



Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Q. What is the Chicago Early Learning Workforce Scholarship?

A. Multiple agencies collaborate in the administration, oversight and delivery of the Chicago Early Learning Workforce (CELW) Scholarship. These include the City of Chicago Mayor's Office, the Department of Family and Support Services (DFSS), Chicago Public Schools (CPS), City Colleges of Chicago (CCC)-Truman College, the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (INCCRRA), and partnering Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs). CELWS aims to support Chicagoans and the current Chicago Early Learning workforce as they pursue coursework to earn a credential, degree, endorsement, or licensure to work with young children (birth through Pre-K) and families in Chicago Early Learning programs. The scholarship serves an important role in Chicago's efforts to expand access to early learning across the city and build a more robust workforce that can help Chicago expand high quality early learning programs. CELWS provides recipients with meaningful career pathways through partnerships with Institutions of Higher Education, which also offer students personalized supports as they navigate their desired course of study.

Q. Who can apply for the Chicago Early Learning Workforce Scholarship?

A. Current Chicago Early Learning program staff who are looking to increase their credentials, endorsements, or ECE degree. Additionally, any Chicagoans interested in entering the early childhood workforce, including parents of children who are currently enrolled in one of Chicago's early childhood programs, recent High School graduates, and DACA recipients. Recipients must be eligible for employment in a Chicago Early Learning program. (Recipients cannot have any felonies and must be able to pass an FBI, State of Illinois, and Sex Offender background check.)

Q. How many credits can I be registered for?

A. A maximum of 15 semester hours or 23 quarter hours per term.

Q. What education will the Chicago Early Learning Workforce Scholarship support?

A. The program will pay tuition, fees, and books (up to \$250 for books/per course) for eligible applicants whose goal it is to earn coursework in early care and education to gain a state recognized credential, degree, endorsement, or licensure.

The scholarship only applies to current coursework and will not be applied to any previously incurred debt.

Q. How much scholarship assistance will the Chicago Early Learning Workforce Scholarship provide? How much will I need to pay?

A. The scholarship will serve as a "last dollar" scholarship, meaning it will cover everything that students' federal grants and other scholarships do not cover. Chicago Early Learning Workforce Scholarship applicants will be required to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or certify they are ineligible for financial aid.

Q. How do I apply to the Chicago Early Learning Workforce Scholarship program?

A. The application and information on how to apply, are available on the Chicago Early Learning website at chicagoearlylearning.org/scholarships. All applications will open mid-January. Once you have completed your application, you will receive an e-mail confirmation with next steps.

Q. When do I apply for a Chicago Early Learning Workforce Scholarship?

A. All applications will open mid-January for the following academic year.

Q. How will I know if I am eligible for the Chicago Early Learning Workforce Scholarship Program?

A. You will receive an e-mail notification of your eligibility. A CELWS Specialist will initially contact and guide you through next steps in CELWS process. If determined eligible upon receipt and review of required documents, including Commitment letter, you will then begin the intake/registration with one of our approved college/university partners. Once you have been found eligible, you will receive next steps from a CELWS advisor from the college or university you have been matched with.

Q. How long may I participate in the Chicago Early Learning Workforce Scholarship program?

A. CELWS will support awardees through Academic program/Degree attainment, contingent on funding, as long as students meet following requirements: Maintain Good Standing and Continued Enrollment at your selected college/university, earn a GPA of 2.0 or higher, commit to work in a birth through Pre-K Chicago Early Learning Program (community-based organization or Chicago Public School) for three years after completion of the academic program or degree.

Q. Can the Chicago Early Learning Workforce Scholarship be combined with other financial aid?

A. Yes, you should apply for other financial aid in addition to the Chicago Early Learning Workforce Scholarship, as this will serve as a "last dollar" scholarship. If you receive other forms of financial aid, including other scholarships, your college or university will deduct that financial aid prior to invoicing the Chicago Early Learning Workforce Scholarship for your remaining tuition, fees, and books (up to \$250 for books/per course).

