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EARLY CHILDHOOD ACCESS CONSORTIUM FOR EQUITY ANNOUNCES EXPANDED ELIGIBILITY FOR ECACE SCHOLARSHIP

Scholarship Program Serves Eligible Workers Seeking Postsecondary Credentials/Degrees in Early Childhood Education

CHICAGO – The Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity (ECACE) is pleased to share that the [Illinois Student Assistance Commission](#) (ISAC) has opened the 2023-24 application for the ECACE Scholarship, now with expanded eligibility for those pursuing or interested in pursuing a credential or degree in early childhood education. The scholarship will now be available at participating community colleges and universities beginning in a student’s freshman year, for certain associate and bachelor’s degree programs, and is also available for advanced degrees and endorsements. Detailed information about eligibility and a link to the 2023-24 scholarship application is available on the ISAC website at <https://www.isac.org/ECACEscholarship>.

“Working in early childhood education can be very difficult,” said **Kayla Conrad, a student in the Early Childhood Education program at Kaskaskia Community College in Centralia, Illinois**. “We often feel underpaid, overworked, and underappreciated. With the ECACE scholarship, I finally feel like someone sees us, understands our needs, and is ready to help. Words cannot express how thankful I am for this opportunity. Early childhood education is extremely important, and I am relieved to see that our value, and the value of our work, is finally being given the proper recognition.”

The ECACE scholarship is designed to help address the shortage of qualified early childhood educators and to build a strong, well-prepared workforce in the field. The scholarship was developed in partnership with the [Illinois Board of Higher Education](#) (IBHE), the [Illinois Community College Board](#) (ICCB), the [Illinois State Board of Education](#) (ISBE), the [Illinois Department of Human Services](#) (IDHS), and the [Governor’s Office of Early Childhood Development](#) (GOECD), and is funded by IDHS. 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

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childhood field. This includes applicants who work or have worked in family childcare and center-based care settings. Other eligibility requirements for the scholarship, and a list of participating institutions, are available on the ECACE Scholarship [webpage](#).

The scholarship can cover as much as the total cost of attendance (which can include tuition and fees, room and board, books, and transportation) for an academic year (including summer) 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 2023-24 academic year, students should complete the 2023-24 Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA®) if they have not already done so, as well as the ECACE scholarship application, and should provide required documentation. Eligible students who are currently enrolled in a participating institution are encouraged to work with their financial aid advisor.

ECACE also has student supports specifically designed for working adults. ECACE navigators provide personalized assistance to students in navigating the postsecondary education college application and financial aid process. Students and prospective students in early childhood education need only complete a simple [form](#) to connect with a navigator. 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.

“The ECACE Scholarship is a critical component of the state’s [strategic plan for higher education](#) to advance the early childhood workforce and increase opportunity through equitable access to higher education for those working in childcare,” said **ECACE Co-Project Director at IBHE Christi Chadwick**.

“These scholarships help ensure that we fill a critical workforce gap,” said **ICCB Deputy Director for Academic Affairs and Student Success and ECACE Co-Project Director Dr. Marcus Brown**. “We look forward to continuing to expand the early childhood workforce to better serve Illinois families through highly skilled professionals that reflect the diversity of the state.”

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](#).

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