

Pathways into the Early Care and Education Workforce in North Carolina

How the TEACH Early Childhood® NC Scholarship Program can lead the way

The early care and education (ECE) workforce provides a critically essential support to children and families, so it is important to attract and retain individuals who meet the state's educational requirements for working in licensed settings. In North Carolina, there are many different pathways into the early care and education workforce. With so many varied options, it can be confusing and overwhelming. This resource is intended to simplify and illustrate the multiple pathways into the ECE workforce in North Carolina and how TEACH Early Childhood® scholarships can support most pathways.

TEACH Early Childhood® NC Scholarship program

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A Comprehensive Approach to
Enhancing Early Care and Education



NORTH CAROLINA
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When figuring out the best pathway, it's important to consider the following factors:

- **Role and Setting**
- **Previous Education**
- **Individual Professional Goals**

Role and Setting

Determines the minimum educational requirements.

- Lead teachers: NC Early Childhood Credential or an equivalency, at a minimum or CDA.
- NC PreK lead teachers: Birth-Kindergarten (BK) or Preschool Add-on license.
- NC PreK assistant teachers: CDA or working towards an ECE associate degree.

Staff education is also one of the main components of the NC Star Rated Licensing System, so employers may have their own standards. Understanding the requirements and options, can help choose the best

Previous Education

Previous education and experience can also help guide individuals to the best pathway. Teachers may qualify for some Credit for Prior Learning (CPL) under the new Workforce Certificate. Previous education may articulate towards associate or bachelor's degrees.

Individual Professional Goals

Teacher education has been shown to be linked to high quality early experiences for young children. Thus, the ECE workforce can benefit from any access to education. Thinking about a long-term professional goals can also help direct individuals to the best pathway to meet their goals.

Whichever pathway chosen, it is important to remember that many of these pathways build on each other or bridge to another pathway. Also, it is never too late to change pathways. This resource highlights these pathways and how the TEACH Early Childhood® scholarships may support you on your professional development journey.

High School Students - Building the Pipeline

High school students interested in a career in early care and education can take a few different pathways into the workforce. Although high school students are not eligible for TEACH scholarships, education under these programs is usually at no cost to the student.

Career College Promise

Dual enrollment in community college courses providing pathways that lead to a certificate, diploma, degree, or state/industry recognized credentials as well as provide entry level job skills tuition free.

Career and Technical Education

High school sophomores may enroll in CTE Pathways and take an early childhood education course with an authentic assessment to earn credit for EDU 119.

High school graduates interested in a career in ECE may participate in the TEACH Early Childhood® Associate Scholars Program which supports the ECE AAS at NC community colleges in exchange for a commitment to working with children after graduation.

Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential

This pathway may be more attractive to individuals who have experience and training hours or those would like to take CDA training through an online format. This nationally recognized credential requires candidates to complete training or education in competency areas, complete a portfolio, be observed, and take a final test. Although the CDA needs to be renewed every 3 years, an exciting new development in NC is that the CDA will be able to articulate towards community college credit. Likewise, the EDU 119 class can articulate to a CDA.

CDA Quorum/Teaching Strategies

DCDEE is offering free memberships for a limited time to the ECE workforce to enroll in Teaching Strategies to earn free CDA Coursework and guidance for portfolio development. CDA Coursework is available in Spanish on this platform. **A TEACH scholarship is available for individuals who wish to pursue the CDA through this format.**

CDA Direct Assessment

Individuals may have coursework and/or training hours already acquired that can be used to earn a CDA through Direct Assessment. An advisor works with the CDA candidate to determine if they meet the requirements for the CDA assessment. **TEACH has a scholarship for this method of earning the CDA as well. Scholarships are also available for CDA renewals.**



ECE Apprenticeships and Pre-apprenticeships

Another pathway into the workforce is intended to attract and retain new people into the workforce, through an apprenticeship model. In this model, the apprentice receives support in the form of education, on the job training, mentoring and compensation increases.

Pre-apprenticeships allow high school students enrolled in ECE courses to participate in internships connected to their coursework and are sponsored by child care centers. Students receive an opportunity for a free college education under this program and start on a pathway into the ECE workforce.