Q. What happens if I do not pass or need to repeat a course?

A. Should you need to repeat a course, you will work with your institution representative to complete and sign the Chicago Early Learning Workforce Scholarship Student Academic Improvement and Acknowledgment form. Once received and approved, the Chicago Early Learning Workforce Scholarship program may pay for a required class up to two times.

Q. What happens if I am unable to take a course for a term?

A. If you are unable to take courses for one or two consecutive terms, you can continue participating in the Chicago Early Learning Workforce Scholarship. After two consecutive inactive terms, you must re-apply for the scholarship program.

Q. When do I register for courses?

A. If you are attending a 4-year University, after receiving your award letter, you will be notified by your CELWS advisor on when you are able to register for the current term. After you have registered, you must share the course(s) you have registered for each term with your Chicago Early Learning Workforce Scholarship Specialist, using the Scholarship Program Participant Class Schedule Form each term. Your Chicago Early Learning Workforce Scholarship Specialist will send a course authorization to your university.

If you are attending City Colleges you will receive an email to your CCC student email from your scholarship advisor reminding you to register for courses each semester. You can also find important dates on the [calendar on the CCC website](#). Most students can register themselves in their My.CCC.edu account. If you have any questions about registration, which classes to take, or your scholarship status, contact your scholarship advisor.

Q. What would my responsibilities be for participating in this program?

A. As part of your participation in the Chicago Early Workforce Scholarship, you agree to:

- Apply for Federal Financial Aid (FAFSA).
- Apply for Gateways registry.
- Maintain Good Standing and Continued Enrollment at your selected college/university.
- Maintain a GPA of 2.0 or higher while participating in the scholarship program. CELWS will be rescinded if GPA falls under a 2.0.

- Ensure your Director or school Principal is aware and supports your academic plan.
- Submit grade reports and/or have your Institute of Higher Education verify them at the end of every term. If you do not submit grades for two consecutive terms you will not receive scholarship support for the next term.
- Completion of surveys from CELWS team.
- Ensure academic status is up to date every term by checking with your academic advisor.
- Submit official transcripts upon graduation/completion of academic program.
- Submission of credential application when you have completed academic program
- Live in Chicago or work in a Chicago Early Learning (CEL) Program.
- Commit to work in a Chicago Early Learning Program (community-based organization or Chicago Public School) for three consecutive years after completion of the degree or academic program.
- Contact the CELWS team at scholarships@chilearn.org if employment or enrollment status changes.

Q. What would my work commitment be after participating in the Chicago Early Learning Workforce Scholarship program?

A. Those who receive a Chicago Early Learning Workforce Scholarship must agree to work in a Chicago Early Learning (CEL) Program for a minimum of three years after the completion of coursework. Those who are funded by Head Start and currently work in a Head Start classroom must complete the three-year service requirement in a Head Start CEL program. Failure to meet the commitment period or remain employed in an eligible setting will result in you repaying the total or a prorated amount of the financial assistance received, based on the length of service completed after completion of approved coursework.

Q. How will my work commitment be verified?

A. Once your three-year commitment period has been completed, the Chicago Early Learning Program will contact you. You will be required to complete an Employment Verification Form and submit a current paystub from the Head Start or CEL funded program(s) where you completed your commitment. You will receive an annual survey confirming your place of employment for three years post-graduation/completion of program.

Q. What happens if I leave my place of employment during the work commitment period?

A. You are required to commit to work for 3 years in **any** Chicago Early Learning program after completion of program/graduation. This may be where you are currently employed or at another CEL program. If the commitment period is not completed, *the amount the student will be required to pay back will be pro-rated according to the percentage of the 3-year work commitment, which was completed.*

Q. Who do I contact if I have questions?

A. For any questions during the screening/eligibility phase, please email chilearn@ilgateways.com or call (866) 697-8278, and ask to speak to the Chicago Early Learning Workforce Scholarship program. For any general questions regarding the CELWS or the work commitment, please email scholarships@chilearn.org.