



Early Education and Care Workforce Development

Early Childhood Educators Scholarship Program – Keeping the Promise



The Challenge

Research demonstrates that education and specialized training of teachers and caregivers is consistently linked to high-quality interactions with children. Early education and care and school-age programs are an essential link in the preparation of young children, and “well-trained, qualified teachers and providers are necessary for programs to promote children’s development.”¹

In the 2004 report, *Economic Impact of the Child Care and Early Education Industry in Massachusetts*, it was estimated that the workforce included roughly 30,000 staff. In addition, this study stressed that “ensuring an adequate supply of educated workers and increasing the likelihood of obtaining a college degree, by improving children’s early learning opportunities, will help position Massachusetts for future economic growth and prepare tomorrow’s work force for the changing demands of our economy.”²

A Response: Higher Education Scholarships

The newly formed Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) recognized the educational needs of early care and school-age educators. One million dollars was designated for the Education Scholarship Program designed to provide financial assistance for currently employed early childhood and school-age educators and providers. This innovative program began as a pilot initiative in December 2005.

The popularity and success of the program was immediately apparent. EEC reported in its January 5, 2006, newsletter that approximately 650 applicants had applied for funding. Scholarship applicants were required to meet a number of criteria, many of which presented challenges for those entering higher educational institutions for the first time.

The first group of 389 scholarship recipients successfully completed college courses at 38 higher educational institutions in the spring of 2006. Building on the apparent success of the scholarship program, the state legislature earmarked three million dollars in the FY '07 budget to continue the initiative. However, upon the completion of the first round of scholarship funding, a prevailing question remained as to whether or not the scholarship program was accessed by the educators most in need of support.

After hearing concerns raised in agencies served by the Schott Fellows, we made contact with administrators in other communities and heard the following concerns:



Early education and care and school-age programs are an essential part of a high-quality education system and “well-trained, qualified teachers and providers are necessary for success.”



Questions and Confusions

1. Lack of information

EEC stated in its April 2006 newsletter that scholarship applications were still being accepted. Then, in its May 2006 newsletter, it announced that all scholarship funds were expended. To date, no specific data from EEC has been released to indicate the demographic distribution of funding.

2. Challenging application criteria

Each applicant is required to be matriculated; an applicant must complete a detailed scholarship application and a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form. The paperwork, coupled with a lack of formal advising support, made it impossible for many educators to access the scholarship money.

3. Communication gaps abound

In authorizing the creation of EEC, the state legislature mandated the creation of a coordinated and comprehensive early childhood system. Two state agencies were involved in the scholarship approval process. EEC had the dual role of processing the scholarship applications and recruitment. The Board of Higher Education (BHE) verified enrollment status, processed FAFSA forms, and handled the financial matters. A breakdown in communication between EEC and BHE led to coordination challenges, which ultimately led to confusion regarding whether a student was approved. Serious gaps existed between the policy goals of EEC and BHE. A lack of support and guidance from both agencies resulted in many early educators not having access to this scholarship program.

4. Matching the need to the response

Demographic data from the pilot will allow EEC to identify gaps and communities that need additional assistance in accessing the scholarship program. Data from the 2005 Massachusetts Capacity Study

indicated that approximately three-quarters of teachers and providers are non-Hispanic white, 11% are Hispanic/Latino, 8% are Black or African American, 2% are Asian or Pacific Islander, and 3% are multi-racial or of another race/ethnic diversity.³ A benchmark for success of the scholarship program must include a systematic strategy to closely align scholarship funding with the identified ethnic/racial/language composition of the current workforce.

5. Trust was tested and frayed

The Early Childhood Educators Scholarship Program was aimed at closing a gap in the education level of the early education and care workforce. In the 2002-2003 Community Profiles Data, the average teacher wage (in centers – including infant/toddler, preschool, and school-age teachers) was \$10.89 per hour.⁴ The cost of college courses is an expense that many educators cannot afford. Many applicants who applied for the scholarship were fearful about entering a college classroom. In some cases, after applicants were told they were approved for scholarship funding, unrealistic timelines made it difficult for educators to register for courses.

