

PARTICIPANT HANDBOOK

Effective 1/1/25



— ARKANSAS —

A Program of Arkansas Early Childhood Association

Arkansas Early Childhood Association
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Welcome and Introduction

Dear T.E.A.C.H. Scholars and Sponsors:

Congratulations on selecting the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® ARKANSAS scholarship program to finance your education. You have embarked on a great journey, and those of us at Arkansas Early Childhood Association are proud of your decision to complete your education. Educated and knowledgeable teachers are a key component to a high-quality early childhood program that will benefit children and families served. If you are an employer of a T.E.A.C.H. scholar, you are investing in the future quality of your program. The fact your program is making this investment demonstrates your commitment to children and families.

Whether you are a scholar or employer-sponsor, the purpose of this handbook is to orient you to the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® ARKANSAS program. It is important to have a clear understanding of T.E.A.C.H. to maximize scholarship benefits and get the most from your experience. Please read it carefully. A T.E.A.C.H. Counseling Specialist will be assigned to scholars. The Counselor will review all aspects of the scholarship and allow scholars the opportunity to ask questions before a contract is signed. Throughout the scholarship, Counseling Specialists will serve as a resource and guide to recipients and sponsors. Feel free to discuss with them any issues related to the scholarship.

If there are any questions or concerns, the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood staff is here for you. Our job is to serve and support both recipients and sponsors as we all partner in this process for the benefit of Arkansas children.

Table of Contents

1 – Overview of the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Scholarship	4
A. History	4
B. Administering Agency	4
C. Role of the Counseling Specialist	4
D. Role of the Employer-Sponsor	5
E. Confidentiality	5
F. Funding	5
G. Definitions	5
2 – Eligibility for the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Scholarship	7
A. Applicants	7
B. Employer-Sponsors	7
C. Professionalism	8
3 – Applying for a T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Scholarship	9
A. Applications	9
B. Wait List	10
C. Deferrals	10
4 – Contract Requirements	11
A. Overview	11
B. Contract Renewal and Feedback	11
C. Contract Extensions/Graduation	12
D. Changes in Information	12
5 – Applying to a College or University	13
A. Choosing a College	13
B. Selecting a Degree Pathway	13
C. Other Financial Aid	14
D. General Education Requirements	15
E. Negotiated Tuition Rates	15
6 – Overview of the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Process	16
A. After Being Accepted to College	16
B. Steps to Complete Each Semester	16
C. Steps to Complete at the End of a Contract	18
D. Other Fees	19
E. Reimbursement and Claim Form Deadlines	19

7 – Release Time	20
8 – Academic Issues	22
A. Grades	22
B. Unsatisfactory Grades/Repeated Coursework	22
C. Adding, Dropping, or Withdrawing from a Class	22
D. Field Experience/Practicum Course	23
E. CDA Credential Procedures	23
F. Praxis Exams	23
9 – Finances	24
A. Responsibilities	24
B. Payment of Tuition and Fees	24
C. Books	25
D. Travel/Access Stipend	25
E. Incentive and Stipend Payments	26
F. Shortened Terms	26
G. Tax Information	26
10 – Commitment	27
A. Voluntary Quit	27
B. Taking a Break from College	27
C. Layoffs and Terminations	28
D. Employer Changes	28
E. Switching Degree Plans	28
11 – Telling Your Story	29
12 – Contact Information	29

1 – Overview of the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Scholarship

A. History

The T.E.A.C.H. (Teacher Education and Compensation Helps) Early Childhood® Project was created by Child Care Services Association in North Carolina in 1990 with the purpose of increasing the level of education of teachers working with children age birth to five, while making college education affordable, decreasing turnover, and increasing wages. Since its beginning, the program has received national attention due to linking teacher education and compensation. The Project has expanded to over twenty states.

In 2019, AECA was chosen to be the administrative home of T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® ARKANSAS. There are now a variety of models available to help the early care and education workforce reach their goal of early childhood certificates, degrees, teacher licenses or coursework to meet a program’s staff qualification requirements.

B. Administering Agency

T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® ARKANSAS is administered by the Arkansas Early Childhood Association. AECA is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to representing the Arkansas early childhood workforce and serving their needs. AECA has worked for more than 60 years to promote quality care and education for the children of Arkansas including an annual conference offering the highest quality professional development for our teachers working with children from birth to age eight.

C. Role of the Counseling Specialist

Having access to a scholarship counselor is one of the most unique and beneficial advantages of the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® scholarship. T.E.A.C.H. Counseling Specialists have a degree in early childhood education or a related field. Counselors come to our program having had a variety of experiences in the early care and education field. The job of a Counseling Specialist is to provide college and scholarship guidance to T.E.A.C.H. participants and sponsoring programs. They process scholarship paperwork and regularly communicate with participating colleges and universities.

Counselors are available to assist you if there are questions regarding the scholarship, if you need help contacting your college, selecting courses or just need guidance on balancing work, school, and personal responsibilities. Keeping in regular contact with your counselor will help ensure you are always on the right path with your education plan.

D. Role of the Employer-Sponsor

The T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® scholarship is not just a partnership with the recipient. The sponsoring employer plays a key role in supporting the scholar as they journey through the education program. Having the financial and moral support of the program is a critical key to success for T.E.A.C.H. recipients. While the recipient is in school, the employer-sponsor will:

- Pay for percentage of tuition and books for participant which will vary by contract.
- Provide release time (reimbursed by T.E.A.C.H.) which varies by number of credits being taken.
- Provide an annual incentive in the form of a stipend or permanent pay increase after the recipient successfully completes a contract and commitment period.

