

Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Grant Education Reimbursement Opportunity Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's)

Q. What is the RTT-ELC Early Childhood Professional Education Reimbursement Project?

- A. This project is an opportunity for early educators to continue their education and overcome barriers or obstacles to earning their next degree or credential. It provides 100% funding (up to a maximum of \$503 per credit hour) for tuition and fees for coursework taken in Fall 2016 or Winter/Spring/Summer 2017. It also provides an additional maximum of \$1,000 to repay existing debt to an Illinois college or university that presents a barrier to enrolling in courses.

Q. Who is eligible to apply?

- A. Any educator working in an Illinois early learning program is eligible to apply regardless of the setting, including Preschool for All, Early Head Start / Head Start and Child Care. Individuals completing practicum, volunteer or student teaching hours in an early learning setting are also eligible. Applicants must have a minimum of 90 days of service in the early learning field as an employee or volunteer.

Additional, priority is given to applicants pursuing a Gateways to Opportunity Infant Toddler Credential (particularly levels 2 or 3), bilingual teacher assistants pursuing a degree path that leads to a Professional Educator License with an Early Childhood endorsement, ECE professionals who are pursuing and can make substantial progress towards their next credential or degree, or educators participating in a structured cohort sponsored by an institution or local collaboration.

Q. How may funds be used?

- A. Funds will be provided on a reimbursement basis upon providing evidence of paid coursework or an outstanding balance due to the institution. These limited funds may be used for current tuition/fees to take coursework towards an early childhood credential or degree. Additional limited funds are also available to repay existing debt that prevents college enrollment, such as an unpaid course or transcript fee, up to \$1,000.

Q. When will the application be available?

- A. Applications will be made available from January to April 20, 2017 on the Gateways to Opportunity website at <http://www.ilgateways.com/>.

Q: What is the timeline for eligibility and release of funds?

- A: The Education Reimbursement Schedule is as follows:

January 2017 – April 20, 2017 – Applications accepted and checked for completeness

April 2017 – May 2017 – Applications reviewed and prioritized

June 2017 – Reimbursement eligibility announced

June 2017 – Reimbursement checks released

No reimbursement payments will be made until June 2017.

Q: How will I know if my application has been received?

- A: Incomplete applications will not be processed. Incomplete applications will be mailed back to the applicant highlighting what is incomplete. Once the application is complete the applicant can resubmit the application. Complete applications will be processed and a letter will be sent to the applicant stating that a complete application has been received. Applicants will be notified of eligibility by letter in June 2017.