

## Introduction

One of the most important factors 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.

Project Pathfinders is a scholarship program administered by the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation (VECF) for early childhood care and education (ECCE) educators in preschool and child care settings in Virginia. When ECCE educators 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 that goal, as well as to access resources, as needed, such as additional funds to defray the costs of books and fees. Applicants who have already completed the approved 2+2 coursework and been conferred the transferable Early Childhood AAS degree from a Virginia community college, may be eligible to extend Pathfinders funding to attend an approved 4-year university to work toward an Early Childhood bachelor's degree.

## Frequently Asked Questions as of May 20, 2026

### **1. Who is eligible to apply to receive a Project Pathfinders scholarship?**

Project Pathfinders is 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 Start sites, and family day homes. Project Pathfinders gives priority to individuals working with children who are eligible for Virginia's publicly funded child care and preschool services. 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. What costs are covered by Pathfinders scholarships?**

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

### **3. How are funds distributed?**

VECF will provide funds to relevant institutions of higher education (IHE) on behalf of students whose Pathfinders scholarship applications have been approved. The Project Pathfinders program does not send funds to nor reimburse students directly.

#### **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 Early Educator Scholarship Program** to ensure that available funds through that scholarship program are utilized first [Virginia Early Educator Scholarship Program](#). **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 and/or state G3 funding (only for community colleges) is utilized [FAFSA® Application | Federal Student Aid](#) – **Required for baccalaureate degree students.**
- Apply to the IHE/campus where you wish to take classes. The online application information for the 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).

Project Pathfinders' applications must be submitted through our online system. The application link and additional information can be found at [Pathfinders - Virginia Early Childhood Foundation](#).

#### **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 will need to apply to a Virginia IHE that offers certificate or degree programs completely online.

#### **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 (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 Early Educator Scholarship Program before being approved for Project Pathfinders funds?**

Yes. Community college Project Pathfinders applicants must have already applied for the Virginia Early Educator Scholarship Program (VEESP), formerly known as Virginia Child Care Provider Scholarship Program, or have reached the lifetime maximum for that scholarship program before applying to Project Pathfinders. The VEESP application can be found at [Virginia Early Educator Scholarship Program](#).

**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 the FAFSA for the current academic year; community college students are encouraged to do so. Federal and state funds that can help with costs beyond tuition, books, and fees may be available for applicants. Tapping into this potential resource is strongly encouraged; if applicants would like assistance completing the FAFSA, please contact your community college financial aid office.

**10. What happens if I am approved for Pathfinders funds but other awards (i.e. Pell Grant, G3, Virginia Early Educator Scholarship Program, other scholarships, etc.) partially or fully cover the cost of tuition, fees and required textbooks?**

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