

# Illinois Gateways to Opportunity Scholarship Program

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's)

### Q. What is the Illinois Gateways to Opportunity Scholarship Program?

- A. The Gateways Scholarship Program is an individual-based scholarship opportunity, for practitioners 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 is eligible to apply for the Gateways Scholarship Program?

- A. Practitioners working in an Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (IDCFS) licensed full-day, full-year child care center, Head Start/Early Head Start, or family/group child care home; IDCFS licensed school-age child care programs operating a minimum of 9 months per year; and ISBE 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
  - Center Staff: Director, Assistant Director, Teacher, Assistant Teacher, School-Age Teacher, School-Age Assistant
  - Practitioners working in a Preschool for All (PFA) program that operates for a minimum of 9 months per year. Practitioners must be working as a Teacher or Teacher's Aide.

### Q. What additional eligibility requirements are there?

- A. Gateways Scholarship recipients must:
- Be educating and caring for Illinois children
  - Have been employed at current center or home, working at least 15 hours per week, for a minimum of one year
  - Have been employed in a public school PFA program for one (1) full school year.
  - Work 15 hours per week on a continuous employment basis (*includes work and benefit time*)
  - Meet wage requirements
  - Be a citizen of the United States or legal alien
  - Commit to work a period of time in early care and education (ECE) or school-age child care, based on scholarship type

### Q. How many courses can be registered for?

- A. A maximum of 15 semester hours or 23 quarter hours in a contract period. A contract period does not exceed one year.
- First time participants are only allowed to register for up to 6 semester hours or 9 quarter hours in their first semester/term.

### Q. What education will the Gateways Scholarship Program assist with paying for?

- A. The program will pay a certain percentage of tuition and fees for those whose goal it is to earn:
- A Child Development Associate (CDA)/Child Care Professional (CCP) Credential (*100% reimbursement of initial credential completion*)
  - An Associate degree in ECE/CD
  - A Bachelors degree in ECE/CD
  - A Masters degree in ECE/CD
  - Course work to advance on the Great START Wage Supplement Scale
  - A Gateways to Opportunity Credential
  - A Bachelors or Masters Degree related to program administration for ECE/CD
  - A Bachelors degree with Type 04 certification or coursework for Illinois Type 04 Teacher Certification
  - 100% of the cost of tuition for Type 04 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 100% of the cost of tuition and fees up front. You will be billed your percentage owed 30 days after the beginning of the term applied for.

The percentages paid by the Gateways Scholarship Program and the recipient for tuition and fees\* are determined through a sliding income scale, which is based upon the recipient’s ECE or school-age child care position income:

% Gateways Scholarship Program Would Pay	% Applicant Would Pay	Hourly Wage	Gross Yearly Wage Working Full Time
90	10	up to \$12.50	up to \$26,020
80	20	\$12.51 - \$15.00	\$26,021 - \$31,220
70	30	\$15.01 - \$18.00	\$31,221 - \$37,459
60	40	\$18.01 - \$21.00	\$37,460 - \$43,699
50	50	\$21.01 - \$24.00	\$43,700 - \$49,920

\* The Gateways Scholarship Program will only pay for fees associated with taking a course. For bachelors and masters level coursework, the highest tuition rate a scholarship can be based on is the current school year rate of the University of Illinois-Urbana-Champaign.

**Q. How do I apply for the Gateways Scholarship Program?**

A. The application and information on how to apply is available on the Gateways to Opportunity website at [www.ilgateways.com](http://www.ilgateways.com) or call INCCRRA to speak with a Gateways Scholarship Specialist at 309-827-5067 or 866-697-8278.

- Applicants must submit required documentation along with a scholarship application.
- Additional documentation may be required upon review of your application.

**Q. What is an “official transcript?”**

A. An official transcript is a transcript in a sealed envelope from the college or university. The applicant should not open this envelope. Copies of foreign evaluations may be accepted, but only from the following evaluation services found at <http://www.naces.org/members.htm>.

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

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

**Q. When do I apply for a Gateways Scholarship?**

A. The Gateways Scholarship Program accepts applications at any time during the year.

- Please submit your signed and completed application and required documentation 3-6 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 INCCRRA for your participation in the Gateways Scholarship Program.

**Q. How long is my contract valid for?**

A. All contracts end on the June 30th and may be renewed every year on July 1st.



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

- A. Scholarship recipients are allowed to sign as many contracts as needed to complete their degree and/or credential as long as they have no previous balance, all grades are submitted and they continue to meet all Gateways Scholarship Program eligibility requirements. This includes a work commitment period working in ECE or school-age child care. To renew a contract, please call your Gateways Scholarship Counselor at 866-697-8278 or 309-827-5327.
- All required documentation must be submitted for a contract to be considered valid.

**Q. When do I register for courses?**

- A. After receiving your eligibility letter, call your Gateways Scholarship Counselor at 866-697-8278 or 309-827-5067 to let them know which courses you wish to register for. After speaking with a Counselor, you may contact your school and register for courses. Please use authorization time frames below:

Semester Hour Schools Authorization Timeframes	Quarter Hour Schools Authorization Timeframes
Fall Semester: July 1st–August 31st	Fall Quarter: July 1st–October 31st
Spring Semester: October 1st–January 31st	Winter Quarter: November 1st–January 31st
Summer Semester: April 1st–May 31st	Spring Quarter: February 1st–April 31st
	Summer Quarter: May 1st–June 30th

**Authorizations are NOT allowed after deadlines.**

**Q. What would my work commitment period to early care and education be for 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 period is as follows:
- 6 months for CDA/CCP completion
  - 1 year for completion of a coursework contract (*for scholarship recipients completing 9–15 semester or equivalent quarter hours only*).
  - 1 year for AA completion
  - 1 year for BS or MS completion

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

- IDCFs licensed full day, full year family/group child care home
- IDCFs licensed full day, full year child care center or Head Start/Early Head Start
- Licensed school-age program operating a minimum of 9 months a year.
- Preschool for All program

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

- A. If you are eligible for the Gateways Scholarship Program, your eligibility letter will tell you the amount you are required to pay and the work commitment period upon completion of your contract.
- You would be billed your portion of the cost of tuition and fees after INCCRRA receives billing from your school. You must pay within 30 days.
  - All payments must be made to: INCCRRA Gateways Scholarship Program, 1226 Towanda Plaza, Bloomington, IL 61701.
  - You will not be able to register for the next term/semester unless you had paid your portion of the costs.
  - You will be required to submit grade reports at the end of every term/semester.
  - Scholarship recipients who do not submit grades for two consecutive term/semesters will not be allowed to register for next term/semester.
  - Scholarship recipients must make a commitment to ECE or school-age care.

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

- A. If you leave during a contract to work in another ECE or school-age program, you will need to work for one year before re-applying to the Gateways Scholarship Program. If you leave ECE or school-age child care during your work commitment period, you will be required to reimburse INCCRRA costs of tuition and fees of your most recent contract.