

BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

REQUEST FOR COMMITTEE AND BOARD ACTION

COMMITTEE: Fiscal Affairs and Administrative Policy **NO.:** FAAP 17-24

COMMITTEE DATE: January 17, 2017

BOARD DATE: January 24, 2017

**APPROVAL OF THE BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION FISCAL YEAR 2018
BUDGET**

MOVED: The Board of Higher Education hereby adopts the recommended amendments to the **Early Childhood Educator Scholarships** guidelines for students and programs.

Authority: Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 15A, Section 6, 9 and 15B

Contact: Clantha McCurdy, Ph.D., Senior Deputy Commissioner, Access and Student Financial Assistance

BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

January 2017

Background

The Early Childhood Educators' Scholarship Program was initially funded by the Massachusetts Legislature in Fiscal Year 2005, for the purpose of increasing the quality and availability of teachers and care providers to work with young children in inclusive settings, including infant/toddler, preschool and child care programs. The program is designed to provide much-needed financial assistance to currently employed early childhood educators and providers who are unable to afford the cost of college tuition due to their overall low-income levels. These employees are encouraged to matriculate in degree programs at the associate's, bachelor's or master's level in Early Childhood Educators' or related programs.

Since its inception, the Department of Higher Education and the Department of Early Education and Care, have acted jointly to develop guidelines and application criteria for the administration of the Early Childhood Educators Scholarship Program. Both agencies recognize the significance of this program in promoting higher education and degree completion as a means of assisting the Commonwealth in bringing highly qualified teachers and providers into the developmental learning environments to provide educational services and care for children. The DHE and EEC have worked collaboratively to manage and evaluate the effectiveness of the ECE Scholarship program, which typically awards an average of \$3.2 million to 1200 students annually.

Beginning in 2014, members of the Office of Student Financial Assistance and Academic Affairs divisions of the Department of Higher Education and the Department of Early Education and Care division for Workforce staff members worked together over a 24 month period to review stakeholder feedback on the effectiveness of the Early Childhood Educators Scholarships (ECE). It was found that a major obstacle to increasing certificate and degree completion for early educators is the "related degree" clause. In addition, it was determined that issues related to the absence of institutional advising in many instances, led to early educator students not taking courses in a sequence that would lead to the completion of a certificate or degree program. It was also determined that, too frequently, early educator students -very close to completion- were losing in the first-come-first-served lottery for scholarship dollars.

On November 2, 2016 Commissioner Carlos Santiago, Department of Higher Education and Commissioner Thomas Weber, Department of Early Education and Care met with staff to discuss the recommended changes and made several modifications. The Commissioners of Higher Education and Early Education and Care **approve and recommend** the following changes for BHE action.

Changes for Early Childhood Educator Scholarships

1. Eliminate the language 'or related degree' for the 2017-2018 applications. The proposed change to this requirement beginning in FY 2017-2018 would be:
"Enroll, as a matriculated student, in an undergraduate degree program, full or part-time, in Early Childhood Education, Child Development, Family Studies, Child Care Administration or fields that directly name early child development and its specific areas of inquiry."

2. Increase the completion of certificates and degrees by requiring applicants to work with the regional EEC EPS network when submitting the scholarship application to OSFA.
3. Require participating institutions to offer advising and to work collaboratively with the Educator Provider Support (EPS) network in the region, such that scholarship students must be advised as to what courses and learning experiences will enable them to complete certificate and degree programs efficiently and without exceeding the required number of credits to do so.
4. Limit eligible degree programs and colleges to those who provide evidence of compliance with the ECE Scholarship 2014 Guidelines for institutions when requested to do so.
5. Identify Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) programs and staff that currently participate in the ECE Scholarship program to determine scholarship eligibility at the program level. This will have no impact for DHE/OSFA and will be in the purview of EEC.

**BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION
EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS' SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM**

DEFINITIONS

INSTITUTION:

Any regionally accredited public or independent (private) college or university in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts offering an Early Childhood Education program of study or program in a related field.

ELIGIBLE PROGRAM:

An undergraduate associate's, bachelor's or master's degree program offered by an eligible institution in either Early Childhood Education, Child Development, Family Studies, Child Care Administration or fields that directly name child development as its areas of inquiry, meeting the following criteria:

- Demonstrated compliance with degree program standards as established and required by a regional program accrediting body, such as the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), and meet program approval standards as defined by the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education;
- Is approved under Title IV standards by the US Department of Education; including all program locations
- Not based on any paid commission, bonus, or other incentive payment – based directly or indirectly upon success in securing enrollments or financial aid – to any person or entity engaged in any student recruiting or admission activities or in making decisions regarding the awarding of Title IV or State funds; and

- Admissions standards require that students have earned a high school diploma or GED
- In cases where the institution has entered into an agreement with another institution (or entity), consortium, or organization to provide an educational program, the institution has ensured that the educational program contracted out is in compliance with any state or federal regulations

Participating institutions must respond to a Department of Higher Education's inquiry concerning institutional compliance with program eligibility requirements. Funds will not be disbursed to an institution's students until the inquiry has been satisfactorily completed and the Department of Higher Education has determined that the institution is in compliance with all program guidelines.

