

Overview of Scholarship Opportunity for the Early Education Workforce

Introduction:

The most important factor in school success and learning outcomes for young children is the capabilities of the adults who support their growth and learning. The early education workforce plays an important role in supporting the optimal development of young children – the majority of whom spend their days in preschool or childcare settings while parents work. Especially for children who are at risk because of their family's low-income status or other factors, the skills and competencies of child care and preschool teachers are essential for ensuring the school readiness of children in their classrooms.

Project Pathfinders is part of a larger initiative to elevate and emphasize the importance of the early education workforce and includes efforts to smooth the career pathway for early educators by making credentials more stackable and accessible. This scholarship opportunity, administered by the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation, is designed to increase the skills of early learning professionals in preschool and child care settings in Virginia by accessing community college coursework and credentials. When scholarship recipients apply for funds, they will set a specific credentialing goal (for example: an Early Childhood Career Studies Certificate) and request funding to pursue achievement of that goal, as well as to access resources, as needed, such as federal financial aid assistance and additional funds to defray the costs of books and fees.

Eligibility:

The scholarship is open to early childhood professionals (lead teachers, assistant teachers, and administrators) seeking to complete a credential in early childhood education or child development through Virginia's community colleges and select 4-year associate-to-baccalaureate transfer degree programs. Eligible individuals are currently employed in a Virginia preschool or child care setting working directly with young children (infants- prekindergarten). Alternatively, cohorts of high school students dually-enrolled in community college early education programs are also eligible for Pathfinders scholarships and supports. Priority will be given for individuals working with at-risk children based on socioeconomic factors (children benefitting from child care subsidies, qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch, or participating in public preschool programs such as Head Start or Virginia Preschool Initiative).

Before applying to Project Pathfinders, community college applicants need to apply need to be able to indicate that they have already applied Virginia Department of Social Services for the Virginia Child Care Provider Scholarship Program at <https://vaccscholarship.com/> or indicate that they have reached the lifetime maximum for that scholarship program. Baccalaureate degree students need to apply for the FAFSA each year, as soon as possible after Oct. 1.

Timeline:

Release of the application materials and initial information sessions will be scheduled prior to the start of each academic semester. Applications will be considered on a rolling basis and new awards made prior to each semester, until funding is no longer available.

Additional resources and supports:

Funding will be available for scholarship recipients to enroll in up to two courses per semester, as relevant to their individual professional development goals. Applicants may also request funds to cover additional costs such as books and fees, as needed. Please note that Pathfinders awards will be applied to a student's account only if a balance exists after all other financial aid or grants (such as Pell or VDSS scholarships) have been applied; balances from Pathfinders awards will not be paid out in cash to scholarship awardees.

Project Pathfinders is conducting a pilot for those child care employers interested in registering employees as apprentices through a national certification initiative in partnership with the Virginia Department of Labor and Industry. A Registered Apprentice sets professional development goals and works with a veteran educator at his/her school or center who agrees to serve as a one-on-one mentor. Apprentices gain credits from community colleges courses, a nationally recognized apprenticeship credential, and an employer- determined wage supplement. To learn more, contact alyson@vecf.org.

For assistance with scholarship applications, email pathfinders@vecf.org or call our Scholarship Advisor Mila Spaulding at 804-749-8149.