

Early Childhood Access Consortium For Equity Scholarship Application Now Available

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CHICAGO – The [Illinois Student Assistance Commission](https://www.isac.org/) (ISAC), in collaboration with the Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity (ECACE), is pleased to announce the launch of the ECACE Scholarship Program, to be administered through ISAC. Created to address the shortage of qualified early childhood educators and to build a strong, well-prepared workforce in the field, the scholarship is designed to support and encourage the pursuit of new credentials as well as more advanced education for current associate degree-holders working in early childhood education. Detailed information and a link to the 2021-22 scholarship application is now available on the ISAC website at <https://www.isac.org/ECACEscholarship>.

In July 2021, Governor Pritzker signed [legislation](#) establishing the ECACE to strengthen access to high quality child care. As part of this effort, the [Illinois Department of Human Services](#) (IDHS) is providing an unprecedented level of funding for scholarships for those working in the field of early child care and education. The ECACE Scholarship was developed in partnership with ECACE Advisory Committee co-chairs, including the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE), the [Illinois Community College Board](#) (ICCB), [the Illinois State Board of Education](#) (ISBE), IDHS, and the [Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development](#) (GOECD).

“ISAC looks forward to serving Illinois through the new ECACE Scholarship, part of a broader investment that will improve equity and access not just for those working in the early childhood field, but also for the families that will benefit in myriad ways from an expanded, diverse and highly skilled workforce,” said Executive Director of ISAC Eric Zarnikow. “Scholarship funds are available for this current 2021-22 academic year, so we want to encourage interested students to apply as soon as possible.”

To be eligible for the ECACE scholarship, those who are seeking credentials and/or a degree in early childhood education must currently be working or have worked in the early childhood field. This includes applicants who work or have worked in family childcare and center-based care settings. Applicants must provide documentation confirming their membership in the [Gateways to Opportunity® Registry](#). Other eligibility requirements are available on ECACE Scholarship webpage.

For eligible students attending community colleges and public universities, the scholarship covers the total cost of attendance for an academic year (including summer) after other financial aid received. Students at participating non-profit private institutions may receive an amount no more than the cost of the most expensive program of study in the early childhood education field at an Illinois public college, after other financial aid received. Recipients of the scholarship are expected to continue or return to teaching or direct services in the early childhood care and education field in Illinois after they complete their program of study.

To apply for the scholarship for the 2021-22 academic year, students should complete the 2021-22 Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA®) if they have not already done so, as well as the ECACE scholarship application and required documentation. Eligible students who are currently enrolled in a participating institution are encouraged to work with their financial aid advisor.

ECACE is also developing a set of student supports specifically designed for working adults. ECACE “navigators” will provide personalized assistance to students in navigating the postsecondary education application and financial aid process. Once in a postsecondary program, the student will work with a program coach and/or mentor from the institution, who will provide additional support to the student to help them persist and complete their studies.

“This scholarship program will help remove financial barriers for community college students throughout our state to continue their education and create a better life while filling a critical workforce gap in Illinois,” said ICCB Executive Director Brian Durham.

“Advancing the early childhood workforce through an early childhood consortium is a key piece of our strategic plan, [A Thriving Illinois](#),” said IBHE Executive Director Ginger Ostro. “These scholarships will complement the work of ECACE and will ensure our child care workforce – critical to the children and families of Illinois – has equitable access to higher education opportunities so they can continue to learn and grow.”

About the Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity

The Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity, created through Illinois Public Act 102-0174, is a collaboration of all public universities and community colleges in Illinois and committed private institutions to develop and provide streamlined paths to credentials and degrees for the early childhood incumbent workforce. Work of the consortium is facilitated by the [Illinois Board of Higher Education](#) and the [Illinois Community College Board](#).

About ISAC

The mission of the Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC) is to provide Illinois students with information and assistance to help make education beyond high school accessible and affordable. ISAC provides comprehensive, objective, and timely information about education and financial aid for students and their families—giving them access to the tools they need to make the educational choices that are right for them. Then, through the state scholarship and grant programs ISAC administers, ISAC can help students make those choices a reality. Find us at isac.org and follow us on [Facebook](#) @ILStudentAssistance, [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#) @ISACfinaid, and on [YouTube](#).