Apprenticeships are available to high school graduates, higher education students, and those who may be newer to the field. Apprentices are paid while pursuing an education and gain hands on work experience at participating child care programs. They are assigned a mentor, and the child care program makes a commitment to supporting the apprentice's education and compensation as the apprentice progresses through the program.

The TEACH Early Childhood® NC Scholarship Program offers a generous comprehensive scholarship for apprentices to support ECE Associate Degrees and/or Bachelor's Degrees in Child Development or Birth-Kindergarten Education.

NC Early Childhood Credential (NCECC)

Lead teachers are required to hold the NCECC. Other staff working with young children can benefit from earning the credential as well. There are a few different pathways for the ECE workforce to meet this requirement. Which pathway is the best option will depend on the individual's goals and preferences.

Enrolling in EDU 119 at any NC community college

There are several TEACH Scholarship models that will support EDU 119. The **Associate Degree Quick Start/Final Step, Comprehensive Associate Degree Scholarship and Working Scholars Associate Degree Scholarship** will support this class, as well as additional classes if desired. Individuals who successfully complete EDU 119 with a C or better can apply for the NCECC and will qualify individuals to work as lead teachers. EDU 119 is also part of Early Childhood Education Associate Degree, Certificate and Diploma programs so by taking the class individuals will be earning credit towards a higher degree.

Equivalency Exams

Individuals who do not want to take EDU 119, may earn an equivalency by passing the DCDEE exam. The NC Division of Child Development Early Education (DCDEE) offers a NC Early Childhood Equivalency Exam. **TEACH Scholarships are for formal coursework, therefore there are no scholarship available for equivalency exams.** Those who pass the equivalency exam will qualify to be a lead teacher but this option will not articulate towards coursework.

Early Childhood Workforce Certificate

The Early Childhood Workforce Certificate is a new certificate program offered at select community colleges. Individuals must complete 18 college credits to earn the certificate, and up to 9 credits may be earned through Credit for Prior Learning (CPL.) Individuals who choose this pathway, should consider that the CPL courses will not articulate towards another ECE certificate, diploma or associate degree. **TEACH Associate Degree scholarships can support most of the courses in this certificate program. Scholarships will be developed to support CPL courses.**

Early Childhood Associate Degree, Certificates, Diplomas

The NC Community College System offers a wide array of tracks and specializations under Early Childhood departments at most NC community colleges. This pathway is ideal for individuals whose goal is to earn a higher degree. The ECE Workforce can also benefit through salary supplement programs like Child Care WAGE\$® and Infant Toddler AWARD\$ Plus® for the education they earn by pursuing higher degrees. Courses taken under these programs may also articulate towards a bachelor's degree leading to better compensation and career opportunities.

TEACH Scholarships for Associate Degree courses for those currently working in the ECE Workforce

Associate Degree Comprehensive Scholarship

Associate Degree Quick Start/Final Step Scholarship

Associate Degree Working Scholars

Associate Degree for Community Specialist Scholarship

TEACH Scholarships for Associate Degree courses for those NOT currently working in the ECE Workforce but would like to

Associate Degree Scholars

The community college strives to be responsive to the needs of the ECE workforce by offering flexible and varied schedules for higher education. For example, mini-mesters, evening and weekend classes, face-to-face, online (synchronous/asynchronous) and hybrid formats are ways in which higher education can be more accessible to the ECE workforce.

Bachelor's Degree in Child Development or Birth-Kindergarten Education

Although not required for lead teachers in early childhood programs in NC, a bachelor's degree is required for teachers in Head Start Programs and NC PreK teachers are required to hold a B-K or Preschool Add On teaching license. A bachelor's degree can open these pathways to the early care and education workforce, as well as provide other career advancement opportunities and higher compensation. Early educators with at least 55 hours of credit towards a BA degree may qualify for these TEACH scholarships:

Bachelor's Degree Comprehensive Scholarship

Bachelor's Degree Quick Start/Final Step Scholarship

Bachelor's Degree Working Scholars

Bachelor's Degree for Community Specialists Scholarship

Beyond the Bachelor's Degree: Post BA graduate licenses, certificates and degrees

Another pathway that the early care and education workforce may follow, is post-baccalaureate studies, such as post-BA licenses (BK), graduate certificates and master's degrees. Individuals who have higher education degrees and want opportunities to develop leadership skills or gain specialized knowledge in a variety of early childhood focused programs of study have several TEACH scholarships available at partnering colleges/universities in NC.

