

Unite to fuel Change



Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Eligibility and Application

Who can receive Early Learning Scholarships (ELS)?

To apply for an Early Learning Scholarship, a family must be income-eligible, and the child must be age-eligible.

Families must be notified in writing when they have been awarded a scholarship.

For programs to be eligible to accept Early Learning Scholarships, the program must be “currently participating” in Parent Aware. Participation in Parent Aware must be verified in Develop.

When will 2025 funds be released? Will there be priority for siblings?

Currently all PWI funds have been allocated for FY25.

With the expanded age eligibility, the significant increase to the maximum scholarship award amount, and significant decrease in funding scheduled to go into effect in July 2025, DCYF must ensure there is appropriate funding before awarding new scholarships.

The sibling policies were removed from statute as of January 1, 2024. At this time, no priority is given for siblings.

Communication and Administration

Who communicates to the family the waiting time for each step?

The Wait List is tracked through the (new) online Early Learning Scholarship Administrator Application Hub by state, county, and region.

Completed applications that have been reviewed for eligibility hold a spot on the wait list based on priority and date of application.

At this time, all Area Administrators are on an Award Pause.

Who is our billing specialist?

Billing Specialists have been assigned to regions and programs. You can find this information in the Billing Specialist Assignments section in the Early Learning Scholarship Handbook by looking for your county in the right-hand column to see which billing specialist is assigned to your region.

Award Planning Agreements and Other Forms

When is an APA completed? Where do we send APAs?

An Award Planning Agreement (APA) is completed between the family and the early childhood program of the family's choice (that is participating in Parent Aware and accepting ELS).

An APA is needed when there is a new award, a new program, an approved enhancement plan, or there is an out-of-pocket cost for the family.

APAs are sent to the child's local Area Administrator serving the county the child lives in.

Do I need to complete a new Award Planning Agreement?

The Award Planning Agreement that previously needed to be updated each year, will now only need to be used for new children in programs with a scholarship, an approved enhancement, or if there is still an out-of-pocket cost for families.

Note: As families renew or are awarded, they will be provided a link to get this form, but programs may contact their local Area Administrator on behalf of the family as well. If an Award Planning Agreement is needed, it should be sent via mail or sent securely via email since it includes private data.

Who do we notify if a child has left our program or is not using the scholarship?

The parent or legal guardian is responsible for contacting the Area Administrator (AA) for their scholarship.

The program may notify the AA of a child's change, but the AA must confirm with the parent/guardian listed on the application before action is taken on the child's award.

Programs should notify the Central Payment Administrator (Greater Twin Cities United Way) of the last date of service for the child and indicate in the Final Invoice column on the Invoice when the child has left the program.

Scholarships can cover a program-required notice to leave (up to two weeks) that is outlined in the program's contract, in line with the child's schedule, and indicated in the Program Participation Agreement (PPA) completed by the program.

If there have been 10 consecutive absent days for the child, the program should inform the GTCUW via the invoice and the AA to contact the parent/guardian.

Can the Program Participation Agreement (PPA) be submitted to the portal?

No, programs should submit the Program Participation Agreement electronically through Alchemer: [Program Participation Agreement](#) or request a paper copy from your local Area Administrator. Scan and send the paper copy to DCYF at DCYF.ELScholarships@state.mn.us.

Note: Programs with multiple childcare licenses and different tuition and fees should have each site complete a Program Participation Agreement.

Would you like the Program Participation Agreement (PPA) sent via email or snail mail?

DCYF has made the Program Participation Agreement an on-line document. Here is a link to the [Program Participation Agreement](#). If you have not completed one, please do so through the online survey. For those that cannot complete this online, there is still an option to complete a paper form. Programs with multiple childcare licenses and different tuition and fees should have each site complete a Program Participation Agreement.

Could I request an Early Learning Scholarship Program Closure Request Form to have on file in case we need it?

Programs may have a closure for unplanned emergencies such as severe weather, facilities issues caused by severe weather or public health-related issues. The [Program Closure Request Form](#) is an on-line survey that will be completed by the program to request up to 2 closure periods, not to exceed 30 days. Programs must re-open once the issue is resolved. The closures days should be noted on the appropriate invoice.

Billing and Payments

Where do I get the invoice form?

You can find all forms on the GTCUW ELSA program website ([Early Learning Scholarships | Greater Twin Cities United Way](#)) or email ELSAPaymentsupport@gtcuw.org to request any of the forms.

