



Date: September 23, 2024

To: Presidents, Chancellors, Chief Student Service Officers

From: Eric Zarnikow, Executive Director, Illinois Student Assistance Commission  
Ginger Ostro, Executive Director, Illinois Board of Higher Education  
Brian Durham, Executive Director, Illinois Community College Board

RE: Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity Scholarship—Request for Assistance

As you know, your financial aid offices have been working with the Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC) to quickly verify students' eligibility for the Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity (ECACE) Scholarship. We wanted to share some information about the status of these awards and **request your assistance** to ensure students are not penalized due to timing issues.

- 1) **The initial round of awarding for the 2024-25 academic year will take place within the week**, providing 650-700 scholarships for a pool of more than 1,800 eligible and timely applicants. Your institution will be also able to submit claims for payment at that time.
- 2) **We are aware that, unfortunately, this year's initial awarding will happen after some institutions' drop/add dates.**
- 3) **It is imperative that students not face a penalty or be excluded from enrollment due to the lack of congruence between award dates and drop/ add dates.** The timing raises a concern that some students, who may have enrolled or returned to college because they hoped for continued ECACE Scholarship support, will now have to withdraw from classes and will incur academic and/or financial penalties for doing so after the campus drop/add period.

**We ask that you exercise all flexibility available to you to protect these students from academic or financial penalties—extending deadlines and/or waiving charges wherever possible—and/or finding other means to cover their costs.**

We are happy to provide more detailed information about your institution's applicants as needed. On a broad basis:

- Eligible applicants with the lowest SAIs (-\$1,500) will be the only students offered a scholarship in the initial round of awarding.
- Students who are clearly ineligible and those with incomes that result in a Student Aid Index (SAI) above zero have begun receiving notices that they will not receive a scholarship this year.
- Some students with an SAI of -\$1,500 and students with SAIs in a range between -\$1,499 and zero will be informed that they are not being awarded a scholarship at this time due to funding limitations, and they will only receive a scholarship in the unlikely event that additional funding

becomes available. We do hold these applications for consideration, but for 2024-25, it is highly unlikely that many of these students would receive an award.

The agencies are taking steps to ensure that, after this initial transition year from federal to state dollars, the annual process for the ECACE Scholarship will begin and be completed earlier, avoiding these timing challenges in subsequent years.

Thank you for your partnership in supporting Illinois students.