

# 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 program or family/group child care home, or IDCFS licensed school-age child care programs operating a minimum of 9 months per 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
  - In IDCFS licensed programs: Center Staff: Director, Assistant Director, Teacher, Assistant Teacher, School-Age Teacher, School-Age Assistant
- \*A full-day, full year program operates 8 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 center or home, for a minimum of one year
  - Have been employed in an ISBE Funded PFA program for one (1) full school year.
  - Work a minimum average of 15 hours per week or more 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 in early care and education (ECE) or school-age child care for a period of time, based on scholarship type

### Q. How many credits 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 term.
  - Bachelor's Degree applicants must have 55 transfer semester or 82 transfer quarterly hours accepted at participating 4 year institutions to apply.

### Q. What education will the Gateways Scholarship Program support?

- A. The program will pay a certain percentage of tuition and fees for eligible practitioners whose goal it is to earn:
- An Associate's Degree in ECE/CD
  - A Bachelor's Degree in ECE/CD
  - A 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

**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 for your percentage owed 30 days after the beginning of each term.

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. Gateways Scholarship Program will not pay out of district fees. For bachelor's and master's 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 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](http://www.ilgateways.com) or call 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 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](mailto:transcripts@incrra.org). Copies of foreign evaluations may be accepted from the 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 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 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 year round.

- Please submit your signed and completed application and required documents 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 the Gateways Scholarship Program.

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

A. All contracts end on the 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, approval, endorsement or credential as long as balances owed are paid, all grades are submitted and all Gateways Scholarship Program eligibility requirements continue to be met. This includes a commitment period working in ECE or school-age child care. To renew a contract, please call your Gateways Scholarship Counselor at 866-697-8278.
  - 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, share the course(s) you wish to register for with your Gateways Scholarship Counselor at 866-697-8278. 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 Term: July 1st–October 31st
Spring Semester: October 1st–January 31st	Winter Term: November 1st–January 31st
Summer Semester: April 1st–May 31st	Spring Term: February 1st–April 30th
	Summer Term I: May 1st–June 15th
	Summer Term II: July 1st–July 31st

**Authorizations are NOT allowed after deadlines.**

**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:
  - 6 months for completion of a coursework contract. Effective for contracts beginning July 1, 2013.
  - 1 year for AA completion
  - 1 year for BS or MS completion
  - 1 year for certificate, approval, endorsement 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
- Licensed school-age program operating a minimum of 9 months a year

**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 length of your 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 unless you have paid your portion of the costs.
  - You will be required to submit grade reports at the end of every term.
  - If you do not submit grades for two consecutive term you will not be allowed to register for next term.
  - You 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 your place of employment during a contract to work in another ECE or school-age program, you will need to contact your Gateways Scholarship Counselor immediately at 866-697-8278 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 costs of tuition and fees of your most recent contract.

