

# SMART START WORKFORCE GRANTS



## Smart Start Workforce Grants Guide to Using Grant Funds: CENTER-BASED PROGRAMS

Eligible child care programs in Illinois will receive Smart Start Workforce Grants to support higher wages. The wage floor is a requirement that programs agree to when they accept the grant. The wage floor varies by region, type of program, and role.

Role	Region		
	Group 1A	Group 1B	Group 2
Wage floor for lead teachers	\$19.25 per hour	\$18.50 per hour	\$18.25 per hour
Wage floor for assistant teacher	\$18.00 per hour	\$17.25 per hour	\$17.00 per hour

Group 1A: Cook, DeKalb, DuPage, Kane, Kendall, Lake, and McHenry counties.

Group 1B: Boone, Champaign, Kankakee, Madison, McLean, Monroe, Ogle, Peoria, Rock Island, Sangamon, St. Clair, Tazewell, Whiteside, Will, Winnebago, and Woodford counties.

Group 2: All counties not listed in Group 1A or 1B

### How do I spend my grant award correctly?

Pay Teacher and Teacher Assistants at or above the required wage floor ( <i>in Grant-funded Classrooms</i> )	✓ Required
Use remaining funds on wages <b>only</b> . ( <i>e.g., With leftover funds, pay wages or wage increases for Directors, staff in other classrooms, custodians, cooks, etc.</i> )	✓ Accepted

### What is **NOT** permitted?

Paying Teacher and Teacher Assistants <b>below</b> the required wage floor (in grant-funded classrooms).	✗ Not Allowed
Using funds on anything other than wages for staff ( <i>e.g., Food &amp; snacks, bonuses, fringe benefits, classroom supplies, playground equipment, etc.</i> )	✗ Not Allowed
Only paying the wage floor to Teachers, but not Teacher Assistants ( <i>in grant-funded classrooms</i> ).	✗ Not Allowed

## When do I spend these funds?

Each grant round will have a “Funding Use Period” when all grant funds must be spent. For example, if you applied for Round 1 and were found eligible, you must spend your grant funds during October, November, and December of 2024 (Round 1 Funding Use Period).

### Fiscal Year 2026 July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026

Application Round	Application Period	Documentation Deadline/ Funding Request	Funding Released:	Funding Use Period:	Quarterly Reporting Deadline:
Round 1	April 1, 2025 - April 29, 2025	May 14, 2025	Two Payments June 2025 & July 2025	July 2025 - September 2025	October 31, 2025
Round 2	July 1, 2025 – July 31, 2025	August 14, 2025	September 2025	October 2025 - December 2025	January 30, 2026
Round 3	October 1, 2025 – October 31, 2025	November 14, 2025	December 2025	January 2026 – March 2026	April 30, 2026
Round 4	January 2, 2026 – January 30, 2026	February 13, 2026	March 2026	April 2026 – June 2026	July 31, 2026

## Frequently Asked Questions:

### 1. What should I do if I still have grant funding available after meeting the required wage floor for the teachers and assistant teachers in my grant-funded classrooms?

All Smart Start Workforce Grant funding must be used toward staff salaries or wages. Any remaining funds may be used to 1) further increase wages for classroom staff or 2) increase or otherwise support wages for other program staff including (but not limited to) floaters, substitutes, directors and assistant directors. There is no specific wage requirement for these roles.

### 2. Do I need to start paying the wage floor as soon as I receive my Smart Start Workforce Grant funds/check?

No! The wage floor must only be met during the “Funding Use Period”. For Round 1, this starts October 1st, 2024.

### 3. Do I need to pay a substitute or floater the wage floor in a grant-funded classroom?

No. The wage floor is only required for Teachers and Teacher Assistants in grant-funded classrooms. However, leftover funds may be used for wages and salaries among other staff at your business at your discretion.

Have more questions about use of funds, contact your local expert with questions. [Find your local expert here.](#)