E. Confidentiality

AECA shall respect and maintain the confidentiality of all personal information from (i.e., wage information, ID numbers, HIPAA-protected information, etc.). All information is maintained electronically on an encrypted drive with secure passwords. T.E.A.C.H. will not sell your personal information. The status of a scholar's employment, scholarship and academic progress will not be shared outside of your employer and college officials.

All T.E.A.C.H. scholars must list AECA/T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® ARKANSAS on their FERPA release form at their college to allow college officials to share relevant information with us.

F. Funding

The financial support of our partners is imperative for the continuation of our program to improve the education of our early childhood workforce. T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® ARKANSAS is appreciative of the confidence our partners have in the program. Currently, funding comes through the Arkansas Department of Education Office of Early Childhood as a subgrant using federal funding from the Child Care Development Block Grant.

G. Definitions

The terms “**Applicant**,” “**Scholar**,” and “**Recipient**” all refer to the early childhood employee who is going to college to obtain a degree in early childhood with help from the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Scholarship.

The terms “**Sponsor**” and “**Employer**” interchangeably refer to the child care center program or family child care home program where the T.E.A.C.H. scholar is employed at least 30 hours per week.

Better Beginnings: A voluntary Tiered Quality Rating Improvement System in which licensed child care providers can receive tools, guidance, and training needed to ensure they are providing the best possible child care and early childhood education.

FERPA: Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (20 U.S.C. § 1232g; 34 CFR Part 99) is a federal law that protects the privacy of student education records. The law applies to all schools that receive funds under an applicable program of the U.S. Department of Education.

PDR: The Arkansas Professional Development Registry is the tracking component of Arkansas’ Early Childhood Education and Care Professional Development System. Early childhood professionals working in licensed centers, homes and out-of-school time facilities are required to become a member of the PDR. Members are assigned a unique PDR identification number that is used to track training. Members have access to their own online training transcript, which lists trainings attended, and to a wealth of educational resources. A minimum number of training hours is required annually to maintain membership. Members are assigned a level according to the education and training received. The PDR includes a search feature to find training opportunities across the state. The PDR also tracks trainers and verifies that they have experience training adults, working with children, and education in their related field.

2 – Eligibility for the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Scholarship

A. Applicants

To be eligible for a T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Scholarship, an applicant must:

- have a GED or a diploma from a regionally accredited high school.
- work at least 30 hours per week in an Arkansas licensed child care center or family child care program as a teacher, assistant teacher, or director with children from birth to age five.
- be admitted to an approved Arkansas college to complete early childhood coursework, degree, certificate, or endorsement.
- financially assist in payment of tuition, fees, and books and be current on all co-pays and payment plans.
- have the support and sponsorship of the child care employer.
- earn no more than the maximum hourly wage, if applicable.

Center-based applicants must document employment of at least 90 days with the sponsoring employer.

Family child care applicants must document that the sponsoring licensed family child care home has been operating in good standing for at least six months.

Other documentation will be required once the application is submitted.

B. Employer-Sponsors

For an employer to sponsor a T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® scholarship, a program must:

- Possess a regular license in good standing with Arkansas Child Care Licensing as a child care center or child care family home.
- Agree to provide release time to scholars that is reimbursed by T.E.A.C.H.
- Agree to pay annual stipends or provide permanent pay raises for completed contracts and commitment periods.
- Financially assist in paying co-pays for tuition, tuition-related fees, and books.

While not required for initial participation, a Better Beginnings quality accreditation level of three stars or higher is encouraged. Participation in the quality accreditation system may be used to determine priority on any waiting list or the maximum number of scholars approved for at the same center.

C. Professionalism

T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® staff shall maintain professionalism in all interactions and communications. Likewise, T.E.A.C.H. scholars and sponsors are expected to conduct themselves in a professional manner with T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® staff, college advisors and instructors. T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® ARKANSAS will not tolerate harassment, threats, or profanity from anyone and reserves the right to discontinue working with a recipient or sponsor at any time.

3 – Applying for a T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Scholarship

T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® offers a variety of scholarship models to help finance coursework that leads to college credit in an early childhood related area. Those interested can find all application materials and support tools at our website: www.arkansasearlychildhood.org/teach.

A. Applications

To apply for a scholarship, prospective scholars will submit a complete application to the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® ARKANSAS office. The T.E.A.C.H. scholarship office will provide instructions as to whether the application is to be submitted by paper or through the online portal. A complete application will consist of:

1. Completed application forms from scholar and employer.
2. Valid email address
3. Copy of paystub dated within last 30 days or completed Family Child Care Income Form
4. The college you wish to attend and the chosen degree program. Visit the ECE Education Directory for options.
5. Child Care License Facility number of the program where you are employed.
6. Agreement from your employer to sponsor scholarship. Talk to your employer about T.E.A.C.H. before you apply. If the online portal is used for applications, sponsoring employers must create and utilize a business account on the portal to provide this necessary information.

Additional documentation will be required, including a copy of applicant’s PDR transcript dated within the last 90 days, proof of previous education and admissions letter from the selected college or university. If an application is incomplete, the applicant will be notified and given ten (10) business days to submit missing information. After ten days, the application will be closed.

