



# TAX CREDIT SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO RECEIVE A SCHOLARSHIP?

K-12 students from families with limited financial resources and income up to 300 percent of the federal poverty level are eligible to receive a tax credit scholarship. Returning scholarship recipients can make up to 400 percent of the federal poverty level. Before April 1, priority will be given to students from each of the following categories:

- » Members of a household whose previous year's total annual income does not exceed 185% of the federal poverty level (\$47,637.50 for a family of 4); OR
- » Reside within a focus district; OR
- » Received a scholarship from a scholarship granting organization during the previous school year; OR
- » Siblings of a current scholarship recipient.

After April 1, all other qualifying students will be considered for scholarships, subject to availability of funds.

### WHAT IS A FOCUS DISTRICT?

Focus districts are public school districts that have a school where at least one subgroup of students performs in the bottom 10% statewide or a graduation rate of less than 60%. A list of focus districts can be found at:

[www.revenue.state.il.us/InvestInKids/FocusDistricts.pdf](http://www.revenue.state.il.us/InvestInKids/FocusDistricts.pdf)

### WILL ADDITIONAL PRIORITY/WEIGHTING BE GIVEN TO THOSE STUDENTS WHO FULFILL MORE THAN ONE OF THE PRIORITY CATEGORIES?

No, applications will generally be reviewed based on the reservation date-and-time stamp and awarded on a first-come, first-served basis, subject to the availability of funds.

### WHAT HAPPENS IF THERE IS NOT ENOUGH FUNDING TO SUPPORT ALL SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATIONS?

Applications will generally be reviewed based on the reservation date-and-time stamp and awarded on a first-come, first-served basis, subject to the availability of funds at your school of choice.

If after April 1 there exist 'priority group' students/applications who applied before April 1 and have not yet received scholarships, state regulations require that these students be served (subject to availability of funds) before non-priority group students and/or priority group students who applied after April 1.

### IF A STUDENT RECEIVED A SCHOLARSHIP LAST YEAR, DO THEY NEED TO REAPPLY?

Yes. Scholarships are awarded for one school year and students will have to reapply annually.

### CAN STUDENTS APPLY TO MORE THAN ONE SGO?

Students can apply to multiple SGOs but can only accept one scholarship through this program. If a student accepts a scholarship from another SGO after applying to Empower Illinois, the family must notify Empower Illinois within three (3) business days. Failure to do so may affect the student's future eligibility for Empower Illinois awards.

## **HOW IS THE AMOUNT OF A SCHOLARSHIP DETERMINED? WHAT IS THE MAXIMUM SCHOLARSHIP A STUDENT CAN RECEIVE?**

In order to qualify for a scholarship, a student's family will have to give official documentation of their household income.

- » For students whose household income is less than 185% of the Federal Poverty Level, the scholarship will be 100% of tuition and necessary fees;
- » For students whose household income is between 185% and 250%, scholarships will be 75% of tuition and necessary fees; and
- » For students whose household income is between 250% and 300%, scholarships will be 50% of tuition and necessary fees.

The maximum scholarship equals tuition and necessary fees or the statewide average operating expense per student, whichever is lower.

- » For the 2019-2020 school year, the statewide average operating expense per student is \$13,763.50.
- » Students identified as gifted and talented can receive up to \$15,139.85 annually.
- » Students identified as English Language Learners can receive up to \$16,516.20 annually.
- » Students identified as eligible to receive services under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act can receive up to \$27,527 annually.
- » The scholarships are commitments for one year.

## **WHAT DOCUMENTATION WILL BE REQUIRED FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS TO RECEIVE SCHOLARSHIPS?**

Students eligible for special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) will need to provide a copy of either their current Individualized Education Program (IEP) or Individualized Service Plan (ISP) from their public school district.

## **WILL SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES BE THE RESPONSIBILITY OF A STUDENT'S LOCAL DISTRICT OR THEIR NEW SCHOOL?**

Your local district is still responsible for offering services but the individual right to services (from the district) is not as strong as it would be if a child remained in public school. We recommend you talk with the private school you are interested in having your child attend in order to get a better sense of what services might be available to your child before making any decision.

## **WHAT TYPE OF EXPENSES ARE COVERED THROUGH TAX CREDIT SCHOLARSHIPS?**

Tuition and necessary fees for any qualified non-public school in Illinois are covered through tax credit scholarships. The scholarship cannot be used to cover transportation expenses.

## **HOW IS A SCHOLARSHIP PAYMENT MADE?**

Scholarship payments will be made directly to the qualified school where the student is enrolled.

## **IF A STUDENT DECIDES TO TRANSFER SCHOOLS MID-YEAR, WILL THE SCHOLARSHIP TRANSFER WITH THE STUDENT?**

The scholarships will follow the student to a new school if there are available funds.

## HOW IS HOUSEHOLD INCOME CALCULATED? WHAT ARE THE HOUSEHOLD INCOME LIMITS?

For 2020-2021 scholarships, your most recent federal adjusted gross income is the basis. This amount does not include the income of children under 18 attending elementary or secondary school on a full-time basis. Foster children are deemed to have a household income that does not exceed 185% of the federal poverty level. We will provide additional information regarding situations where the 1040 is unavailable.

### 2019 Federal Poverty Level (FPL) Chart

Household Members	185% FPL	250% FPL	300% FPL
1	\$23,106.50	\$31,225.00	\$37,470.00
2	\$31,283.50	\$42,275.00	\$50,730.00
3	\$39,460.50	\$53,325.00	\$63,990.00
4	\$47,637.50	\$64,375.00	\$77,250.00
5	\$55,814.50	\$74,425.00	\$90,510.00
6	\$63,991.50	\$86,475.00	\$103,770.00
7	\$72,168.50	\$97,525.00	\$117,030.00
8	\$80,345.50	\$108,575.00	\$130,290.00

\*Note: If there are more than eight people in your household, add \$4,420 for each additional person.

## HOW WILL PROGRAM BENEFITS BE MONITORED AND ASSESSED?

All students who receive scholarships will be required to take the state assessment. The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) will select an independent research organization to conduct an annual study examining the year-to-year learning gains of students receiving scholarships and a comparison of these learning gains to public school students with similar demographic backgrounds.

## DO STUDENTS NEED TO BE ACCEPTED TO A PARTICIPATING SCHOOL BEFORE THEY CAN APPLY FOR A SCHOLARSHIP?

Students may begin the scholarship application process prior to gaining acceptance to the school of their choice. Students however will be required to confirm enrollment at a participating school within 30 days (in some case 10 days) of receiving an award commitment.

## CAN THE SCHOLARSHIP MONEY BE USED AT ANY NON-PUBLIC SCHOOL?

No, the scholarship money can only be used to attend non-public schools that are "recognized" by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE). A list of those schools that are currently recognized by ISBE can be found