

Early Childhood Educators Scholarship

BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Massachusetts Office of Student Financial Assistance

PURPOSE

The Early Childhood Educator's Scholarship program is funded subject to the availability of funds and appropriation from the Massachusetts Legislature (M.G.L. c. 15D, Section 5). The scholarship is designed to provide financial assistance for currently employed early childhood and out of school time educators and providers who enroll in a certificate, associate's, bachelor's, or master's degree program in Early Childhood Education, Child Development, Family Studies, Child Care Administration, or fields that directly name early child development and its specific areas of inquiry. The Early Childhood Educators Scholarship Program was funded as a pilot initiative by the Legislature for the purpose of increasing the quality and availability of teachers and care providers to work with young children and youth in inclusive settings including infant, toddler, preschool, and school age programs.

DEFINITIONS

- **Eligible Institution:**

An institution within the system of public institutions of higher education as identified in Section 5 of Chapter 15A of the Massachusetts General Laws or regionally accredited independent (private) college or university in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts offering an Early Childhood Education program of study or program in a related field.

- **Eligible Program:**

An undergraduate associate's, bachelor's or master's degree program offered by an eligible institution in either Early Childhood Education, Child Development, Family Studies, Child Care Administration or fields that directly name child development as its areas of inquiry, meeting the following criteria:

- Demonstrated compliance with degree program standards as established and required by a regional program accrediting body, such as the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), and meet program approval standards as defined by the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education;

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- Is approved under Title IV standards by the US Department of Education, including all program locations;
- Not based on any paid commission, bonus, or other incentive payment – based directly or indirectly upon success in securing enrollments or financial aid – to any person or entity engaged in any student recruiting or admission activities or in making decisions regarding the awarding of Title IV or State funds;
- Admissions standards require that students have earned a high school diploma or GED; and
- In cases where the institution has entered into an agreement with another institution (or entity), consortium, or organization to provide an educational program, the institution has ensured that the educational program contracted out is in compliance with any state or federal regulations.

Participating institutions must respond to a Department of Higher Education's inquiry concerning institutional compliance with program eligibility requirements. Funds will not be disbursed to an institution's students until the inquiry has been satisfactorily completed, and the Department of Higher Education has determined that the institution is in compliance with all program guidelines.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

To be eligible for the Early Childhood Educator's program, the student must:

- a) be enrolled at an eligible institution, as defined;
- b) (1) be a U.S. Citizen, permanent legal resident, or non-citizen eligible under Title IV regulations and physically reside in Massachusetts for at least one year, as of the start of the enrolled term with an intent to remain in Massachusetts consistent with Board of Higher Education policy; or (2) have an approved eligibility status designated by the Board of Higher Education pursuant to Section 9 of Chapter 15A, as amended by Section 11 of Chapter 28 of the Acts of 2023;

complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or, if ineligible to complete the FAFSA, then complete the Massachusetts Application for State Financial Aid (MASFA);

- c) comply with financial aid verification requirements;

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- d) not be in default on any federal or state student loans or owe a refund for any previous state financial aid programs
- e) enroll, as a matriculated undergraduate or graduate degree student, on a full- or part-time basis (a minimum of 3 credits) in an eligible Early Childhood Education, Child Development, Family Studies, Child Care Administration program or fields that directly name early child development and its areas of inquiry;
- f) be employed, as an educator or provider in an early education and care program or out of school time program that is licensed or authorized by the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) and continue employment in this field while pursuing the approved course of study, or be a licensed family childcare provider and continues to work as an early educator in an early education and care program in Massachusetts and provide documentation of such employment; or be considered a “prospective student” which is defined as unemployed or not employed as an early education and care provider at a facility or program, licensed or funded by the Department of Early Education and Care, but plan to enroll in an approved course of study as defined in the eligibility requirements of the ECE Scholarship;
- g) prospective students must demonstrate they are seeking employment with an early education and care provider in the commonwealth and will have one year to secure eligible employment;
- h) have not earned a prior bachelor’s degree (or the equivalent) if enrolled in an undergraduate program;
- i) meet satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) according to institution’s requirements and federal standards;
- j) sign an agreement to continue employment as an early educator or provider in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, with the expectation that the student will continue to be employed in the Early Childhood Education field as an educator or provider in Massachusetts for six months per semester of scholarship receipt, not to exceed a two year maximum commitment upon graduation from an associate’s degree program and a four year maximum commitment upon graduation from a bachelor’s degree program; and
- k) not be a recipient of funds under any of the following financial aid workforce programs: Tomorrow’s Teachers Scholarship, Behavioral Health Workforce

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Scholarship or Paraprofessional Grant. Students who simultaneously apply and meet eligibility criteria for more than one of these workforce programs shall only be determined eligible for one program.

