven credits of coursework per semester and classes offered in the evenings.

Prospective students must submit unofficial transcripts, essays, a writing sample, and three letters of recommendation; select candidates will be invited to interview. The GRE is not required. Students may enter the program after either a bachelor’s or a master’s degree. The post-master’s pathway requires 62–64 credit hours, while the post-bachelor’s pathway requires 82–84 credit hours. The campus-based program is designed to be completed in approximately five to six years regardless of starting degree level.

Erikson’s approach also reflects the realities facing today’s doctoral students. The program has been intentionally designed to make doctoral study more affordable and achievable for working adults, allowing students to pursue advanced study without necessarily leaving their existing careers. Support systems, flexible advising models, professional and social programming, and close relationships with faculty are designed to foster both student success and a strong sense of belonging within a community of scholars.

Preparing scholars for impact inside and outside academia

The PhD is designed for students seeking careers across the broad landscape of child and family research and leadership. Graduates of Erikson’s doctoral education have pursued careers in academia, applied child development research, government, program design and evaluation, nonprofit leadership, and policy analysis. A 2022 analysis of the previous 25 years shows that 100% of graduates were still in a child or family-related field. 40% were in academia, 40% were in research firms or state-based research roles, 20% were in some type of direct practice (e.g., school principal) or child-related entrepreneurship (e.g., consulting business).

The independent program builds on Erikson Institute’s more than 60 years of expertise in early childhood education and child development, and its distinctive focus on applied child development research. Small classes and access to faculty are intended to support the strong scholarly relationships for which Erikson is known.

Honoring legacy while leading innovation

Since 1986, Erikson has partnered with Loyola University Chicago to offer doctoral education in child development. That formative collaboration has played an important role in Erikson’s history and in preparing generations of scholars, researchers, educators, and leaders. Erikson extends its deep gratitude to Loyola for decades of partnership and shared commitment to doctoral education. The transition to an independent [PhD program](#) represents not a departure from that successful history, but its expansion into the next chapter.

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About Erikson Institute

Erikson Institute is a higher learning institution in Chicago dedicated to advancing knowledge, practice, and leadership in early childhood and child development. Since 1966, Erikson has educated professionals, conducted and translated research, and developed innovative approaches that strengthen the lives of children and families.