ELIGIBLE STUDENT:

A matriculated undergraduate student enrolled full or part-time in Early Childhood Education, Child Development, Family Studies, Child Care Administration or fields that directly name early child development and its areas of inquiry, who also meet the following requirements:

- a) Is a permanent legal resident of Massachusetts for at least one year prior to the start of the academic year.
- b) Is a U.S. citizen or eligible non-citizen eligible under Federal Title IV Regulations.
- c) Be employed, for at least one year, as an educator or provider in an early education and care program or out of school time program that is licensed or authorized by the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) and continue employment in this field while pursuing the approved course of study, or
- d) Is a licensed family child care provider and continues to work as an early educator in an early education and care program in Massachusetts.
- e) Has maintained employment or has provided licensed family child care for at least one year prior to receipt of grant funds and has provided documentation of such employment.
- f) If enrolled in an undergraduate program, has not earned a prior bachelor's degree.
- g) Maintains satisfactory academic progress in accordance with institutional standards.
- h) Annually files the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).
- i) Signs an agreement to continue employment as an early educator or provider in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, with the expectation that the student will continue to be employed in the Early Childhood Education field as an educator or provider in Massachusetts for six months per semester of scholarship receipt, not to exceed a two year maximum

commitment upon graduation from an associate's degree program and a four year maximum commitment upon graduation from a bachelor's degree program.

Priority consideration will be given to eligible applicants recommended by an individual qualified to speak to their commitment and dedication to the field of early education and care.

AWARD VALUE:

The award for eligible applicants under this program shall be as follows:

- a) up to \$500 per credit at a public university or private college or university, not to exceed a maximum of \$4,500 per semester.
- b) up to \$400 per credit at a public four-year college, not to exceed a maximum of \$3,600 per semester.
- c) up to \$250 per credit at a public two-year college, not to exceed a maximum of \$2,250 per semester.

Grants may be awarded for a maximum of three courses per semester, and recipients must enroll in a minimum of three credits in a given academic semester to be awarded funds. Awards may not exceed the recipient's cost of attendance for any academic term. The Department of Higher Education shall establish the number of credits to be paid in any given semester and reduce awards in any given term or academic year, based on demand and available funds, as necessary.

The Department of Higher Education will annually review the tuition and fee charges at Massachusetts public colleges and the university and adjust the program award values, as it deems necessary.

INSTITUTIONAL DISBURSEMENT OF GRANTS:

Each participating institution must certify that the recipient is eligible in accordance with guidelines established for the Early Childhood Educators' Scholarship Program. Academic year awards will be disbursed in equal payments for the fall and spring semesters or as calculated based on enrolled credits within the established limits for the fall and spring semesters.

Fall semester is defined as commencing September 1 and concluding on or before December 31. Spring semester term is defined as commencing January 1 and concluding on or before May 31. An institution must request and obtain approval for non-conforming terms from the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education. The Massachusetts Department of Higher Education will inform participating institutions each year whether funding is available for summer enrollment in the program. Each course offered through the program during any of the above terms must fully conform to the institution's published standards that clearly define enrollment status levels and course length at the institution.

Grants may be awarded to eligible applicants for summer terms based on availability of funds, but only to those who indicated summer credits on the annual ECE application.

All funds appropriated for this program must be expended by June 30 of each fiscal year or as otherwise determined by the Legislature.

PARTICIPATION AGREEMENT:

All institutions participating in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Early Childhood Educators' Scholarship Program must file a State Financial Aid Program Participation Agreement to be maintained on file in the Office of Student Financial Assistance.

AUDIT REQUIREMENTS:

- a) It shall be the responsibility of each college and university to maintain documentation of a recipient student's eligibility.
- b) The Commissioner shall require each campus to furnish to the Board of Higher Education a report detailing specific information regarding recipients. The Office of Student Financial Assistance will coordinate specification and procedures for this report.

All financial books, records and documents pertaining to this program shall at all times be open to inspection, review and audit by the Commissioner, the State Auditor or their authorized representatives, who shall have access to the premises wherever such books, records and documents are located. The institution shall retain such financial books, records and documents for seven years. An institution may retain such records for a period of five years if approval is received from the Records Conservation Board in accordance with General Laws, Chapter 30, Section 42.