



## Introduction

The most important factor 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.

This scholarship opportunity will be administered by the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation in partnership with the Virginia Community College System for professionals in preschool and child care settings in Virginia. When scholarship recipients 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 achievement of that goal, as well as to access resources, as needed, such as career advising and additional funds to defray the costs of books and fees.

## Frequently Asked Questions as of June 9, 2016

### **1. Who will be able to apply to Project Pathfinders for scholarships?**

Project Pathfinders will be 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 Starts, and family day homes. Project Pathfinders gives priority to individuals working with at-risk children (including but not limited to those benefitting from child care subsidies, qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch, or participating in public preschool programs such as Head Start or Virginia Preschool Initiative). There will also be an option for groups to apply to Project Pathfinders. Examples of group applicants might be a cohort of students recruited by a community college, a quality improvement initiative such as Virginia Quality, or an employer-sponsored cohort of individuals currently employed by a child care or preschool program.

### **2. Is support just for tuition costs, or for books and fees as well?**

Tuition assistance will be available to all Project Pathfinders participants. Support for books and fees may be available for those who need additional financial support; a separate application process will be established for that purpose.

### **3. How will funds be distributed?**

When students are accepted to Project Pathfinders, they will receive an approval letter to provide to their community college, and tuition will be paid directly to the college from the scholarship fund.

#### **4. What should I do if I'm interested in applying?**

The Project Pathfinders applications will be available on VECF's online application portal this summer. When the application becomes available, we will announce availability widely through contact lists and through VECF's social media. Follow us on Facebook ([www.facebook.com/SmartBeginnings](http://www.facebook.com/SmartBeginnings)) and Twitter (@SB\_VECF).

Until then, individuals interested in applying to Project Pathfinders can take the following steps to prepare for application:

- Fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) to ensure that any available federal aid is utilized (<https://fafsa.ed.gov>)
- Apply to the VDSS Child Care Provider Scholarship to ensure that available funds through that scholarship program are utilized (<https://egov.virginia.gov/DSS/VCCPSP>)
- Apply to your local community college campus (or the campus where you wish to take classes). Online application information for Virginia Community College System is available at <https://apply.vccs.edu>, as well as on individual community college websites

Project Pathfinders applicants who have taken the above steps will have an advantage in the application process. Assistance with the steps outlined above will be available to interested applicants who request it. If assistance completing one or more of the steps above is needed, please email [info@vecf.org](mailto:info@vecf.org).

#### **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 or Child Development Program, you may wish to apply to a campus which offers certificate or credential programs completely online. For group applicants (such as an employer-sponsored or quality initiative cohort), it may be possible to host an off-campus course in partnership with a nearby community college campus. Assistance and information will be available to employers or quality coordinators interested in this option.

#### **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 credentialing goals of the applicant (included in the approved certificate or degree curriculum).

#### **7. How many classes can be taken in Project Pathfinders?**

Students will be approved to take up to 2 courses each semester as a Project Pathfinders participant. The number of courses a student will take in total will depend on their specific certificate or degree goals.

If you have specific questions or comments, please write to [info@vecf.org](mailto:info@vecf.org). Individual questions will not receive responses, but will inform regularly updated FAQs provided by VECF, which can be found on our [website](#) or accessed through our Facebook ([www.facebook.com/SmartBeginnings](http://www.facebook.com/SmartBeginnings)) and Twitter (@SB\_VECF) accounts.