



**DATE:** September 12, 2016

**TO:** Child Care Assistance Program Administrative Contacts  
Child Care Assistance Program Client Contacts

**FROM:** Minnesota Department of Human Services  
Child Care Assistance Program

**SUBJECT:** Early Learning Scholarships and the Child Care Assistance Program

**Background:** This memo has information about Early Learning Scholarships and answers questions about Early Learning Scholarships and the Child Care Assistance Program.

### **What are Early Learning Scholarships?**

Scholarships provide eligible families financial support for their child to attend a high-quality early childhood program. The goal of the Early Learning Scholarships program is to increase access to high-quality early childhood programs and to support the school readiness of children with the highest needs.

Some basics about the scholarships:

- Families receiving child care assistance are income-eligible for the scholarships.
- Scholarship funding is limited. Not all eligible families will receive a scholarship. Some families may be placed on a waiting list.
- Scholarships are generally for children ages 3-5, but some can be used for children ages 0-2.
- There are two scholarship pathways:
  - Pathway I Scholarships are awarded to families to use at the eligible program of their choice.
  - Pathway II Scholarships are awarded to designated Four-Star Parent Aware Rated early childhood programs.

### **Who is income-eligible for Early Learning Scholarships?**

Families receiving public assistance are income-eligible for scholarships:

- Families can use a Service Authorization or any recent paperwork showing eligibility for the Child Care Assistance Program as proof of income eligibility for scholarships.
- Counties can share eligibility information with the scholarship administrator if a signed release is provided, or counties can send a copy of a current Service Authorization to an applicant, who can then send it to a scholarship administrator.

Families not on a public assistance program with income below 185% of the Federal Poverty Guideline are income-eligible for scholarships.

## **How do families apply for Early Learning scholarships?**

Scholarships are administered by regional scholarship administrators. To apply:

1. Family contacts the administrator in their area to determine if scholarships are available.
2. Family fills out an application and submits it to regional scholarship administrator.
3. Regional scholarship administrator determines if the family is eligible.
4. If the family is eligible, the family chooses an eligible program.
5. Scholarship funds are paid directly to the program the family chooses.

## **What programs can accept Early Learning Scholarships?**

To receive scholarships, programs must participate in Parent Aware Ratings. Beginning July 1, 2016 programs must have a 3- or 4-Star Parent Aware Rating to accept scholarships. School-based pre-k programs, Head Start, and licensed home-based and center-based child care programs can participate in Parent Aware. Regional scholarship administrators can help families find eligible programs.

## **What are Parent Aware Ratings?**

Parent Aware helps parents find programs that prepare children for school and life. The One- to Four-Star Ratings system measures best practices that help children succeed.

Participating programs have:

- Volunteered for extra, in-depth training
- Devoted themselves to strong, caring relationships with each child
- Adopted the latest approaches to keeping children's learning on track
- Committed to daily activities and routines that help children learn
- Placed a focus on children's health and safety

An accelerated pathway to a Parent Aware Rating is available to certain types of programs (accredited child care, Head Start and public school pre-kindergarten programs).

For more information about Parent Aware Ratings go to: [Parentaware.org](http://Parentaware.org)

## **Does receiving a Scholarship impact Child Care Assistance Program eligibility?**

No. Receiving a scholarship does not affect Child Care Assistance Program eligibility. Scholarships do not count as income for the Child Care Assistance Program. The amount of Child Care Assistance is not reduced when a scholarship is received. See Child Care Assistance Program Manual Chapter 9.9,

## **How can Scholarships help a family on Child Care Assistance?**

Programs are encouraged to layer scholarships with other resources, including the Child Care Assistance Program. Programs are directed to bill the Child Care Assistance Program for their regular charges. Child Care Assistance Program payments are not reduced due to scholarship receipt. Providers are directed to bill scholarships for charges not covered by the Child Care Assistance Program. If providers have questions on layering scholarships and child care assistance, refer them to [Information for Child Care Providers: How Early Learning Scholarships Work with the Child Care Assistance Program” \(DHS-7056\)](#)

Examples of uses for scholarship funds:

- Copayments (see Child Care Assistance Program Policy Manual section 6.21)
- Activity fees

- Rates not covered by Child Care Assistance Program maximum rates
- Breaks in Child Care Assistance Program authorization or additional hours of attendance not paid by Child Care Assistance Program

**Should counties suggest that families apply for an Early Learning Scholarship?**

Yes. Refer families to the regional scholarship administrator in their area.

