Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity (ECACE) Scholarship Program

September 18, 2023
Agenda

• ECACE Program Overview
  o Kim Eck, Illinois Student Assistance Commission
  o Christy Shields, Illinois Student Assistance Commission

• Q & A Discussion
  o Christi Chadwick, Illinois Board of Higher Education
  o Marcus Brown, Illinois Community College Board
ECACE Program Overview

• Provides funds for those currently working or have worked in the early childhood education field and are seeking additional credentials and degrees

• A recipient may receive an award amount up to total cost of attendance, after all other financial aid has been applied (last payer)

• The ECACE scholarship is not need-based aid

• Recipients are expected to continue or return to teaching or direct services in the early childhood care and education field in Illinois after completion of their program of study
2023-24 ECACE Scholarship Program

- This will be the third year of this federally-funded program

- The online application is available in the ISAC Student Portal
  - Priority access to funding date was August 7, 2023
  - Applications continue to be accepted

- Enhancements to eligibility have expanded access to the program for the 2023-24 award year
2023-24 ECACE Eligibility Criteria

To qualify for the ECACE Scholarship Program during the 2023-24 academic year, an applicant must:

- be a U.S. citizen or eligible noncitizen (federal definition)
- be a member of the incumbent workforce, currently working or having worked in the early childhood industry (in either a licensed or license-exempt facility), including home-based child care (e.g., family, friend, neighbor), center-/community-based care, Preschool for All programs, school-based preschool settings, and Head Start programs, that serve children from birth to age 5. Acceptable positions include teachers, assistant teachers, directors, family child care providers and assistants
  - applicants must provide documentation confirming their current membership in the Gateways to Opportunity® Registry
2023-24 ECACE Eligibility Criteria

• Be enrolled or accepted for enrollment on a full- or part-time (at least 3 credit hours) basis at the undergraduate or graduate level at a public or non-profit private 2- or 4-year Gateways-entitled and Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity member institution, and pursuing at least one of the following:
  o an Associate of Applied Science degree (or related certificate) in early childhood education or an associate degree with a concentration in early childhood at an approved college;
  o a bachelor's degree in early childhood education, with or without a Professional Educator License; or
  o for those who already hold a bachelor's degree:
    ▪ courses to make them eligible for a lead teacher position in a licensed program;
    ▪ a Professional Educator License with an Early Childhood Endorsement;
    ▪ additional endorsements (Bilingual, English as a Second Language, Special Education) or letters of approval or credentials; or,
    ▪ for those seeking licensure, and/or an additional endorsement, a Master's degree in early childhood.
2023-24 ECACE Processing

• Applications are categorized as Timely New, Timely Renewal, Untimely New and Untimely Renewal as they are received by ISAC
  o All complete applications, regarding of how they are categorized are considered when prequalifying applicants for program eligibility

• Prequalification results are available in ECACE system in GAP Access twice each week -- on Wednesday and Friday mornings
  o Only records for students who have completed the online application process and who meet all initial eligibility requirements are considered for prequalification

• Prequalified applicants who have been awarded are eligible for payment
  o A maximum award amount populates in the “Max Annual Award Amount” field in GAP Access
  o 2023-24 maximum award amounts are:
    ▪ $33,558 at four-year institutions
    ▪ $18,262 at community colleges

As part of the payment request process, additional eligibility requirements must be verified by the college
2023 ECACE Award Amounts

• Colleges must determine the term award amount(s) based on other financial aid the student is receiving
  o ECACE is last payer, after all other aid has been provided
  o May be used to replace student loans that might otherwise have been part of the student’s aid package.

• For students who plan to attend different types of institution during the award year, the ECACE system will automatically calculate an eligible award amount based on the student’s type of school listed on their application for each term.

• For example, an award amount of $25,910 would show as the maximum eligible award amount for a student at a four-year institution who is attending at a community college in the fall (first) term
  o Calculated by dividing $18,262, which is the max award at a community college by 2 (= $9,131) since the student is only attending there for the first term
  o The rest of the award is calculated using the max award of $33,558 at a four-year institution divided by 2 (= $16,779)
  o $9,131 + $16,779 = $25,910
2023-24 ECACE Payment Processing

• Claims for prequalified students are submitted in the ECACE system in GAP Access

• By submitting a payment request, colleges are certifying that the student is enrolled and continues to meet all eligibility criteria

• A first-term priority payment request deadline date will be announced once it has been determined
  o However, colleges are encouraged to submit payment requests and to indicate if prequalified students will not be accepting their award as soon as possible

• A Payment Result Summary and Invoice Detail Report can be viewed or printed by selecting the Report tab in the ECACE system the day after a payment request has been processed

• Disbursement of funds is processed by the State Comptroller’s Office, and payments are made on a monthly basis
  o Allow four to six weeks for payment processing
Certifying & Payment Request - ECACE System

By submitting a payment request to ISAC, a college is certifying that the student meets all eligibility criteria.

