

Child Care Scholarships

Expanding Access to Higher Education for the Early Childhood Workforce

Performance period January 2024–December 2025

Child care scholarships are a long-standing component of early childhood system building, supporting access to higher education for educators while strengthening workforce pathways across a mixed-delivery system.¹ In a field characterized by low wages, uneven access to postsecondary education, and limited advancement opportunities, scholarships help reduce financial barriers that otherwise prevent educators from pursuing credentials and degrees. By supporting degree attainment while maintaining employment, scholarship programs contribute to broader system goals related to workforce preparation, professional advancement, and the availability of qualified educators in early care and education settings.

Maine included **Child Care Scholarships** in its Preschool Development Grant–Renewal (PDG-R) to address workforce needs identified in the state’s Birth–Five needs assessment and strategic plan, particularly challenges related to recruitment, retention, and access to degree pathways for early childhood educators. The PDG-R investment was intended to strengthen existing workforce infrastructure by expanding access to higher education through targeted scholarship supports, rather than creating a new stand-alone program. By supporting scholarships **administered through MaineAEYC**, the state sought to reduce structural barriers to participation, align scholarship supports with broader workforce and professional development systems, and advance PDG-R priorities related to workforce capacity, equitable access to credentials, and long-term system sustainability.

This report presents findings from outcome-focused assessment activities conducted in fall 2025 as part of Maine’s Preschool Development Grant–Renewal (PDG-R) program. Drawing on diverse data ¹ the report examines the Child Care Scholarships initiative with respect to the following PDG-R outcome areas:

- **Impact**, including intended outcomes related to access to higher education, degree pathways, and professional advancement for early childhood educators.
- **Communication and cross-sector coordination**, including coordination among the administering organization, state agencies, and higher education partners.
- **System building**, early contributions related to workforce pathways, alignment with existing scholarship and credentialing systems, and sustainability considerations.
- **Supports and access**, including design features that facilitated participation in scholarship pathways and barriers affecting educators’ ability to engage.

Data sources for this report include semi-structured virtual interviews with the state initiative lead and the MaineAEYC scholarship coordinator, review of implementation documentation, and administrative scholarship data.

¹Mixed delivery early care and education (ECE) is the coordinated effort to support early childhood services and programming across a range of settings to help meet the varied needs of children and families.

The Child Care Scholarships initiative was administered by MaineAEYC using its established scholarship infrastructure and data systems. PDG-R funding supported a discrete cohort within MaineAEYC's broader portfolio, providing awards to early childhood educators pursuing bachelor's or master's degrees in early childhood-related fields. Scholarship funds covered full tuition and included a modest stipend for course-related expenses.

The initiative initially prioritized family child care providers. Recruitment within that group was more limited than anticipated, with administrators reporting that many family child care providers were already at capacity or not positioned to return to school during the implementation period. As implementation progressed, scholarships were awarded to eligible applicants across the early childhood workforce, including center-based educators and public Pre-K teachers. The PDG-R-supported scholarships operated alongside, but separately from, other MaineAEYC-administered scholarship pathways, and maintained distinct eligibility criteria and funding requirements.

The first cohort began receiving funding in Fall 2024. Recipients were required to be actively enrolled in eligible degree programs and to meet defined credit load expectations during each academic period. Participation timelines vary based on individual degree progress and extend beyond the initial funding term for some recipients. MaineAEYC managed outreach, application review, and award administration and coordinated with institutions of higher education to verify enrollment and process tuition payments. Degree pathway, enrollment status, and coursework progress were tracked through MaineAEYC's centralized scholarship database, which supports multiple scholarship pathways and differentiates awards by funding source.

CHILD CARE SCHOLARSHIPS FEATURES

MaineAEYC administered Child Care Scholarships through its existing scholarship infrastructure.

18 scholarships were awarded during the PDG-R period.

Scholarships supported educators enrolled in **bachelor's and master's degree programs** in early childhood-related fields.

Scholarships covered **100 percent of tuition costs** and included a **\$250-per-semester access stipend** for course-related expenses.

Eligibility was limited to educators earning less than \$25 per hour, working at least part time, and meeting degree prerequisites (associate degree or 60 credits for bachelor's pathways; bachelor's degree for master's pathways).