Applications are approved only if the applicant meets all qualifications and funding is available. While T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood processes applications on a rolling basis, there are application deadlines for each semester:

Fall: June 15

Spring: October 15

Summer: March 15

Applications received after these dates will be processed only if time allows and there is sufficient funding.

Approved applicants will receive written confirmation of their scholarship, including a welcome letter, instructions, and forms. Applicants must also complete a welcome phone call or web meeting with a T.E.A.C.H. Counselor to officially accept the

scholarship. After accepting, a T.E.A.C.H. contract will be sent which must be digitally signed by the applicant and employer. After graduation, a new application will be required if the recipient wishes to continue in another degree program.

B. Wait List

In case of a wait list, applications must be complete prior to being placed on the list. Wait lists will be prioritized by date received and by degree being sought. Because master's degrees are not required for most positions in early childhood programs, we will prioritize undergraduate degrees over graduate degrees on the wait list. Current scholars who are graduating and wish to start a new program will be placed on any wait list according to degree sought and date application was received. When scholarships become available, the next applicant on the wait list will be contacted and given 10 business days to provide any missing information, including proof of admission. If the information is not provided, the applicant will go to the bottom of the wait list.

C. Deferrals

Circumstances often arise that prevent approved scholars from starting classes in the semester they originally planned. In such cases, the scholar must inform the Counseling Specialist before the payment deadline of the upcoming semester. T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® ARKANSAS will allow scholars to defer their start date by one semester. If the scholar does not enroll the following semester, the contract will be dropped, and the scholar must reapply. Scholarship awards are ~~always~~ subject to availability of funds.

4 – Contract Requirements

A. Overview

Approved applicants will receive a T.E.A.C.H. contract (Form A) which must be signed by the applicant, the employer, and the State T.E.A.C.H. Manager. By signing, the parties indicate they have read, understood, and agreed to the terms of the contract and Participant Handbook.

1. As part of the contract, applicants must also sign the Personal Responsibility Agreement (PRA).
2. Recipients and employers are responsible for paying a percentage of tuition and books each semester.
3. Contracts run for 12 months and are renewed annually until the education goal is completed if the scholar continues to meet eligibility and academic requirements.
4. Recipients agree to complete at least nine (9) credit hours each contract period with the minimum required grades for credit towards the degree or certificate. *
5. Recipients must maintain employment with their current employer for at least one year after the contract is completed.

**New scholars will be limited in the number of approved courses for the first semester.*

If a scholar is unable to complete nine (9) credits in the contract year, a Counseling Specialist will meet with them to discuss options on a case-by-case basis. Academic progress will be reviewed each semester.

If adequate progress is not being made or if the student is placed on academic probation by the school, the scholar and Counseling Specialist must meet to design an improvement plan to help the student be successful going forward. If the scholar does not agree to the improvement plan, the T.E.A.C.H. contract will be terminated. If the scholar does not consistently complete contract requirements, the scholarship may be terminated.

B. Contract Renewal and Feedback

If adequate progress is being made and contract requirements are fulfilled, T.E.A.C.H. contracts will be renewed annually until the education goal is completed. See Section 6 for steps on renewal. Recipients will also receive an online survey each year from T.E.A.C.H. We appreciate the feedback.

C. Contract Extensions/Graduation

At the discretion of the State Manager, a contract may be extended if emergency circumstances prevent the recipient from completing course requirements within the contract period. Extensions will be approved on a case-by-case basis, and only a one-semester extension may be granted.

For those scholars who are graduating in one semester, contracts will be extended to coincide with the date of graduation. If the graduation date is two semesters away, a renewal contract will be issued.

D. Changes in Information

Scholars and employers must report all changes to our office within five (5) business days. This includes contact information, employment status, school admission and enrollment and any other factor pertinent to the scholarship. If changes are not reported timely, repayment will be required for any monetary loss sustained by the T.E.A.C.H. program as a result.

5 – Applying to a College or University

A. Choosing a College

T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® scholarship applicants must select a college that has been approved by T.E.A.C.H. To be approved, a college must be an Arkansas-based institution that is regionally accredited, offer an Early Childhood program for college credit and agree to bill T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® directly for recipient tuition and fees.

Applicants may visit the ECE Education directory of participating colleges and universities. Applicants must follow the admission and enrollment process for the selected school. A T.E.A.C.H. Counseling Specialist is available to help scholars decide which program might be best. They can also connect potential scholars with contacts at a participating college to answer questions. Most colleges have websites to apply online. When applying and enrolling, applicants must make sure they select an approved early childhood program. T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® can only pay for programs specializing in early childhood development.

Taking placement tests is part of the admissions process at many Arkansas colleges. Applicants should allow time to complete these when applying. Apply early to get your preferred entry date. If an applicant has previous college coursework, the college will require official transcripts from all colleges attended. Advisors and coordinators can also review transcripts to see which credits from previous colleges might transfer. Always get transfer decisions in writing from a school official. T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® is unable to pay college application fees, transcript fees or past due balances at previous colleges.

Recipients must meet the college's requirements for admission and graduation. Applicants should begin the admissions process as soon as possible. T.E.A.C.H. will terminate a contract for failure to meet admissions requirements or not following the approved degree plan set by the college. Recipients may not transfer to another institution if they fail to meet graduation requirements.