Note: Greater Twin Cities United Way will not be sending an invoice to you after the end of a billing cycle at this time. We understand that one Area Administrator was sending an invoice to providers for each billing cycle with some of the information filled out on the form for them. At this time, we are not planning to send out the partially completed invoice

forms each billing cycle, given that the volume would be significant to manage for the entire State of Minnesota.

Where do I send my invoice or any forms?

We are accepting invoices for service periods from July 1 and forward. Any service periods prior to July 1 will still get paid by your current Area Administrator. If you still need to bill for June 24 – July 7, please split the invoice in two and send the service period starting July 1, 2024, and beyond to Greater Twin Cities United Way so we can pay those dates for you.

You can now upload documents to our online secure portal here: [Secure Portal Dropbox Link](#)

Note: Going forward, please do not email any Invoices, Program Participant Agreements, ACH or W-9 forms, copies of voided checks or other banking information to ELSAPaymentSupport@gtcuw.org email. We have set up a more secure method for you to send your documents to us. The ELSA email address will only be used for you to communicate with us and is not a way to send sensitive information.

Before you upload your documents to our secure portal, please follow the file naming rules in the guidelines linked [here](#). This will make it easier for us to identify what type of form it is and which Child Care Program it is from. This makes it easier to locate your forms when you contact us with questions about your invoice or other questions and makes processing your invoices for payment much faster.

How do I complete an invoice form?

Here are some steps to take with completing the invoice template that will make completing your invoice easier in the future:

Additionally, you can use this link to view a tutorial with images to help you fill out the invoice: [How to Fill Out an Invoice](#)

Cover Page Tab

1. Part I – Early Childhood Program Contact Information

- a. If the person who completes the billing is the same every time, fill out the Program Contact Information the same way each time or save the template with this information completed so you do not have to re-enter it each time. This information will not change every other week or even monthly, unless you have multiple people completing the billing.

2. Part II – Invoice Information

- a. Fill out the Authorized Individuals Position/Title only since this will not change each billing cycle and save this on the template so it does not have to be entered each time. (The rest of this section will change each billing cycle.)

Invoice PW-I (A) Standard or Extended Tab

1. Participating Child Information Section
 - a. Complete the First Name, Last Name, Birthdate, Award Date and Attendance Start Date for each child who is scholarship eligible.
 - b. Complete the Scheduled to Attend, Program Tuition, CCAP Payment and Other Payment(s) Received for each child, if these amounts do not change from cycle to cycle.

Once you have filled out these sections above with the information that will not be changing from one billing cycle to the next, save your invoice form to your computer with another name so you know that it is your template you will use to start your invoicing process for each billing cycle.

Is there any information on assigning invoice numbers or should we move forward with our own invoice numbers?

We are using Greater Twin Cities United Way invoice numbers when we are entering your invoices. The invoice numbers will include the service period we are paying you for with an “E” before the date. (i.e., E07.01.24 – 07.07.24)

Will invoice codes be linked to the payments?

No, invoice codes will not be linked to payments. You will receive payments for each location separately and will also receive an emailed remittance to the email address we have on file.

Notes: The remittance will identify the correct location

What are the service dates?

You can find the service dates in the last tab of the ‘Invoice Form Template’ on the Greater Twin Cities United Way. [Early Learning Scholarship Website](#)

Note: The first bi-weekly billing cycle was 6/24 – 7/724, but because Greater Twin Cities United Way is not responsible for paying the dates prior to July 1, 2024, you will send invoices for service dates in the last week of June to your current Area Administrator, and then send a separate invoice for the service dates in the first week of July to Greater Twin Cities United Way.

What is the due date for invoice submissions and what is the expected payment date?

Any invoices received by Tuesday at midnight will be processed and payment will be sent on the following Friday. See below for an example.

- Bi-weekly service period end: 7/8 – 7/21/24
- Invoice submission date: Tuesday, 7/23/24
- Invoice payment date: Friday, 8/2/24

Note: You can submit invoices on a bi-weekly or monthly schedule depending on how frequently you would like to get paid

What is your approach to overpayments?

Our process will be to recoup the funds on future invoices. Please make sure you are not putting a negative amount in the “Scholarship Payment Award Requested” column on the invoice since we cannot submit a negative amount. If the calculation is a negative amount, please correct your entries and change it to zero before submitting it to us.