Priority consideration will be given to eligible applicants recommended by an individual qualified to speak to their commitment and dedication to the field of early education and care.

AWARD VALUE AND CALCULATION

All students who meet eligibility requirements and are enrolled in an eligible undergraduate program at an eligible institution, as defined, may receive an Early Childhood Educators' Scholarship award. The award calculation for an eligible student, by type of institution and number of credits, is as follows:

Early Childhood Educators' Scholarship Award = Number of enrolled credits (**multiplied**) award amount per credit as determined by institution type

Credit values and maximum awards per academic semester should be adjusted and allocated in the following manner:

Community College Students

Up to \$350 per credit – not to exceed a maximum of \$3,150 per semester

State University Students

Up to \$550 per credit – not to exceed a maximum of \$4,950 per semester

Independent College or Public University Students

Up to \$750 per credit - not to exceed a maximum of \$6,750 per semester

AWARD DISBURSEMENT

Participating institutions must verify that each recipient is eligible in accordance with guidelines established for the Early Childhood Educators' Scholarship, and that the student is enrolled in an approved certificate, associate's, bachelor's, or master's degree program, as applicable. Further, the institution is required to verify that the student has not earned a prior degree (or equivalent) before awarding and disbursing funds, which may be done through a signed affidavit after all reasonable attempts were made to secure prior transcripts, if any.

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Academic year awards will be disbursed in equal payments for the fall and spring semesters or as calculated based on enrolled credits within the established limits for the fall and spring semesters.

- Fall semester is defined as commencing September 1 and concluding on or before December 31.
- Spring semester is defined as commencing January 1 and concluding on or before May 31.

An institution must request and obtain approval for non-conforming terms from the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education. The Massachusetts Department of Higher Education will inform participating institutions each year whether funding is available for summer enrollment in the program. Each course offered through the program during any of the above terms must fully conform to the institution's published standards that clearly define enrollment status levels and course length at the institution.

Institutions are required to refund the DHE any funds that are deemed to have been improperly awarded and disbursed to recipients who are later determined to be ineligible for the program. Refunds may occur because of adjustments to SAI, changes to dependency status, and/or changes to a student's enrollment status. Refunds may also occur if the institution receives payment and becomes aware that a student has withdrawn, dropped below full-time status, taken an approved leave of absence, or otherwise fails to complete the period of enrollment as charged.

Grants may be awarded to eligible applicants for summer terms based on availability of funds, but only to those who indicated summer credits on the annual ECE application. All funds appropriated for this program must be expended by June 30 of each fiscal year or as otherwise determined by the Legislature.

ANNUAL REVIEW

The Department of Higher Education is responsible for evaluating the effectiveness of the Early Childhood Educators' Scholarship program. Institutions that have signed an agreement to participate in the Massachusetts State financial aid programs are required to share data for all students with the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education (DHE) or its designee, and the Office of Student Financial Assistance for this purpose. The program may be evaluated annually to determine any immediate impact or to determine if adjustments are required for various processes, such as disbursement of funds.

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PARTICIPATION AGREEMENT

All institutions receiving funds under the Early Childhood Educators' Scholarship program must have an active Massachusetts State Financial Aid Participation Agreement on file with the Massachusetts Office of Student Financial Assistance (OSFA).

AUDIT REQUIREMENT

- a) It shall be the responsibility of each college to maintain documentation of a recipient student's eligibility for the Early Childhood Educators' Scholarship.
- b) The Commissioner shall require each college to furnish annually to the BHE a report detailing specific information regarding recipients of the Early Childhood Educators' Scholarship. OSFA will establish the timeline, specifications, and procedures for this report.
- c) All financial books, records and documents pertaining to this Program shall, at all times, be open to inspection, review and audit by the Commissioner, the State Auditor or their authorized representatives who shall have access to the premises wherever such books, records, and documents are for seven years. An institution may retain such records for a period of five years, if approval is received from the Records Conservation Board in accordance with General Laws, Chapter 30, Section 42.