Families that might benefit from scholarships are:

- Families on the Basic Sliding Fee waiting list.
- Families that are not in an approved activity.
- Families whose providers charge more than Child Care Assistance Program maximum rates.
- Families who do not stay consistently on the Child Care Assistance Program or whose authorized hours change frequently.

**Where can I find more information about Early Learning Scholarships?**

Contact the Regional Scholarship Administrator in your region or area.

**Early Learning Scholarships Reference Sheet**

<b>Funding Source</b>	State of Minnesota
<b>Child/family income eligibility</b>	Family income is less than or equal to 185% of federal poverty guidelines  <b>OR</b>  Child is eligible for other public funding sources including Free or Reduced-price Lunch Program, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), Head Start, or Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP)
<b>Child age</b>	Ages 3 thru 5 who are not yet eligible for kindergarten.  Ages 0 thru 5 if the child is a sibling of a child who has a scholarship and attends the same program.  Ages 0 thru 5 if the child of a teen parent pursuing a GED or High School Diploma
<b>Scholarship amount per child and program eligibility</b>	Annual Scholarship: Up to \$7,500 per child  For all new and renewing scholarships beginning July 1, 2016, only programs that are three or four stars are eligible to accept scholarships.

## Early Learning Scholarships Reference Sheet

<b>Regional Scholarship administrators</b>	<b>Regional Administrator Offices:</b>  Region 1 Kittson, Marshall, Norman, Pennington, Polk, Red Lake, Roseau <b>Tri-Valley Opportunity Council: 1-800-543-7382</b>  Region 2 Beltrami, Clearwater, Hubbard, Lake of the Woods, Mahnomon <b>Mahube-Otwa Community Action Partnership, Inc.: 218-632-3600</b>  Region 3 Aitkin, Carlton, Cook, Itasca, Koochiching, Lake, Saint Louis <b>Families First Minnesota: 1-888-450-2773</b>  Region 4 Becker, Clay, Douglas, Grant, Otter Tail, Pope, Stevens, Traverse, Wilkin <b>Lakes and Prairies Community Action Partnership: 800-452-3646 or 218-512-1584</b>  Region 5 Cass, Crow Wing, Morrison, Todd, Wadena <b>Mahube-Otwa Community Action Partnership, Inc.: 218-632-3600</b>  Region 6E Kandiyohi, McLeod, Meeker, Renville <b>Prairie Five Community Action Council, Inc.: 1-800-292-5437</b>  Region 6W Big Stone, Chippewa, Lac Qui Parle, Swift, Yellow Medicine <b>Prairie Five Community Action Council, Inc.: 1-800-292-5437</b>  Region 7E Chisago, Isanti, Kanabec, Mille Lacs, Pine <b>Pine Technical College: 1-800-890-5399</b>  Region 7W Benton, Sherburne, Stearns, Wright <b>Milestones: 320-251-5081</b>  Region 8 Cottonwood, Jackson, Lincoln, Lyon, Murray, Nobles, Pipestone, Redwood, Rock <b>Southwestern Minnesota Opportunity Council, Inc.: 1-800-658-2444</b>  Region 9 Blue Earth, Brown, Faribault, Le Seur, Martin, Nicollet, Sibley, Waseca, Watonwan <b>Families First Minnesota: 1-855-588-2056</b>  Region 10 Dodge, Fillmore, Freeborn, Goodhue, Houston, Mower, Olmsted, Rice, Steele, Wabasha, Winona <b>Families First Minnesota: 1-888-450-2773</b>  Region 11 Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Scott, Ramsey, Washington <b>Think Small: 651-641-6604</b>  <b>Tribal Regional Administrators:</b>  <b>Leech Lake Child Care Services: 218-335-8338 or 1-800-551-0969</b> <b>White Earth Child Care/Early Childhood Program: 983-3285 Ext. 1380</b>
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