EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS (ECE) SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

Office of Student Financial Assistance (OSFA)

Student Guide

General Information:

The scholarship is designed to provide financial assistance for prospective and currently employed early childhood and out-of-school educators and providers who enroll in a certificate, associates, bachelor's, or master's degree program in an approved area of study. The Early Childhood Educators Scholarship Program was funded as a pilot initiative by the Legislature for the purpose of increasing the quality and availability of teachers and care providers to work with young children and youth, in inclusive settings including infant/toddler, preschool and school age programs.

Eligible Majors:

- ☐ Early Childhood Education
- ☐ Child Development
- ☐ Family Studies
- ☐ Child Care Administration
- ☐ Child Guidance
- ☐ Human Services
- ☐ Social Work
- ☐ Psychology
- ☐ Special Education
- ☐ Elementary Education
- ☐ Child Psychology
- ☐ Fields that directly name early child development and its specific areas of inquiry

Eligible **graduate/master's program**s include these same categories as well as Early Childhood Research, Policy, and Practice; Education Entrepreneurship; and Learning Sciences.

Eligibility Criteria:

- ☐ Physically reside in Massachusetts for at least one year, as of the start of the enrolled term, with an intent to remain in Massachusetts consistent with Board of Higher Education policy; and

- ☐ Have approved eligibility status as a "High School Completer,"[1] per the Massachusetts tuition equity law,[2] or be a U.S. Citizen, permanent legal resident, or non-citizen eligible under Title IV regulations.
- ☐ Have applied for financial aid, using the standard Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or a FAFSA equivalent application authorized by the Department of Higher Education.
- ☐ Not be in default of any federal or state Student Loans for attendance at any institution or owe a refund for any previous financial aid received.
- ☐ Enroll, as a matriculated student, in an approved college certificate or degree program, full or part-time, in an eligible institution.
- ☐ Be employed as an educator or provider in an early education and care program (FCC, center-based, after/out-of-school time, residential placement or contracted FCC system) that is licensed or funded by the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (EEC).
  Or
  Be considered a "prospective student" which is defined as unemployed or not employed as an early education and care provider at a facility or program, licensed or funded by the Department of Early Education and Care, but plan to enroll in an approved course of study as defined in the eligibility requirements of the ECE Scholarship.
    - Prospective students must demonstrate they are **seeking employment with an early education and care provider in the commonwealth** and will have one year to secure eligible employment.
- ☐ Sign an agreement to continue employment as an early childhood educator or provider in Massachusetts upon completing the degree requirement, or repay funds as defined.
- ☐ Students must either be pursuing their first bachelor's degree or pursuing a master's degree in an approved program, as defined.

[1] *See www.mass.edu/tuitionequity for more details.*

[2] *Pursuant to Section 9 of Chapter 15A, as amended by Section 11 of Chapter 28 of the Acts of 2023.*

Starting with the 2025-2026 ECE Application and going forward, the following definitions will be used to determine eligibility:

Eligible Positions are defined as those that provide direct care to children, such as: Family Child Care (FCC) owner/educator, FCC assistant, teacher, lead teacher, director, group leader. As well as specific positions within Family Child Care Systems that have contract agreements with EEC. Such positions include home visitors, mentors, coaches and educational leaders.

Licensed or funded programs are defined as those issued a license to operate direct care to children or are considered "funded." **All eligible programs must have been issued a Program Number by EEC and have an active account in LEAD**. This also includes Family Child Care Systems that have contracts with EEC to provide financially subsidized care to children.

ECE Scholarship Frequently Asked Questions:

Q: How do I apply for the Early Childhood Educators Scholarship and what information will I need to complete it?

- ☐ Must have a current FAFSA on file. If you need to complete your federal application, please do so at Home | Federal Student Aid

- ☐ To apply to the ECE Scholarship you will need to log into the MASSAid Student Portal.
  - ➢ If it is your first time logging into the MASSAid system, you will need to create an account.
  - ➢ The ECE Application is located under the main tab and is labeled "**Grants/Scholarship Online Applications**"

Please note that it takes at least **72 hours from the time a student's FAFSA is processed to upload to the MASSAid system*.