B. Selecting a Degree Pathway

T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® scholarships are awarded only to eligible applicants admitted to approved colleges and enrolled in an early childhood related program.

Recipients starting with a high school diploma are encouraged to begin their college experience with the Associate of Applied Science (AAS) degree in Early Childhood Education. Many participating in-state colleges offer this degree in various formats. This degree will give students over 30 hours of concentrated early childhood development knowledge as well as quality field experience opportunities. Counseling

Specialists can visit with recipients about which programs are most convenient. Students beginning with an associate degree program must complete that degree before moving on to another program. If recipients prefer an intermediate step on the path to an associate degree, a Certificate of Proficiency (which leads to the Child Development Associate credential), or the Technical Certificate in Early Childhood is available at many colleges. A Certificate of Proficiency may be earned while completing the AAS.

It is the responsibility of applicants to provide documentation showing they meet all admission requirements of the program applied for.

Some degree programs require an early childhood concentration or emphasis to be eligible for the scholarship. Applicants should visit with their college advisor to verify the requirements of their degree. Should the scholar elect to not complete the required concentration or emphasis, the scholarship will be terminated, and repayment may be required.

T.E.A.C.H. will not pay for a second associate, bachelor's, master's degree or early childhood-related teacher license.

T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® ARKANSAS may limit scholarships for graduate degrees to prioritize undergraduate applicants.

C. Other Financial Aid

Scholars are allowed to apply for additional financial aid in the form of grants and other scholarships. T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® does not require the FAFSA. However, if the recipient plans to apply for additional aid, a FAFSA must be submitted to the college's financial aid office before the deadline. Students can go to www.fafsa.ed.gov to apply.

1. **PELL Grants:** Students who apply and qualify for PELL grants may use this assistance to pay T.E.A.C.H. co-pays and books. Any amount not applied to a student account balance after T.E.A.C.H. pays for tuition and fees will usually be refunded to the student. Be aware PELL has a lifetime maximum which can be awarded per student. Students are encouraged to use this additional financial aid only if necessary.
2. **Student Loans:** The goal of T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® is to help scholars obtain a debt-free education. Terms of student loan repayment often include exorbitant interest rates and monthly payments that extend for decades. Even minimum loan payments can make it difficult, if not impossible, for early childhood professionals to achieve financial security. For this reason, T.E.A.C.H. strongly discourages recipients from accepting student loans. For most models, T.E.A.C.H. pays the school in full for tuition and fees then bills recipients and

sponsors for co-pays. Loans should be unnecessary for most Arkansas public colleges. Seek guidance before agreeing to any financial aid package. If you believe you need a loan for your expenses while in school, talk to your Counselor first to explain why. **T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® ARKANSAS reserves the right to reduce or eliminate tuition, fees, and book awards if student loans are accepted which might cover any part of the student account balance. In cases where loans could cover tuition and fees, the T.E.A.C.H. scholarship will not be awarded for those items. The only exception would be for private college tuition.** T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® funds cannot be used to repay student loan balances.

D. General Education Requirements

If a student must take transferrable general education requirements that are less expensive to complete at a community college, T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® will usually require completion of those courses at the lower-cost institutions as credits will transfer.

E. Negotiated Tuition Rates

If negotiated tuition rates have been set with a particular college or university, T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® will only pay those rates. The recipient will be responsible for any tuition that is higher than the negotiated rate.

6 – Overview of T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Process

A. After being accepted to college:

- 1) Recipients will be assigned an advisor to help them plan and register for courses. Recipients must make sure they are enrolled in the correct program.
- 2) Recipients are strongly encouraged to enroll in early childhood coursework FIRST to gain confidence in academic skills before registering for more difficult general education courses (for example, math and psychology).

B. Steps to Complete Each Semester:

- *Plan courses.*
 - 1) Meet with your college advisor every semester to plan and register for next semester's courses.
 - 2) For recipients new to the scholarship or those without an established college record, T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® limits approved courses to seven (7) credit hours per semester in the first 1-2 semesters.
 - 3) For the summer semester, recipients who are working will be limited to one course per summer term (usually **two** courses per semester). If a recipient is not working during the summer, they may enroll in up to two classes per summer term (**four** classes total). The State Manager reserves the right to require a recipient to complete contract requirements within the fall and spring semesters only.
 - 4) If a recipient is not working during the summer, employers must approve ALL schedules since they will not provide release time to offset co-pay amounts.
 - 5) Once scholars establish a record of satisfactory grades or have college hours with acceptable grades, they may be approved to take more hours. Approval is needed from T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood®, the college advisor and employer-sponsor to take more than seven (7) credits per semester.
 - 6) For students on academic probation, the number of courses approved each semester may be limited by the college or T.E.A.C.H. Students with a history of dropping or withdrawing from courses may be limited in the number of courses approved by T.E.A.C.H.
 - 7) Scholars who elect to go over the number of approved courses will need to arrange payment for those courses directly with the college.
- *Gather the required items for T.E.A.C.H.*

ALL SCHEDULES ARE SUBJECT TO APPROVAL BY T.E.A.C.H. AS WELL AS EMPLOYER APPROVAL.