Unlike standard TEACH models, PDG-R scholarships **did not require employer sponsorship or employer contribution**.

PDG-R-supported scholarships were administered as a **distinct funding stream** within MaineAEYC's broader scholarship portfolio.

What was the impact of the scholarships?

Impact was defined at the workforce level, focusing on access to higher education and participation in bachelor's- and master's-level degree pathways.

The initiative was intended to achieve the following outcomes.

- **Enable access to bachelor's- and master's-level degree** pathways for early childhood educators through full tuition coverage.
- **Support** educators who were unable to access other scholarship models due to sponsorship or employment requirements.
- **Prioritize participation by family child care providers**, consistent with workforce needs identified at the outset of implementation.

Administrative records indicate that PDG-R funding supported 18 early childhood educators enrolled in postsecondary degree programs. Of these 18 recipients, three completed bachelor's degrees during the evaluation period, eleven remained actively enrolled in degree programs, and four exited the scholarship program due to job changes, relocation, or loss of eligibility. Participation and supported pathways are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Participation and Degree Pathways Supported

Measure	PDG-R Period
Total scholarship recipients	18
Bachelor's degree (in progress)	6
Bachelor's degree (graduated)	3
Bachelor's degree (exited scholarship program)	4
Master's degree (in progress)	5
Tuition coverage	100% of tuition costs
Sponsorship required	No

Note: Degree pathways reflect enrollment status during the PDG-R evaluation period.

MaineAEYC collected participant feedback across its broader scholarship portfolio; however, responses were not disaggregated by funding source, and satisfaction data specific to the 18 PDG-R-supported recipients could not be isolated. Across the full scholarship population, respondents reported high satisfaction with scholarship supports. While these findings reflect overall perceptions of MaineAEYC's scholarship model, they cannot be interpreted as evidence of PDG-R-specific outcomes. They are included to provide context regarding participant experience within the broader scholarship model.

Administrative records indicate that, although family child care providers were an intended priority population, participation by family child care providers was limited to one recipient during the evaluation period.

Interview data from structured interviews with the state PDG lead (Andie Faurot) and the MaineAEYC scholarship coordinator (Morgan Tolin) indicate that scholarship recipients were at varied stages in their degree programs, with some closer to completion and others earlier in their coursework, reflecting different entry points at the time of award. Interviews followed a structured protocol aligned to the evaluation questions, addressing intended outcomes, implementation, participation, and early indicators of progress. While degree completion was documented for three recipients, most participants remain in progress, and longer-term outcomes related to workforce retention and advancement extend beyond the evaluation window.

How did communication and coordination support the Child Care Scholarships initiative?

Communication and coordination were primarily administrative. MaineAEYC worked with state partners, including the Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS) and the Maine Department of Education (DOE), regarding scholarship administration and alignment with PDG-R requirements. MaineAEYC also coordinated with participating institutions of higher education to verify enrollment and process tuition payments and communicated directly with scholarship recipients about application requirements, enrollment verification, credit load expectations, and required documentation.

Coordination with broader workforce and professional development partners, including the Maine Roads to Quality Professional Development Network (MRTQ PDN), occurred at a systems level (e.g., alignment of funding streams and degree pathway supports within the broader TEACH scholarship infrastructure) and included use of the Maine Early Childhood Workforce Registry as a recruitment tool under an established data sharing agreement. However, there was no evidence of jointly planned or co-delivered activities specific to the PDG-R-funded scholarship recipients. Outreach and recruitment activities were primarily informational and are described in the Participation and Access section.

How did the Child Care Scholarships initiative contribute to system building?

The initiative addressed one defined component of Maine's early childhood workforce system: access to advanced degree pathways through scholarship design. It did not establish new governance structures, credential policies, or professional development systems; rather, it operated within MaineAEYC's existing scholarship infrastructure, where PDG-R functioned as a discrete funding stream within the TEACH framework.

Within that defined scope, PDG-R funding allowed administrators to test specific design variations—including full tuition coverage and removal of employer sponsorship and post-award employment commitments—within the existing framework. Interviewees described these features as addressing a targeted gap for educators unable to participate in traditional scholarship models.

