



MASSACHUSETTS
Department of
Higher Education

**Early Childhood Educator Scholarships
Guideline Improvements**

Approved: Commissioner Carlos E. Santiago, Department of Higher Education
Commissioner Thomas L. Weber, Department of early Education and Care

After 10 years of Early Childhood Educators Scholarships, some of the needs in the field have changed and lessons have been learned through experience. In keeping pace with the changes staff members have kept in communication with stakeholders on the ground in our communities and institutions of higher education, leading to the following recommendations. It is expected that the Early Childhood Educator Scholarships can better serve to increase the number of certificate and degree completers in Massachusetts with the implementation of the recommended adjustments.

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 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 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 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.

BACKGROUND

After 10 years of Early Childhood Educators Scholarships, some of the needs in the field have changed and lessons have been learned from these years of experience. In keeping pace with the changes and acting on lessons learned, staff members have kept in communication with stakeholders on the ground in our communities and institutions of higher education.

Commentary and feedback has helped create recommendations whereby Early Childhood Educator Scholarships can better serve to increase the number of certificate and degree completers in Massachusetts.

Beginning in 2014, members of the OSFA and Academic Affairs divisions of DHE and EEC Workforce staff members met over a 24 month period to review feedback on the effectiveness of the Early Childhood Educators Scholarships. 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 Commissioners Santiago and Weber met with staff to discuss the recommended changes, made several modifications and subsequently recommended the below adjustments for release and BHE approval during the winter of 2017:

1. Eliminate the language ‘or related degree’ for the 2017-2018 applications. Students enrolled prior to 2017-2018 in a related degree major will be grand-mothered to continue on their pathway. One of the existing eligibility requirements for students currently states: *“Enroll, as a matriculated student, in an undergraduate degree program (full or part-time) in Early Childhood Education, or a related field (i.e., elementary education, sociology, psychology).* The proposed change to this requirement beginning in 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 areas of inquiry.*

This language matches the changes made to Guidelines for programs in 2014, and *also matches program titles from CIP codes* that cover programs offered by our IHE’s in the field of early childhood in Massachusetts. This would make data collection on enrollment and completion much more possible. These modifications to the eligibility requirements will require certain enhancements to the EEC Scholarship application and processes, within the MASSAid financial aid system.

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. EPS networks will review the applicant pool for their region and identify for OSFA, those early educator students who are closest to certificate and degree completion in order to

increase the number of completers annually. EEC's Region 3 has done this effectively. Develop a timeline for implementation and a schedule of orientations that is manageable for other regional EPS teams by January 2018. Making this a requirement for all regions is expected to increase the number of completers.

Currently all students are required to have a valid FAFSA before they can complete the ECE Scholarship application. As such, applicants to the ECE program are identified in the FAFSA record pool in MASSAid and an appropriate year ECE record is created after the ECE application is completed, accepted and saved in MASSAid. The item 2 requirement will likely create a need to segregate those EPS-approved applicants from the FAFSA applicant pool and only allow those (applicants) to complete the ECE application in MASSAid. Although the workings of this new requirement would warrant discussion with the vendor, it is probable that those EPS-approved applicants would be uploaded in MASSAid. This has the potential to re-define the entire front-end eligibility determination for the program and could be a major enhancement.

3. Require participating institutions to offer advising and to work collaboratively with the 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. EEC's Region 3 EPS is doing this effectively and if it is made a requirement, it is expected that other regions would be more effective too.

OSFA can activate or de-activate institutions from the "eligible school" list for the ECE Scholarship program at any time, if and when schools are investigated and found out of compliance. It is likely that no enhancements or modifications will be required for item 3.

4. Limit eligible degree programs and colleges to those who are able to provide evidence of compliance with the ECE Scholarship 2014 Guidelines for institutions, if and when asked to do so.
5. Identify QRIS programs and staff that currently participate in ECE Scholarship and work with QRIS programs, EEC Program Quality staff and EPS grantees on the front-end to determine scholarship eligibility at the program level. This will have no impact for DHE/OSFA and will be in the purview of EEC. Once the current review of QRIS has been completed by EEC, this recommendation can be initiated.

In addition the following timeline is suggested to further strengthen the scholarships program:

FY18

- Make ECE Scholarship program an incentive to those programs that participate in QRIS levels (2-4). Determined whether this will be handled at the eligibility rules level or at the award amount levels.
- Assess EEC licensed programs for degree-needs of early educator leaders and staff.
- Require programs serving children to work with EPS grantees and college partners for academic advising.

January 2017

FY19

- Create the ability to track degree attainment and early educator retention the field through QRIS programs. This will have no impact for the DHE/OSFA and will be in the purview of EEC.

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