6. Confusion about summer enrollment

Some scholarship recipients indicated on their initial form that with funding, they would enroll in summer courses. These recipients were not given any notice that the scholarship money had been expended in May, leaving no available funds for summer courses. In fact, according to the April 2006 EEC Questions and Answers document, it was stated that “if you previously indicated plans to take summer courses when your application was submitted, then no further action is required.”⁵ One scholarship participant stated, “I was devastated that I had already purchased my books, changed my work vacation schedule and rearranged my family obligations for nothing.”

ntial link in the preparation of young children,
ary for programs to promote children's development."



Recommendations

We offer nine recommendations:

1. Increase transparency and accountability

EEC is asked to release the spring 2006 data indicating the distribution of the funds from the Early Educators Scholarship program. Plans must be put in place immediately to ensure equal access to the next round of scholarship applicants.

2. Involve stakeholders in planning

Establish a neutral Higher Education Task Force that includes current early childhood and school-age educators. Charge this group to review how EEC scholarship information is distributed, seek the translation of all printed notices and newsletters, and evaluate the pilot program for strengths and weaknesses.

3. Design mechanisms to receive input from recipients

Host community meetings in those communities that research shows have the highest need for educational and training support, in an effort to determine how to best meet the needs to access the scholarship program.

4. Build in an advising/career counseling component

Provide training related to career counseling for local Community Partnerships for Children, Resource and Referral Agencies, college admissions offices, family child care support group leaders, program directors, and other appropriate staff. This would strengthen the infrastructure supporting the workforce that seeks access to scholarship funds and support of broader educational goals.

5. Ease accessibility

Remove barriers to scholarship access, such as the matriculation requirement and the completion of a FAFSA in the first round.

6. Support transition to college

Offer financial support for courses designed to prepare the workforce for college courses, such as a transitional program, remedial courses, and support of English-language learners.

7. Study and adopt best practices

Learn from the best practices of other state models such as New Hampshire, North Carolina, Maine, and Connecticut, all of which have strong and inclusive professional development programs for the EEC workforce.

8. Strengthen communication about application and scholarship award processes

Compare the timelines for scholarship notification and college enrollment in order to strengthen the relationship between EEC and BHE.

9. Plan for the future

EEC is asked to:

- Release a specific timeline that addresses how the scholarship program will fully support the identified workforce beginning in the fall of 2006
- Develop a plan to set aside funds for career advising/mentoring/coaching to ensure the scholarship program reflects a true desire to build equity in the workforce that ultimately will lead to the long-term educational plans of the scholarship recipients
- Release the demographic information from EEC and BHE regarding the scholarship awards

A Final Word

We commend EEC for its effort to improve the future of young children through the financial support of the educational needs of the workforce. It would be a travesty if the momentum generated were lost due to oversights in the implementation.

Anna Cross

Joan Matsalia

Carol Nolan

Diana Watson



- 1 Shonkoff, J. P., & Phillips, D. A. (2000). *From neurons to neighborhoods: The science of early childhood development*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- 2 *The economic impact of the child care and early education industry in Massachusetts*. (2004). National Economic Development and Law Center.
- 3 Marshall, N. L., et al. (2005). *Preparing the early education and care workforce: The capacity of Massachusetts' institutions of higher education*. Wellesley, MA: Center for Research on Women, Wellesley College.
- 4 Massachusetts Department of Education. (2003). *Massachusetts community profiles*.
- 5 Massachusetts Department of Early Care and Education. (2006, April). *Questions and answers about the early educators scholarship program* (4th ed.).



The Schott Fellowship in Early Care and Education

Valora Washington, Ph.D.

Executive Director

Cambridge College

1000 Massachusetts Avenue

Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138

schottfellowship@yahoo.com

www.schottfellowship.org

617-873-0678