



## 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 childhood education workforce plays an important role in supporting the optimal development of young children – the majority of whom spend their days in preschool or child care 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.

This scholarship opportunity is administered by the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation for professionals in preschool and child care settings in Virginia. When scholarship recipients apply for funds, they will set a specific credentialing goal (for example: an Early Childhood Career Studies Certificate) and be eligible for funding to pursue achievement of that goal, as well as to access resources, as needed, such as additional funds to defray the costs of books and fees.

## Frequently Asked Questions as of October 24, 2022

### **1. Who will be able to apply to Project Pathfinders for scholarships?**

Project Pathfinders will be available to individuals currently employed in child care or preschool settings. Individuals may include teachers, assistants, or administrators working with children from infants through prekindergarten in classrooms based in centers, public or private schools, faith institutions, Head Starts, and family day homes. Project Pathfinders gives priority to individuals working with at-risk children (including but not limited to those 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). High school students approved by their high school to participate in a dual enrollment or concurrent Early Childhood program of study at a community college are also eligible to apply.

### **2. Is support just for tuition costs, or for books and fees as well?**

Tuition assistance will be available to all Project Pathfinders participants. Support for books and fees is available for those who need additional financial support.

### **3. How will funds be distributed?**

Spreadsheets of approved Pathfinders recipients are provided each semester to all colleges and their official bookstores. They will place a DND (Do Not Drop) on each recipient's account. The colleges and bookstores will invoice Pathfinders after drop/add day. Pathfinders will send payment directly to the colleges and bookstores. No reimbursements can be made directly to recipients.

#### **4. What should I do if I'm interested in applying?**

Individuals interested in applying to Project Pathfinders can take the following steps to prepare for application:

- Apply to the Virginia Child Care Provider Scholarship Program to ensure that available funds through that scholarship program are utilized first ([vaccscholarship.com](http://vaccscholarship.com)) – **Required for community college students.**
- As soon as possible after October 1 each year, fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) to ensure that any available federal aid is utilized (<https://fafsa.ed.gov>) – **Required for baccalaureate degree students.**
- Apply to the campus where you wish to take classes. The online application information for Virginia Community College System is available at <https://apply.vccs.edu>, as well as on individual college and university websites.
- Your student number will be required on the Pathfinders application.

Need help? Assistance with any of these steps is available; please email [pathfinders@vecf.org](mailto:pathfinders@vecf.org).

Applications may be submitted through our online system. The application link and additional information can be found at <https://vecf.org/pathfinders/>.

#### **5. What if there is no early childhood or child development program at my local community college campus?**

If your local community college campus does not have an Early Childhood Program, you may wish to apply to a campus which offers certificate or credential programs completely online. For group applicants (such as an employer-sponsored or quality initiative cohort), it may be possible to host an off-campus course in partnership with a nearby community college campus. Assistance and information will be available to employers or quality coordinators interested in this option.

#### **6. What kinds of classes are approved under the scholarship?**

All course types are included in Project Pathfinders, including online and face-to-face, as well as other “hybrid” course formats offered by individual community college campuses. Project Pathfinders will cover tuition for courses specified as part of the applicant’s identified early childhood credentialing goals of the applicant (included in the approved certificate or degree curriculum). Project Pathfinders will also cover tuition, books and fees for ESL courses needed to prepare for the ESL Placement Test.

#### **7. How many classes can be funded by Project Pathfinders per semester?**

Students can be approved for funding for up to 2 courses each semester as a Project Pathfinders participant.

#### **8. Are applicants required to apply for the Virginia Child Care Provider Scholarship Program before being approved for Project Pathfinders funds?**

Yes. Community college Project Pathfinders applicants must have already applied for the Virginia Child Care Provider Scholarship Program, or have

reached the lifetime maximum for that scholarship program before applying to Project Pathfinders. The VCCPSP application can be found at [vaccscholarship.com](http://vaccscholarship.com).

**9. Are applicants required to file the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) before being approved for Project Pathfinders funds?**

Baccalaureate degree students are required to fill out FAFSA; community college students are encouraged to do so. Federal and state funds may be available for applicants that can help with costs beyond courses and textbooks. Tapping into this potential resource is strongly encouraged; if applicants would like assistance completing the FAFSA, please contact your community college financial aid office or [pathfinders@vecf.org](mailto:pathfinders@vecf.org).

**10. What happens if I am approved for Pathfinders funds but other awards (i.e. Pell Grant, VA Child Care Provider Scholarship, other scholarships, etc.) fully cover the cost of tuition, fees and required textbooks?**

No funds are placed in individual student accounts. The community college bills VECF for Pathfinders funds if a balance exists after all other awards have been placed in the student's account. Therefore, if there is no balance, the college will not bill Pathfinders. Applying Pathfinders funds to a student account cannot create a balance that is then given to the student.