- 1) Students should be able to print these items from the college's online student portal. Scholars will obtain a copy of their official schedule and estimated tuition statement and then will enter the scheduled courses into the **Course Authorization Form (Form D)**.
 - 2) The items listed above are due immediately after registration but **MUST** be submitted at least five (5) days before the college's payment deadline for the next semester. It is the recipient's responsibility to know payment deadlines.
 - 3) After the paperwork is received and the schedule approved by T.E.A.C.H., the scholarship office will send an email approval to the college giving them authorization to bill T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® for tuition and tuition-related fees.
 - 4) T.E.A.C.H. is not responsible for the cancellation of registration if paperwork is not received in our office by the deadline.
- *Submit the required items.*
 - 1) Form D, a copy of the official schedule and tuition statement must be submitted using the approved method.
 - 2) Counseling Specialist will review course selections. Approval is contingent on grades, funding availability and other factors.
 - 3) Scholars must let us know immediately if they change classes after registration. T.E.A.C.H. will need an updated copy of all documents.
 - 4) Scholars will be notified of any unapproved coursework. They will be 100% responsible for tuition and fees associated with an unauthorized course.
 - 5) If scholars plan to take more than seven (7) credit hours, they must seek approval from T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® as well as their employer.
 - *Claim reimbursement for books.*
 - 1) Once books are purchased, complete **Form B**, and submit along with copies of detailed receipts that show the book title and how items were paid for.
 - 2) Form B and receipts may be sent immediately after purchase but no later than January 15 (Fall), June 15 (Spring) or September 15 (Summer).
 - 3) T.E.A.C.H. will reimburse sales tax and shipping if included on the receipt.
 - 4) Scholars may choose to buy or rent books. Books may be new or used if they meet course requirements. T.E.A.C.H. encourages recipients to keep books that would be useful for a personal library.
 - 5) T.E.A.C.H. will reimburse eBooks/subscription cards but not reader software.

- 6) Other than required calculators for math courses, supply items will not be reimbursed.
 - 7) The tuition section of Form B does not need to be completed unless the scholar has paid tuition out of pocket and is requesting reimbursement.
 - 8) Students receiving PELL grants may have their books covered by that financial aid. You must still submit your receipts and Form B indicating books were covered by PELL. If the college deducts the amount from your PELL grant, T.E.A.C.H. will reimburse you.
 - 9) Under no circumstances can books be charged to T.E.A.C.H.
- *Claim release time. (Employers may do this.)*
 - 1) Scholars and/or employers will log release time through the semester.
 - 2) The Release Time Reimbursement Claim form (Form C) will then be completed and submitted. Employer and recipient must approve before sending.
 - 3) Release Time claims may be submitted monthly or at the end of the semester.
 - *Send Grade Report.*
 - 1) At the end of the semester, scholars must send a copy of their grade report showing final letter grades.
 - 2) Grades may be needed before approval of the next semester's schedule.

C. Steps to Complete at the End of a Contract (Renewal)

- When a contract is complete and up for renewal, the T.E.A.C.H. Counseling Specialist will send notice that the Information Update Form (Form E) is now due.
- Recipients will complete Form E; employers will verify and submit the form.
- A current paystub must also be submitted.
- Be sure to indicate your intention and education goal going forward.
- Once T.E.A.C.H. receives Form E/paystub then verifies grades and credit hours, any financial incentive which is due will be paid. The T.E.A.C.H. office will also notify employers about any incentive that is due. (All contract terms including commitment must be met for full payment to be issued.)
- For those continuing with the scholarship, a new contract will be created for scholar and employer's signature.
- Optional: If you are applying for additional financial aid, be sure to submit a new FAFSA each year. You may apply starting on October 1. The earlier, the better.
- Upon graduation, recipients must send us a copy of their diploma or transcript listing the degree and date awarded before any final incentive can be paid or a new scholarship approved.

D. Other Fees

There may be additional costs and fees associated with college enrollment which are eligible for partial reimbursement by T.E.A.C.H.

MAY BE REIMBURSABLE	NOT REIMBURSABLE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Praxis testing fees (if degree includes teacher licensure or endorsement) • CDA assessment fee (requires prior approval and additional contract) • Laptop (contingent on available funding and subject to dollar limits) • Graduation fees • Exemption testing fees for required courses • Testing center fees associated with proctoring distance learning students (if required by course instructor) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School supplies (other than required calculator for math course) • Application fees • Transcript Request fees • Past due balances associated with enrollment prior to T.E.A.C.H. participation • Student loan payments • School fees not related to tuition or course enrollment (parking, dining, etc.) • Student account interest charges • Tuition and fees for courses dropped after refund periods

For reimbursable fees, the scholar will submit Form B and a copy of their paid receipt.

E. Reimbursement and Claim Form Deadlines

Semester	Final Date to Submit Forms
Spring	June 15
Summer	September 15
Fall	January 15

7 – Release Time

For each credit hour of approved enrollment, scholars are eligible for 16 clock hours of paid release time up to a maximum of 96 hours each semester. Release time is available when classes are in session.

Release time may be reimbursed for:

- Attending class
- Studying for exams
- Completing assignments
- Meeting with advisors and instructors
- Meeting with mentors (apprentice-scholars only)
- Personal appointments that cannot be completed outside of work hours (at the discretion of the employer and if staffing allows)

Recipients should cooperate with their employers to find the best schedule for release time. Release time is not required to be given in any specific increments.

