

2021

Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5) Education Reimbursement Initiative

Through the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development (GOECD), with funding from the Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5), and in partnership with the Illinois Network of Child Care Resources and Referral Agencies (INCCRRA), a program was implemented in 2019, and continues to address potential financial barriers to advancing or completing educational goals at accredited Illinois institutions of higher education.

The time-limited Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five Education Reimbursement Initiative was identified to support the early childhood workforce in Illinois. In February 2021, the third edition of this program's applications were made available and accepted until all funds were obligated. This statewide opportunity prioritized early educators either currently enrolled in coursework or blocked from future enrollment at an accredited Illinois institution of higher education because of an outstanding balance due.

As a result, reimbursements totaling \$80,000, at a maximum of \$600 per person, were distributed to nearly 150 early educators to alleviate financial barriers such as tuition, fees, and outstanding student debt at accredited Illinois institutions of higher education. At the conclusion of this program, an analysis of the data gathered was completed.

While the initiative was successful in its ability to provide varying amounts of relief for recipients, recommendations for further supporting early educators and addressing their higher education barriers are needed for increased success in the future. These recommendations include:

- Increase the maximum education reimbursement amount payable per person to allow for more forward movement in the workforce toward degree completion, attainment of official transcripts, additional professional development advancements, and assist with staff retention. Data collected from nearly 150 people found eligible for an education reimbursement showed that the average debt per person was just over \$1,600, far exceeding the education reimbursement maximum amount payable of \$600.
- Allow those who received reimbursements from a previous year to apply across program years. Data showed that out of nearly 150 people that received a reimbursement in 2021, over 30 also received funding in 2020. This group's continued debt represents over 23 percent of the total reimbursement funding awarded in 2021.
- Cover the cost of books and fees directly related to coursework and degree completion, as well as fees associated with obtaining official transcripts. Consideration for these items could help early educators with expenses that are not regularly covered by other financial aid, and assist with funding the final pieces of degree completion.