BA Plus Comprehensive Scholarship

BA Plus Working Scholars Scholarship

BA Plus Community Specialists Scholarship

Leadership in Infant/Toddler Learning (LITL) (UNC-G only)

Master's Degree in Early Childhood Leadership (UNC-G and UNC-W only)



Benefits of TEACH Early Childhood® Scholarships

TEACH Scholarships provide a variety of benefits to the early care and education workforce that are not available with other scholarship programs or financial aid. TEACH recipients may also braid other sources of financial aid with their TEACH scholarship to maximize available resources.

Benefits Comparison	TEACH Comprehensive Scholarship	TEACH Working Scholars Scholarship	Federal Financial Aid (FAFSA)
Tuition and Book Support	95% tuition 95% books 9-15 credits per year	Capped award of \$625-\$1250 per semester for 6 credits	Pell Grants and loan amounts vary depending on need and eligibility
Course Access Support	\$85 course access stipend per semester enrolled	N/A	N/A
Paid Time Off	1-6 hours per week of paid release time for teachers and reimbursable to employers	N/A	N/A
Compensation for Education	Bonus or raise upon completion of 9-15 credit hours per year	Bonus for every 12 credit hours completed	No compensation for credit completion
Commitment	1 year work commitment to sponsoring employer	6 months commitment to ECE field for every scholarship award	N/A
Degree Attainment Recognition	\$1200 -\$2000	\$1200 -\$2000 if participating 2 or more semesters	N/A

TEACH Scholarship recipients also are assigned a dedicated scholarship specialist to help them navigate the scholarship process and connect them with resources and support to help make the higher education process less confusing.

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What are TEACH participants saying about TEACH Scholarships?

"TEACH has been a major element in the equation of my educational journey. T.E.A.C.H was like a fairy god mother coming into my life to alleviate all the added financial stress and eliminated those extra hours at work. I have always been the person who saves everyone else and being able to save myself with help of the T.E.A.C.H program is something that I am so proud of."

-Daisy McDougald, Robeson County



"I was able to earn a higher education, which supports both my personal and professional life. I am beyond grateful for this opportunity and the staff are so supportive. If you are thinking of continuing your journey in the education workforce, reach out to CCSA, with TEACH, as you may also qualify for an educational scholarship."

-Amanda Powell, Columbus County

Rupali Mandwal successfully completed the Introduction to Early Childhood Education (EDU-119) course from Durham Tech. She now holds the State of North Carolina Early Childhood Credential, which makes her eligible to be a Lead Teacher in a licensed Early Childhood Education program. She believes that this goal has become feasible for her because of the TEACH Scholarship Program and the support and encouragement from her employer.



"TEACH has helped me pay for college and get my associates degree. If it wasn't for TEACH I don't think I would have even went back to school because I wouldn't have been able to pay for it. I have had to stop and start and also repeat some of the classes and TEACH has been there to help out financially with it all. Going back to school I feel has shown my own daughter that even though I started this journey to get a degree over 20 years ago it doesn't matter how long it takes to finish as long as you finish."

-Melissa Schmittle, Mecklenburg County

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NC Community College Early Childhood Pathways Chart 2025

COLLEGE	COUNTY	AA GEN.	AA TSF.	INFANT TOD CERT.	PRES OR ECE CERT.	ADM CERT.	SPEC. ED CERT.	EDU 3119* Offered	DIP	119 Test Out or Workforce Certificate
A-B Tech	Ashtville	X	X	X	X					No
Alamance	Burlington	X	X	X	X	X			X	No
Beaufort	Beaufort	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	No
Bladen	Bladen	X	X	X	X	X			X	No
Blue Ridge	Henderson, Transylvania	X	X	X	X	X			X	No
Brunswick	Brunswick	X	X	X	X	X			X	No
Caldwell	Caldwell	X	X	X	X EDUCATOR				X	No
Cape Fear	New Hanover, Pender, Brunswick	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	No
Catawba VCCC	Catawba, Burke, Caldwell	X	X	X	X				X	No
Central Carolina	Chatham, Harnett, Lee	X	X	X	X	X			X	No
Cleveland	Cleveland	X	X	X	X				X	No
Coastal Carolina	Onslow	X	X		X	X		X		No
College of Albemarle	Chowan, Pasquotank, Dare, Currituck, Manteo	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	No
CPCC	Mecklenburg	X	X	X	X	X	X			No
Craven	Craven	X	X	X	X	X			X	No
Davidson-Davie	Davidson-Davie	X	X	X	X	X			X	No
Durham Tech	Durham	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	EDU 119 test out offered.
Edgecombe	Edgecombe Nash	X	X	X	X				X	No
Fayetteville Technical Community College	Cumberland	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Workforce certificate offered. No EDU 119 test out.