The initiative also informed ongoing state-level discussions about scholarship structure and long-term sustainability, including whether full tuition coverage could be sustained within existing funding streams and how adjustments to coverage levels might affect the number of educators supported.

In what ways did the design of the Child Care Scholarship initiative support participation and access?

The scholarship model included several design features relevant to access and participation, including financial support, eligibility criteria, outreach activities, and instructional options available through participating institutions of higher education.

According to interview data, a central factor enabling participation was full tuition coverage, supplemented by a \$250-per-semester access stipend to offset course-related expenses such as books and learning materials. Interviewees described full tuition coverage as a key factor influencing applications, particularly for educators who had previously viewed college as financially unattainable. Unlike other TEACH scholarship models that require a financial contribution from a sponsoring employer, PDG-R–supported scholarships did not require employer sponsorship or contribution, reducing reliance on program-level approval or cost-sharing as conditions of access.

MaineAEYC provided administrative support to scholarship recipients, including guidance on application requirements, enrollment verification, credit load expectations, and required documentation. Staff also offered individualized assistance to help recipients navigate degree requirements while maintaining employment in early care and education settings. These supports were part of MaineAEYC's standard scholarship administration process and were not unique to the PDG-R cohort.

Outreach and recruitment activities were designed to share information about scholarship opportunities with eligible educators. MaineAEYC used an existing data-sharing agreement with the Maine Early Childhood Registry to identify and contact educators based on education level, employment setting, and geographic location. MaineAEYC also conducted outreach through community colleges to reach additional prospective applicants. In addition, the PDG-R Workforce Navigator shared information about scholarship opportunities with educators in rural areas and among those outside established professional networks. These activities were informational and operated independently rather than as part of a coordinated recruitment strategy.

Interview data also indicate that some participating institutions of higher education, including the University of Maine at Farmington, offered online or flexible course options that supported participation among some working educators enrolled in degree programs.

Eligibility criteria targeted educators earning less than \$25 per hour and working at least part-time, with PDG-R funding extending eligibility to public Pre-K teachers. Although participation by family child care providers was an intended focus, only one family child care provider accessed a scholarship during the evaluation period.

Administrative records indicate that the 18 scholarship recipients represented multiple counties across Maine, including Androscoggin, Cumberland, Penobscot, Knox, York, Oxford, Franklin, Somerset, Kennebec, and Sagadahoc, reflecting geographic distribution across the state.

The number of scholarships awarded was constrained by available PDG-R funding. At the time of the interview, MaineAEYC reported a waitlist of approximately 10 eligible applicants, with an additional 20 prospective applicants who had submitted incomplete applications or had not yet applied to a degree program. Interviewees identified several additional barriers to participation, including the time

demands of balancing coursework with employment, geographic distance from institutions of higher education, and varying readiness to return to school. While some virtual or flexible course options were available, these barriers—time, distance, and readiness—were largely outside the scope of the scholarship model's direct supports.

Lessons Learned

- **Removing employer sponsorship and employer contribution expands** access but does not eliminate all participation barriers. Time, workload, geographic distance, and readiness to return to school continue to shape who participates.
- **Targeted outreach alone was not sufficient to engage family child care providers** in degree pathways. According to interviewees, barriers for family child care providers extended beyond tuition cost and included workload capacity, life stage, and the demands of operating as a sole provider. Identifying what additional supports might address these barriers was beyond the scope of this evaluation.
- **Flexible or online course options** supported participation for some educators.

Summary

During the PDG-R period, the Child Care Scholarships initiative supported 18 early childhood educators pursuing bachelor's- and master's-level degrees through MaineAEYC's established scholarship infrastructure. Recipients were already enrolled in degree programs when PDG-R funding began, and the scholarship provided financial support that enabled them to continue their progress.

By removing employer sponsorship requirements and covering full tuition, the initiative tested a variation of the scholarship design within Maine's existing TEACH framework. Participation patterns indicate that while this structure expanded access for some educators, tuition support alone was insufficient to engage family child care providers, whose barriers extended beyond financial cost.