- ☐ Students must have an up-to-date PQR number Massachusetts EEC Professional Qualifications Registry this is your unique account number and represents your professional profile.

- ☐ Employed applicants must have a valid ECE program number (must be employed as an educator or provider in an early education and care program or out of school time program that is licensed or funded by **DEEC** - **Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care**, including contracted Family Child Care Systems.)

- ☐ **EMPLOYED STUDENTS ONLY:** At the end of the application, you will be provided with the **ECE Proof of Employment Form (POE)**. This form will need to be fully completed and signed by your supervisor. Your ECE application will remain incomplete until your POE is submitted via the upload feature in MASSAid. ******PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS DO NOT NEED TO SUBMIT A PROOF OF EMPLOYMENT FORM******

  →**IF YOU ARE SELF-EMPLOYED/OWNER OF A CHILD CARE PROGRAM:** Please report your information under "CURRENT EMPLOYER/SUPERVISOR" and submit your application. The system will recognize that student information and employer information match and will request that you certify your self-employment.
- ☐ Once the form is completed, you will need to log back into the MASSAid student portal and upload your documentation. (In an effort to become paperless, please **DO NOT** mail and/or fax your documentation)

- ☐ Students receive a confirmation email, after submitting an ECE application, with additional information regarding the scholarship process.

Q: How do I upload my POE form and/or re-print/access my POE?

1. Log into the MASSAid Student Portal

2. Click on the tab labeled "**My ECE**":



3. Click on "**Upload Proof of Employment**" or to access your POE Form, click on "Re-Print Proof of Employment":



4. To view your uploaded POE, click on the tab labeled "**My Forms**"

5. Please note that an OSFA administrator must manually review all proof of employment forms which may take up to **72 hours** depending on the volume of applications received. Until your form is reviewed and approved or denied, your ECE record will be flagged for "*No Proof of Employment on File*". *The system does not automatically mark your POE as received.*

Q. What happens after my proof of employment (POE) form is approved by OSFA?

After OSFA has approved your proof of employment form, and *if there are **no** other discrepancies* on your account that need to be resolved, your application will go into a pending review status with the Department of Early Education and Care.

EEC is required to verify reported work history, which involves verification of a student's PQR number and ECE program number.

Q. What if I am a prospective student – do I still need to submit a proof of employment form?

No, you will not need to submit a proof of employment form as you do not currently hold an eligible position or are employed by an eligible EEC program/employer.

Please note that 'prospective students' are expected to **seek employment with an early education and care provider in the commonwealth**. The Department of Early Education and Care will conduct follow-up with these students in a year's time to verify employment.

Q. What if I have another ineligible reason on my ECE account? (EX. Citizenship, Not a MA resident, etc.)

Students can click on ineligible reasons for further information

- ☐ **Citizenship Status**: When a student fills out a FAFSA (federal application), their information gets sent to the Social Security Administration to verify their citizenship. If this gets flagged at the federal level, then it will also reflect at the state level (OSFA). **This issue must be cleared with the financial aid office at the institution. When resolved, the FA office can manually go into the MASSAid system and remove this flag.**
- ☐ **Student/Parent not a MA resident**: All students must meet Massachusetts residency requirements for state financial aid; that is one full year of MA residency prior to the start of the academic year. The information reported on your FAFSA helps to determine this (license, address, legal state of residence, and date of residency). If any of this information conflicts with residency in Massachusetts, the student will have to submit documentation, via the MASSAid Student Portal. The appropriate OSFA administrator will review submitted documentation, per residency reply form requirements, to determine whether the student meets residency guidelines.

  If you are an **independent student** Dependency Status | Federal Student Aid, your parents' residency **WILL NOT** be taken into consideration.
- ☐ **Not approved by EEC**: The Department of Early Education and Care will not approve a student's application if they cannot confirm employment information, PQR status, and eligible EEC program number corresponding to your place of employment.

There may be other ineligible reason(s) flagged on your account – please click on the listed reason(s) in the MASSAid student portal for further guidance

Q: Do I need to reapply every year?