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Forsyth	Forsyth	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Workforce certificate embedded in early childhood program. No EDU 119 test out
Gaston	Gaston	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	No
Guilford	Guilford	X	X	X	X	X			X	No
Halifax	Halifax	X	X	X	X	X				No
Haywood	Haywood	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	EDU 119 test out offered.
Isothermal	Polk Rutherford	X	X	X						No
James Sprunt	Duplin	X	X	X	X	X			X	No
Johnston	Johnston	X	X	X	X	X			X	Workforce certificate
Lenoir	Lenoir, Greene, Jones	X	X	X	X	X			X	No
Martin	Martin, Bertie	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	Workforce certificate offered. No EDU 119 test out.
Mayland	Avery, Mitchell, Yancey							X		Workforce certificate only
McDowell Tech	McDowell	X	X	X	X	X			X	No
Mitchell	Mitchell	X	X		X				X	No
Montgomery	Montgomery	X	X		X	X		X OFFERED FALL 2025	X	No
Moore	Moore, Hoke	X	X	X	X	X			X	No
Nash	Nash	X	X	X	X	X			X	No
Pamlico	Pamlico	X	X	X	X	X			X	No
Piedmont CC	Person, Caswell	X	X		X	X			X	No
Pitt	Pitt	X	X	X	X	X	X AUTISM			No
Randolph	Randolph	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	Workforce certificate offered; no EDU 119 test out offered.
Richmond	Richmond	X	X	X	X		X		X	No
Robeson	Robeson	X	X	X	X	X			X	No
Rockingham	Rockingham	X	X	X	X	X			X	No
Rowan-Cabarrus	Rowan-Cabarrus	X	X		X	X			X	EDU 119 test out offered.
Sampson	Sampson	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	No
Sandhills	Moore, Hoke	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	No certificate. EDU 119 test out offered.
South Piedmont	Anson, Union	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	No
Southeastern	Columbus	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	No
Southwestern	Jackson, Macon, Swain	X	X	X	X			X	X	Workforce certificate offered. No EDU 119 test out.
Stanly	Stanly	X	X	X	X	X			X	EDU 119 test out offered.
Surry	Surry, Yadkin	X	X	X	X	X			X	No

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Tri County	Cherokee, Clay, Graham	X	X							No
Vance Granville	Franklin, Granville, Vance Warren	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	No
Wake Tech	Wake	X	X	X	X	X			X	No
Wayne	Wayne	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Workforce certificate offered. No EDU 119 test out.
Western Piedmont	Burke	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	No
Wilkes	Wilkes	X	X	X	X	X			X	No
Wilson	Wilson	X	X	X	X	X			X	No

Other Information

- ***Johnston, Mayland, Southwestern, Carteret, Martin, Forsyth, Coastal Carolina, Vance Granville and FTCC offer the new Early Child Care Workforce certificate.***
- ****EDU 3119 is a new Continuing Education course offered at some community colleges.***
- *Carteret only has the Early Child Care Workforce Certificate and no other early childhood program offerings.*
- *Tri-County has a school age associate degree program*
- *Stanly community college has social emotional development certificate*
- *Richmond community college has a special education diploma*
- *Pitt community college has autism certificate*
- *Gaston college has a pre-k literacy certificate*
- *Craven community college has pre-birth to kindergarten diploma*
- *Central Carolina community college has family child care home certificate*
- *Blue Ridge community college has the preschool and infant toddler certificate in Spanish*

Statement: You can use your TEACH scholarship at multiple community colleges and in conjunction with other financial aid resources.

**The data gathered and presented in this chart represent the early childhood curriculum programs of study available in various communities throughout the state, as recorded in the spring of 2024.*

**This information is subject to change and will be updated periodically to reflect the current offerings and developments.*



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Career Pathways and Education Requirements

