

Fund the Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity (ECACE) Scholarship Program at \$20 Million in FY26

What is the ECACE Scholarship Program?

The Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity (ECACE) Scholarship Program was created in 2021 to address the shortage of qualified early childhood educators by encouraging the pursuit of credentials and advancement of already held degrees in early childhood education, with an aim toward building a strong, well-prepared workforce.

Why is the ECACE Scholarship Program Important?

Illinois Needs More Qualified Early Childhood Educators ECACE is critical to strengthening our early childhood education and care workforce. Additionally, ECACE is essential to the state's Smart Start plan to increase access to high-quality early childhood programming across the state by creating 20,000 new preschool seats by 2027 and to meet the increased case load for the child care assistance program (CCAP). To meet the demands of the growing number of Pre-K slots and the increased CCAP caseload, the State will need an estimated **2,700** new early childhood educators. This figure does not account for current teacher vacancies or turnover. This is where ECACE comes in.

With an increase of:	The ECACE scholarship can serve the following number of students:
\$5 Million	1,333
\$10 Million	2,000
\$15 Million	2,666

Meets the Needs of the Incumbent Workforce ECACE serves individuals currently working in early childhood education and care, meaning the scholarship supports students who often balance work, school, and familial responsibilities.

Serves those Most in Need In academic year 2023-2024, nearly 4,700 students across 95% of the counties in Illinois received an ECACE scholarship. Of those students, 50% were adult learners over 30 years old, 89% of recipients were women, and 76% of recipients had an expected family contribution of \$10,000 or less.

Demand for the Scholarship is High In just 4 weeks, nearly 3,000 early childhood educators applied for academic year 2024-2025 funding, and this is likely an underrepresentation of the true demand. With the current \$5 million appropriation, only 666 students received the scholarship this year, leaving out roughly 2,300 educators.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT

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Thoughts from the Field

Early Childhood advocates surveyed over 450 current recipients of the ECACE Scholarship to learn about the impact of the scholarship program. Here's what we heard:

Financial and Stress Relief. "The ECACE scholarship allowed me to work and attend school stress-free. I didn't have to sacrifice my livelihood to attend one of the best schools for educators in the country. I only pursued my Bachelor's because the ECACE scholarship made it more accessible. The scholarship also had me considering graduate school but if it is taken away I don't think higher education would be practical."

Balance of Work and Familial Responsibilities. "The ECACE scholarship has been a tremendous help to me. As a mother of five young children this scholarship has helped with daycare costs, I have been able to buy a laptop for school, as well as with the economy being so expensive it has helped put food into our home as I am not working this summer while working on classwork."

Increased Educational Attainment and Credentials. "It has helped me continue my career. I currently work in a school district and would like to have my own class once I am able to graduate with my degree and license."

Provided Validation, Purpose, and Hope. "The ECACE has drastically made school life stress free, supported me during my clinical when I could barely work, has given me an honoring feeling that supports what I've worked hard for."

Supporting Organizations



The Illinois General Assembly has an opportunity to invest in the early childhood education and care workforce. **We urge the legislature to increase funding for the Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity (ECACE) Scholarship Program by \$15 million in the FY26 budget** allowing increased financial supports for the early childhood incumbent workforce.

