

Gateways to Opportunity® Scholarship Program

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's)

Q. What is the Gateways to Opportunity Scholarship Program?

- A. The Gateways Scholarship Program is an individual-based scholarship opportunity, for professionals working in early care and education. The program provides financial assistance for early childhood education and child development (ECE/CD) coursework and degrees offered through participating colleges and universities dependent on available funding. The Gateways Scholarship Program is administered by INCCRRA and funded by the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) and the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE).

Q. Who can apply for the Gateways Scholarship Program?

- A. Professionals employed by an Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (IDCFS) licensed full-day, full-year* child care program or family/group child care home, IDCFS licensed school-age child care programs operating a minimum of nine months per year and ISBE Funded Preschool for All programs serving children for one full school year. Practitioners must also be working in one of the following positions:
- In IDCFS licensed programs: Family Child Care Provider, Family Child Care Assistant, Group Home Provider, Group Home Assistant, Director, Assistant Director, Teacher, Assistant Teacher, School-Age Teacher, School-Age Assistant
 - In an ISBE Funded Preschool for All (PFA) program that operates for a minimum of nine months per year: Teacher or Teacher's Aide
- *A full-day, full year program operates eight or more consecutive hours per day, for a minimum of 47 weeks per year.*

Q. What additional eligibility requirements are there?

- A. Gateways Scholarship recipients must:
- Be educating and caring for Illinois children.
 - Have been employed at their current IDCFS licensed program center or home, for a minimum of one year, or an ExceleRate Illinois Bronze, Silver, or Gold Circle of Quality program for 90 days (not including PFA programs).
 - Have been employed at an ISBE Funded PFA program for one full school year.
 - Work a minimum average of 15 hours per week or more on a continuous employment basis (*includes work and benefit time*) and at least 47 weeks per year.
 - Meet wage requirements.
 - Be a citizen of the United States, be a lawful permanent resident, or reside in the State of Illinois.
 - Commit to work in early care and education (ECE) or school-age child care for a period of time, based on scholarship type, upon the completion of the scholarship contract.

Q. How many credits will the scholarship assist with?

- A. Scholarship recipients may be authorized for up to 5 courses in a contract period or a maximum of 15 semester/23 quarter hours in a contract period (for courses outside of the typical length course). A contract period does not exceed one year.
- Bachelor's Degree applicants must have 55 transfer semester or 82 transfer quarterly hours accepted at participating four year institutions or a conferred Associate's Degree to apply.

Q. What education will the Gateways Scholarship Program support?

- A. The program will pay a certain percentage of tuition for eligible practitioners whose goal it is to earn:
- An Associate, Bachelor's, or Master's Degree in ECE/CD.
 - Coursework to advance on the Great START Wage Supplement Scale.
 - Coursework towards a Gateways to Opportunity Credential.
 - A Bachelor's or Master's degree related to program administration for ECE/CD.
 - Coursework for Illinois Professional Educator Licensure in Early Childhood.
 - 100% of the cost of tuition for Professional Educator Licensure in Early Childhood Student Teaching.
 - Coursework for Bilingual/ESL Approval/Endorsement.

Q. How much scholarship assistance will Gateways provide? How much will I need to pay?

- A. Upon being found eligible and registering for coursework the Gateways Scholarship Program will pay the participating college and university a percentage of the cost of tuition for specific number of college credits, dependent on your income level.

The percentage paid by the Gateways Scholarship Program for tuition is determined through a sliding invoice scale, which is based upon the recipient's income at time of award.

% of Tuition Gateways Scholarship Program Would Pay	Applicant Responsibility to College or University	Hourly Wage
100%	0%	up to \$4.25 over Illinois State Minimum Wage
90%	10%	\$4.26 to \$7.00 over Illinois State Minimum Wage
80%	20%	\$7.01 to \$10.00 over Illinois State Minimum Wage
70%	30%	\$10.01 to \$13.00 over Illinois State Minimum Wage
60%	40%	\$13.01 to \$16.00 over Illinois State Minimum Wage

Gateways Scholarship Program will not pay out of district costs.

Q. How do I apply to the Gateways Scholarship Program?

- A. The application and information on how to apply are available on the Gateways to Opportunity website at www.ilgateways.com or call 866-697-8278.
- Applicants must submit required documentation along with a scholarship application. Checklists listing required documentation are included with the scholarship application.
 - Additional documentation may be required upon review of your application.