If classes cover a shorter period than a normal 16-week semester, T.E.A.C.H. does not require that your program provide all release time hours but could allow they could give you as many of the eligible hours as they are able. Release time hours can be spread throughout an entire semester, even if a class is only 8 weeks.

Recipients are paid for release time through their normal payroll process. Employers are reimbursed directly for release time at a published hourly rate after submitting the Release Time Claim Reimbursement Form (Form C). Programs may use release time reimbursements to cover a portion of the release time wages or substitute pay while the teacher is out of the classroom. Sponsor co-pays for tuition, fees and books will be deducted from release time reimbursements. If the reimbursement does not cover co-pays, the sponsoring program will be billed for the balance which must be paid prior to the beginning of the next semester.

If there are challenges with release time, employers or scholars should visit with a scholarship counselor. Scholars and employers are encouraged to work together on release time scheduling. Employers who will not or cannot provide any release time should not sponsor a T.E.A.C.H. contract.

Creative suggestions for taking/providing Release Time include:

- Allow the teacher to come in late/leave early while ratios are lower.
- Pay for lunch breaks that are normally unpaid.
- Use release time instead of personal/sick leave.
- Pay for holidays that are normally unpaid.
- Give small increments of time throughout the week rather than large chunks.

A substitute could be hired specifically to cover T.E.A.C.H. recipients. This practice works best for programs that sponsor multiple T.E.A.C.H. contracts.

Release time is only an option for a director or family child care scholarship. Family child care providers are encouraged to use release time with their scholarship if they have staff available to cover their program.

8 – Academics

A. Grades

Recipients must submit a copy of their final grades each semester. The grade report must include the recipient's name and list all final letter grades. Charge approvals will be withheld, and contracts may be terminated for a recipient who does not submit grades by the end of the next semester. Grades may be required to approve the next semester's schedule. For each contract, scholars must complete at least 9 credit hours with a passing grade as established and determined by the individual school. If the program requires a C or better, a grade of D will be treated like an F for purposes of the T.E.A.C.H. contract. A withdrawal grade does not count toward fulfillment of the nine (9) minimum credit hours. If a student receives a grade of incomplete, T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood may extend the contract up to 12 months to allow time to record the final letter grade once the course is completed.

B. Unsatisfactory Grades/Repeated Coursework

If a scholar does not pass a course, the scholar must meet with the college advisor and T.E.A.C.H. Counselor to create an improvement plan for successfully completing the course. This plan may include reducing course loads, participating in supportive services such as academic coaching, and/or applying for accommodations for diagnosed disabilities. If the counselor and advisor are satisfied the recipient has a sufficient plan, T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® will pay for the course a second time. If the scholar fails a course two times, the scholar will be required to pay for the course the next time. If a class must be retaken and the college allows it, the new grade may replace the initial grade, and the credits can be used toward contract completion.

C. Adding, Dropping or Withdrawing from a Class

Recipients must notify their Counseling Specialist before adding, dropping, or withdrawing from a class. Students who need to drop a class must do so within the 100% refund period to avoid a requirement to repay. (This period is usually the first week of classes.) It is the students' responsibility to know the dates of critical deadlines on the college calendar. Some schools may administratively withdraw students who do not fulfill attendance and participation requirements.

If the school withdraws/drops a scholar OR if the scholar does not drop or withdraw from a class before tuition is charged, the scholar has two options:

1. Retake the class at your own expense as soon as the class is offered again.
2. Work out a repayment plan with T.E.A.C.H. to reimburse the cost of the class.

D. Field Experience/Practicum Courses

Most early childhood education programs require some type of practicum, field experience or both. Recipients should speak directly to your college advisor or department coordinator to find out what the college's rules are about field experience coursework.

If recipients are required to complete practicum or field experience coursework outside of the program where they are employed, they can still retain their T.E.A.C.H. contract (even though they may temporarily drop below the minimum required working hours at the sponsoring program). In these cases, the T.E.A.C.H. counselor will require an email or written statement signed by your employer that states you will remain employed at the sponsoring program and will be able to return following your field experience or practicum so you can fulfill your contract year, plus the commitment year.

E. CDA Credential Procedures

Scholars MUST indicate to T.E.A.C.H. they plan to seek the CDA credential through a Certificate of Proficiency program. To earn the credential through T.E.A.C.H., a CDA candidate must:

1. Complete the Early Childhood Certificate of Proficiency coursework.
2. Obtain 480 hours of fieldwork.
3. Complete the Professional Portfolio.
4. Complete the family questionnaire.
5. Complete the Verification Visit conducted by a CDA PD Specialist.

Upon paying the CDA Assessment fee, the recipient or employer may submit their payment receipt. T.E.A.C.H. will reimburse a portion of the fee to whoever paid for the assessment (minus any co-pays owing). T.E.A.C.H. will only reimburse an assessment fee one time.

For candidates who are denied the credential, the participant has two options:

- Reapply for the CDA, at their own expense, within 12 months.
- Pay T.E.A.C.H. for the cost of the initial assessment fee. Once this is paid, T.E.A.C.H. could cover the cost of reapplying at a future date.

F. Praxis Exams

For scholarship models which include teacher licensure or endorsement, T.E.A.C.H. will reimburse a portion of Praxis testing fees. Once registered for the exam, recipients may submit their receipts to T.E.A.C.H. for reimbursement (minus any co-pays due).