**Request:**
- Payment
- Cancel
- Ineligible
- Delete

**Enrollment Status:**
- Full time
- Half time
- At least 3 credit hrs

**Academic Level:**
- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior
- Graduate/Post Baccalaureate

**Program/Degree Pathway:**
- Associate of Applied Science
- Bachelor's Degree
- Certificate
- Master's Degree
- Other Post-Baccalaureate Pathway

**Requested Amount:**
Enter term award amount(s) based on other financial aid the student is receiving.
Ineligibility Reason:  
• Not enrolled this term 
• Not a US citizen/eligible non-citizen 
• Not a HS grad/no GED 
• Defaulted student loan 
• Not pursuing an early childhood education major 
• Not make satisfactory academic progress 
• Enrolled less than 3 credit hours 
• Student is not accepting ECACE Scholarship 
• No remaining unmet cost 

If a college determines that a prequalified applicant does not meet all eligibility requirements, they report the reason for ineligibility.
ECACE Disbursement

• Awards are disbursed per the discretion of the college.
  o There are no term limits, but the total requested for all terms cannot exceed the Scholar’s annual award during any academic year

• ISAC authorizes a voucher in the amount of the payment invoice and submits it to the State Comptroller's Office, which issues payment to the institution.
  o Colleges can match the invoice number on the Payment Results/Exceptions report to the voucher

• Upon receipt of the scholarship funds from the Comptroller, the college should verify the student's enrollment status for the term for which the award was intended
  • The institution may credit the scholarship funds to the recipient’s account for expenses due and payable
  • If appropriate, any credit balance may be returned to the recipient.
  • If the college must reduce the amount of the award so as not to exceed the cost of attendance, the adjustment should be made in the ECACE system

• If the recipient has withdrawn, the college must indicate the reason for not receiving the scholarship on the ECACE “Student Detail: Payment” screen.
ECACE Resources
ecaec.org

To locate Consortium Member List:
Hover over Consortium and click on Consortium Members List

To locate Frequently Asked Questions:
Hover over Resources and click on Frequently Asked Questions
Frequently Asked Questions
Updated as of Wednesday, July 5, 2003

The Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) and the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) have received many questions about the Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity (ECACE) and the work of this initiative. This document is designed to address those questions. This should be considered a working document, which will be revised as the initiative progresses. This is not intended as a policy manual or general overview of the work.

Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity

1. What is the Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity and how was it created?
2. How is the incumbent early childhood workforce defined?
3. Which institutions are members of the Consortium?
4. How is “Prior Learning” being defined in this initiative?

Consortium Goals

1. What are the statewide goals for upskilling the early childhood workforce, and are there goals for each of the following – enrollment, persistence, and completion?
2. Can students who are in our Elementary Education program who earn an ECE endorsement (and are members of the incumbent workforce) “count” toward our goals?
3. Why do the Consortium goals focus on Credentials instead of Community College Certificates?

Consortium Work

1. What does the work of the Consortium include?
2. Do individual institutions have the autonomy and the support to develop their own

ecace.org/ECACE_FAQ.html
2022-23 ECACE Close Out

• Notifications detailing the outstanding amount that must be refunded to ISAC for 2022-23 ECACE Scholarships were e-mailed to financial aid directors.

• The appropriate amount – along with a completed Gift Assistance Programs Refund Check Form – should be submitted to ISAC no later than **September 29, 2023**.

• Details about returning funds to ISAC and the payment offset and reconciliation process are provided in the Refunds and Unpaid Claims section of the Processes area.

ISAC Contact Information

School Services
866-247-2172
isac.schoolservices@illinois.gov

ISAC Call Center – Student Services
800-899-4722
isac.studentservices@illinois.gov

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Partner & Training Services

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Consortium Contact Information

www.ecace.org/ and ecace-info@ecace.org

www.ecace.org/Consortium_Member_Roster.html
Q & A Discussion