Q. When do I apply for a Gateways Scholarship?

- A. The Gateways Scholarship Program accepts applications year round.
- Please submit your signed and completed application and required documents three-six weeks prior to the first day of class you intend to take.
 - Scholarship applications are processed and approved on a "first come, first serve" basis and dependent upon availability of funds.
 - Your signed application serves as your contract with the Gateways Scholarship Program.

Q. What is an "official transcript?"

- A. An official transcript is a transcript in a sealed envelope from an accredited college or university. The applicant should not open this envelope. Official electronic transcripts are also accepted if sent from an accredited college or university to transcripts@incrra.org. Copies of foreign evaluations may be accepted from the evaluation services found at www.naces.org/members.htm.

Q. How will I know if I am eligible for the Gateways Scholarship Program?

- A. You will receive a notification within 30 days of the receipt of your completed and signed application and required documents informing you whether or not you are eligible. If eligible, you will be assigned to a Gateways Scholarship Specialist who will assist you throughout the scholarship process.

Q. How long is my contract valid?

- A. All contracts end on June 30th and may be renewed yearly on July 1st.

Q. How long may I participate in the Gateways Scholarship Program?

- A. You may sign as many contracts as needed to complete a degree, certificate, licensure, endorsement or credential as long as all Gateways Scholarship Program eligibility requirements and responsibilities continue to be met. This includes a commitment period working in ECE or school-age child care. To renew a contract, please complete a new Gateways Scholarship Program application.
- All required documentation must be submitted for a contract to be considered valid.

Q. Can the Gateways Scholarship Program be combined with other financial aid?

- A. Yes, you can apply for other financial aid in addition to the Gateways Scholarship Program. If you receive a MAP Grant, your college or university will deduct the MAP Grant prior to invoicing the Gateways Scholarship Program for your tuition.

Q. When do I register for courses?

- A. After receiving your eligibility notice, share the course(s) you have registered for with your Gateways Scholarship Counselor by completing and submitting the **Participant Class Schedule** found on the Gateways website. Your Gateways Scholarship Counselor will send a course authorization to your college or university. Please use course authorization time frames below:

Semester Hour Schools Authorization Time Frames*	Quarter Hour Schools Authorization Time Frames*
Fall Semester: July 1st–August 31st	Fall Quarter: July 1st–September 30th
Spring Semester: October 1st–January 15th	Winter Quarter: November 1st–January 15th
Summer Semester 1: April 1st–May 31st	Spring Quarter: February 1st–April 30th
Summer Semester 2: July 1st–July 31st	Summer Quarter 1: July 1st–July 31st
	Summer Quarter 2: July 1st–August 15th

Authorizations are NOT allowed after deadlines.

***Exceptions may be made on a case by case basis for schools who offer mid-term classes.**

Q. What would my work commitment period to early care and education and school-age care be, after participating in the Gateways Scholarship Program?

- A. The work commitment period to early care and education is dependent upon coursework completed and scholarship type. Work commitment periods follow:
- Six months for completion of a coursework contract.
 - One year for completion of a degree (associate, bachelor's, master's)
 - One year for certificate, licensure, endorsement completion

The work commitment must be completed in one of the following Illinois early care and education settings:

- In IDCFS licensed programs: Family Child Care Provider, Family Child Care Assistant, Group Home Provider, Group Home Assistant, Director, Assistant Director, Teacher, Assistant Teacher, School-Age Teacher, School-Age Assistant
- In an ISBE Funded Preschool for All (PFA) program that operates for a minimum of nine months per year: Teacher or Teacher's Aide.

The commitment period beings at the completion of the scholarship contract. All scholarships end on June 30th.

Q. What would be my responsibilities for participating in this program?

- A. If you are eligible for the Gateways Scholarship Program, your eligibility notice will tell you the percentage of your tuition that will be paid to your college of university.
- You will be required to submit grade reports at the end of every term.
 - If you do not submit grades for two consecutive terms you will not receive scholarship support for next term.
 - You must make a commitment to ECE or school-age care. The commitment period beings at the completion of the scholarship contract. All scholarship contracts end on June 30th.

Q. What happens if I leave my place of employment during a contract or a work commitment period?

- A. If you leave your place of employment during a contract to work in another ECE or school-age program, you will need to contact your Gateways Scholarship Specialist immediately at scholarship@ilgateways.com to discuss your scholarship options.
- If you leave the field of ECE or school-age child care during your work commitment period, you will be required to reimburse INCCRRA the cost of your most recent contract.

▶▶ YOUR SIGNED APPLICATION SERVES AS YOUR CONTRACT WITH THE GATEWAYS SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM ◀◀