9 – Finances

A. Responsibilities

It is the responsibility of recipients and sponsors to pay tuition and book co-pays each semester. Co-pays will be deducted from reimbursements for books, travel, and release time. However, if there is a balance owing on the account, the balance must be cleared prior to the beginning of the following semester. Invoices will be sent out for any balance over \$25. When agreeing to sponsor a scholar, employers must ensure they have the financial resources for co-pays and stipend payments, especially if they are sponsoring multiple recipients. Please talk with us if you ever have any concerns about the financial aspects of the scholarship.

B. Payment of Tuition and Fees

Once a contract is signed, paperwork is received (See Section 6) and the recipient's schedule approved, the T.E.A.C.H. office will send the college a charge approval via email which authorizes the college to bill T.E.A.C.H. for tuition and tuition-related fees. Following the drop/add period, the college will send T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood an invoice for the amount owed for tuition and tuition-related fees and our office will issue payment at that time. Recipients should not need to pay public colleges directly except for any unauthorized coursework or fees not covered by the scholarship (supplies, food, parking, housing, interest charges).

The charge approval does not “pay” your bill. It merely authorizes the college to bill us. Scholars will still have a balance showing on their account until T.E.A.C.H. receives the school invoice and pays, but the charge approval will protect your registration from being cancelled. Approvals will only be given for courses required as part of the contracted degree or coursework. Tuition and tuition-related fees for any other courses are the responsibility of the scholar. If the scholar makes changes to their course schedule without the approval of T.E.A.C.H., the scholar may be required to repay T.E.A.C.H. if that course is not part of an approved degree plan *even if college personnel advised the scholar to change courses*. Recipients should ALWAYS involve their Counseling Specialist in decisions about their schedule.

The T.E.A.C.H. database automatically calculates the co-pays that are due each semester from the recipient and employer for tuition, fees, and books. Co-pays will be deducted from reimbursements and payments sent to recipients and employer-sponsors. If the reimbursement is insufficient to cover the amount of the co-pay, recipients and sponsor-employers will be invoiced for any remaining amount. Invoices must be paid prior to charge approvals being sent to the college for the next semester. PELL grants may be used to cover co-pays.

Charge approvals will be withheld, and scholarships may be terminated if co-pays

are not paid and/or payment arrangements have not been made. For outstanding balances, T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® will deduct the amount owed from future scholarship payments and/or payments from other AECA-administered programs.

C. Books

Scholars are responsible for purchasing or renting their books then T.E.A.C.H. will reimburse them a percentage. Scholars may choose to purchase books online (Amazon, etc.) or at a bookstore. T.E.A.C.H. cannot reimburse scholars for books purchased from a friend or classmate. Submitted receipts must be from a bookstore or from an official website and include the title and price of each book.

To request reimbursement, send T.E.A.C.H. a completed Tuition/Book Reimbursement Form (Form B) with your copies of itemized book receipts/cash register receipts as soon as you can during the first half of the semester or term. Put your name on your copies of the book receipts and attach them to your Form B. Forms can be submitted through email or mail.

You may choose to purchase new or used books. If the book will be a good reference in your future work, consider keeping it. T.E.A.C.H. will reimburse tax and standard shipping if they are included on your receipt. We cannot reimburse any supplies except the required calculator for a math class.

T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® will also reimburse for eBook purchases or a textbook subscription card like Cengage Unlimited but not the cost of renting or purchasing an eBook reader (such as Kindle, Nook, etc.).

PELL Grant Students: If you are receiving a PELL grant, some schools will allow you to use the grant to cover textbooks. If this is the case, you must still submit a Form B with your receipt showing the books were charged to financial aid. On Form B, mark that PELL is paying for your books. If the school deducts the amount from your PELL, T.E.A.C.H. will reimburse you. Under no circumstance can T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® be billed directly. If T.E.A.C.H. receives an unauthorized invoice for books, we will not pay and will direct the school to invoice the student directly.

D. Travel/Access Stipend

Recipients are eligible for a travel/access stipend each semester they are registered for classes. Once we receive the Form D, schedule, and tuition bill, T.E.A.C.H. will process the stipend. If recipients withdraw prior to attending class, they are responsible for the repayment of any stipends or reimbursements received. Co-pays for tuition and books will be deducted from stipend and reimbursement payments.

E. Incentive and Stipend Payments

Upon successful completion of a T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® contract, recipients are eligible for an incentive payment from T.E.A.C.H. and the employer. These awards are paid according to the following schedule:

EVENT	AMOUNT PAID
Verification of 9 credit hours with passing grades at the end of the contract period	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 50% of the T.E.A.C.H. incentive
Within 90 days following successful completion of contract coursework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 50% of the employer incentive or permanent wage increase
Completion of the commitment period (12 months after contract ends)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remaining 50% of T.E.A.C.H. incentive • Remaining 50% of employer incentive or permanent wage increase

Employment will be verified with the employer at the end of each contract. Recipients who voluntarily leave employment for any reason before completing the commitment period forfeit all unpaid portions of incentives. The employer must submit a copy of the paystub showing payment of incentives or documentation of the pay increase.

F. Shortened Terms

T.E.A.C.H. classifies coursework according to the following semesters: Fall, Spring and Summer. If a college has shorter terms within a semester (for example, Fall 1 and Fall 2), T.E.A.C.H. will combine those terms for purposes of paying incentives, stipends and release time. Additional incentives and/or release time will not be paid for intersessions. January intersessions are combined with the spring semester. May intersessions will be combined with the summer semester.