Yes! Students need to reapply every year they wish to be considered for ECE Scholarship funds.

Q. When does the ECE application become available and when is the deadline?

The ECE application typically becomes available on April 1st for the following academic year and remains open until August 1st. Please note that application dates are subject to change - always check OSFA's website for updated application information Office of Student Financial Assistance / ECE Scholarship

Q. What happens if I change employers or my institution during the academic year?

Students must notify OSFA and ECE, in writing, of any changes in employment. Please send all updated information via email to Stephanie Perez at OSFA, Sperez@dhe.mass.edu and Sarah Sian at EEC, Sarah.C.Sian@mass.gov.

If there is a change in your institution, please contact Stephanie Perez at OSFA, Sperez@dhe.mass.edu.

Q. Are paraprofessionals employed at Massachusetts public schools eligible to apply to the ECE Scholarship?

No, *Paraprofessionals working in a K-12 Massachusetts public school and wish to become licensed teachers, may be eligible to apply to the Paraprofessional Teacher Preparation Grant Program (PTPG). Students can review program eligibility requirements on OSFA's website:* Office of Student Financial Assistance / Paraprofessional Grant. *Students cannot participate in both programs.*

Q. If I do not use my fall scholarship, am I still eligible for my spring award?

ECE Scholarship recipients who do not register for courses for the fall semester or are not able to be certified by the college for a fall award, will automatically have their spring funds cancelled. Schools must request a reinstatement of an ECE award for any student who enrolls for the spring semester via the MASSAid system; requests for reinstatement are reviewed by OSFA later in the semester and are approved based on the availability of funding.

Q. How will I find out if I am eligible or ineligible for the ECE Scholarship?

Eligible Applicants: If you have met the requirements verified by OSFA, your application will be sent to EEC for further review and verification. If approved by EEC, a student will be flagged as eligible and will receive an award notification, via email, from the Office of Student Financial Assistance. *Scholarship amounts are based on a per credit rate, depending on the type of institution as provided below:*

Institution Type	Maximum Award Amounts
University of Massachusetts	$750 per credit, maximum of $6,750 per semester
Private College/University	$750 per credit, maximum of $6,750 per semester
State University	$550 per credit, maximum of $4,950 per semester
Community College	$350 per credit, maximum of $3,150 per semester

Ineligible Applicants: Ineligible notifications begin late July and are sent via email to students. **All students will be sent two notifications and will have 21 days from the *date of their first email*** to resolve all ineligible discrepancies from their account. Students will be notified on rolling basis as OSFA continues to receive applications.

ECE Scholarship Application at a Glance

Student

- Complete current year FAFSA
- Complete ECE application via MASSAid Student Portal
- Receive confirmation email
- Employed students: upload completed Proof of Employment form-SIGNED BY SUPERVISOR

OSFA

- Determines eligibility based on FAFSA and ECE application
- Reivews POE and will approve or deny
- Prospective students/employees DO NOT need to submit POE
- Ineligible students will receive information on what follow-up is needed

EEC

- Verifies employment information for applicants approved by OSFA
- Checks for active PQR and valid Program Number
- Applicants are approved or denied based on employment eligibility

OSFA

- Students approved by OSFA/EEC will receive an award letter from OSFA
- Students wil are denied by EEC will receive notficiation of their ineligible status and information on next steps

Scholarship Certification Process

College

All eligible students will appear on an electronic roster at participating institutions (via MASSAid.)

- At a date determined by OSFA, institutions will begin to certify eligible students on their campus in order for ECE scholarship funds to be disbursed. This happens seperately for both the fall and the spring semester.
- Certification inlcudes: confirming enrollment status, number of credits, and that the student meets all requirements for federal (FAFSA) and state financial aid (OSFA)

OSFA

- All students that have been certified as eligilbe by the school will go into a 'ready to pay' status allowing our office to generate payments.
- Disbursement of **fall funds** will be made as early as mid September, ***pending certification from the institution***, and will continue through the end of the semester.
- Disbursement of **spring funds** will be made as early as mid January***pending certification from the institution***, and will continue through the end of the semester.