G. Taxes

Some scholarship payments may be considered income. Scholars and employers are responsible for reporting all taxable income to the Internal Revenue Service and the State of Arkansas. **Regulations do not allow AECA to withhold taxes on payments to program participants.** In January, a 1099 form will be sent to all participants receiving more than \$600 in taxable income for the previous year. The 1099 should be included when filing tax returns. *This information does not constitute tax advice.* Participants should consult their tax advisor for guidance.

10 – Commitment

By signing the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® contract, a recipient commits to remaining employed with their current child care employer during the contract period plus an additional year thereafter. Recipients must work at least the same number of weekly hours during the commitment year as the contract year and must notify T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® if there are any changes in employment or work schedule.

A. Voluntary Quit

The T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® contract is an agreement that should not be entered into without thoughtful consideration. The scholar is receiving an education that is mostly paid for, and the employer is getting the benefit of a teacher with formal education in early childhood. If a recipient is considering quitting their employer, the Counseling Specialist should first be consulted so the scholar can fully understand the consequences. When a scholar voluntarily quits their sponsoring program before fulfilling their contract and commitment period, the scholarship is terminated, and the sponsoring employer is released from any further obligation to the contract. If the charge approval has been sent to the college for the current semester, the employee will be allowed to finish the semester and be liable for all co-pays. If the scholar completes the current semester, no repayment of tuition and fees will be required. If recipients drop or withdraw after the 100% refund period, they will be liable for repayment of tuition and fees.

The T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® scholarship is NOT transferrable to another employer. Only in the rare case where it is documented that an employer did not fulfill contract obligations (even after a reminder from the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® office) would T.E.A.C.H. consider allowing a recipient who voluntarily quits to immediately enter into a new scholarship contract with a different employer. Such documentation must be clear and convincing, and the employer must first be given the opportunity to fulfill contract obligations and pay any back-owed incentives or other compensation. **Otherwise, recipients who voluntarily leave an employer will be prohibited from reapplying for the scholarship for a period of at least one year from the date they quit.** Exceptions to this policy will be considered on a case-by-case basis and only for circumstances beyond the scholar's control. Employers may have repayment requirements, but those are not part of the T.E.A.C.H. contract.

B. Taking a Break from College

It is often necessary for a scholar to take a semester off from school. If you need to take a break, visit with your Counseling Specialist to get approval. T.E.A.C.H. scholars must complete a minimum of nine (9) credit hours for the contract period. It is the recipient's responsibility to keep track of their completed hours. If a scholar can complete the contract hours and still take a semester off, then the scholarship

will not be affected. If a recipient needs to take a break but will not fulfill contract hours, the Counseling Specialist will discuss that with the scholar on a case-by-case basis. If more than a one-semester break is needed, the scholar will have to reapply for the scholarship unless prior approval is obtained.

C. Layoffs and Terminations

Recipients laid off through no fault of their own will not be required to repay T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® but will not be able to continue the T.E.A.C.H. scholarship without a sponsor. Recipients will be allowed to finish the current semester but will need to find employment with another child care program willing to sponsor their T.E.A.C.H. contract for the scholar to continue the following semester. If a recipient with an active contract is involuntarily terminated, those situations will be addressed on a case-by-case basis to determine what options, if any, are available. If the scholar completes the current semester and submits grades, tuition and fees will not have to be repaid. Courses dropped or withdrawn after the refund period must be repaid.

D. Employer Changes

If ownership or management of the employer changes (for example, the program is acquired by another agency), scholars must contact the T.E.A.C.H. office immediately. The new employer will need to agree to the terms of the original contract and sign a new contract. If the employer will not agree, the recipient will be released from any commitment to the current contract and may seek a new scholarship contract with a different employer should they choose to leave. Otherwise, the scholar will be allowed to finish the current semester before the contract is terminated. No repayment will be required if courses are completed.

E. Switching Degree Plans

In most cases, recipients must complete the initial education program they are contracted for before being approved for another program. If a scholar plans to continue their education in another program after graduation, a new application will be required. If additional prerequisites are required prior to starting a new program, recipients must use a lower cost community college to take those prerequisites (as long as the courses will transfer to the four-year school).

11 – Telling Your Story

T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® ARKANSAS wants to know your stories that would make an impact on others interested in knowing why T.E.A.C.H. exists and what we are accomplishing. Please take any opportunity to share how the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood scholarship has helped you and the children in your care. You may send us stories, photos, videos, and we will share them with our early childhood community.

12 – Contact Information

Arkansas Early Childhood Association
P. O. Box 4291 ♦ Fayetteville, AR 72702
www.arkansasearlychildhood.org
teach@arkansasearlychildhood.org
501-680-1930



Contact us if you have any questions about your scholarship.

We need to hear from you if you:

- have any changes to your contact information.
- have had a change in any personal circumstances.
- are having trouble in or failing a class.
- are considering dropping or withdrawing from a class.
- have a personal emergency that prevents you from attending school or work for an extended period.
- number of hours worked or the age group you work with changes.
- are considering changing jobs or are no longer employed in your program.
- are considering changing colleges.
- your employer achieved national accreditation or received a new level in Better Beginnings
- have graduated or earned a credential, degree, or endorsement.
- have received an academic award or honor.