Rebills – CCAP absent days for service periods already billed – how would you like this represented on the invoice?

Code 9 is to be used for “Other Fees” and is not intended to be used for billing absent days. The CCAP payment is already reduced for exceeded absent days, and with this the scholarship position will increase. If the child hits 25 absent days in their scholarship, we will look for or request an absent day exemption before reducing the scholarship payment. If there is one on file, there would be no reduction.

If the center’s registration fee is \$135 per student, but the scholarships only cover \$125 per student, what amount should we report?

The remainder can be covered as part of the scholarship cost, if the child has funds. You can report the actual \$135 and then put an extra \$10 in other payments received.

Note: The maximum registration fee is the amount above the Cap by age, geography, program type, and star rating that can be added on top of the child’s base maximum. If there is a balance between the total award, plus maximum registration fee after tuition is covered, then the difference in registration fee charged and maximum can be covered.

Example: Max 4 Star Center for children is \$20,000, with up to two \$25 registration fees. The program charges a \$150 registration fee. The \$25 difference can be covered by the scholarship if there is a balance from the \$20,000 for the base scholarship. If not, and it is projected to be charged to the family, it would be a reason for the PPA to be completed.

Now that all scholarships have been renewed on 7/1/2024 and are good until 6/30/2025, will families or providers receive any notice about renewing these scholarships?

Families will be given notice to renew starting 90, 60, and 30 days in advance, beginning in April of 2025. This will be a continuation of the same timeline Area Administrators used previously. The on-line application system sends out automatic notices, and the Area Administrators provide additional support to families.

Can we submit corrected invoices if we made a mistake on the invoice?

Yes, on the cover page of the invoice you can check the box that says this is a corrected invoice for the same service period.

Is the portal drop live? What is the link?

The new portal will not be live until 2025. Until then, please use the dropbox that is currently in use. You can find instructions on how to access this on our landing page ([Early Learning Scholarships | Greater Twin Cities United Way](#)).

When will there be detailed remittances including child info?

We intend to have this available with the new portal in 2025. Until then, if you need details, please reach out to your assigned Billing Specialist.

Does the payment remittance use the same naming convention as the invoice so we can match them up?

We are using Greater Twin Cities United Way invoice numbers when we are entering your invoices. The invoice numbers will include the service period we are paying you for with an “E” before the date. (i.e., E07.01.24 – 07.07.24)

This invoice number will also match your remittance.

The naming convention for your invoice submission helps our Billing Specialist team easily identify who the invoice is for and for what time period. This naming convention is different than the above invoice numbers.

Does a 3-week notice means we don't get paid for the third week of the child who leaves a program?

The Early Learning Scholarship can cover required fees in the program's contract up to two-week notice (these days should be documented as absent days).

When will our ELS IDs be shared with us?

We shared the ELS IDs with each provider in October. If you did not receive it, please reach to us at ELSAPaymentsupport@gtcuw.org

Can the excel document be amended so we can see the entire invoice page at the same time?

We cannot allow you to modify the form as we run the risk of formulas and preset filters being corrupted or deleted.

Can you choose which billing schedule you want?

Yes, but please do not switch between them. You can bill every 2 weeks, every 4 weeks, or monthly.

When will you be sending the new invoice forms?

The new invoice form has been available on our landing page since October and is available on our landing page website ([Early Learning Scholarships | Greater Twin Cities United Way](#)).

Aren't all award dates 7/1/24?

The Award Date is the date the child's scholarship begins. For FY25, as there have not been new awards, the Award Date is 7/1/24.

Any future new awards, the Award Date is equal to or after the parent/guardian signature on the application and equal to or after the date the AA completes the verification of the child age eligibility and the family's income eligibility.

Are PW1 & PW2 allowed to be on the same form, on separate pages?

There are separate invoice forms for each available on our landing page. For now, we must maintain that they be kept separate.

Our rates have gone up, who do I notify? Who do I contact when billing changes from summer to fall?

Notify the Area Administrators for each child in your care so they can work with the families to amend the APA if needed.

When your rates change, update your Program Participation Agreement (PPA) by using the link in the email you received when you completed the PPA or contacting DCYF.ELScholarships@state.mn.us to send you the link.

If you have not completed a PPA, please do so as soon as possible.

Can I use this format in something other than excel?

There is a google sheets version available of the new invoice form. There are instructions on how to use google sheets to complete your invoice packet on our landing page ([Early Learning Scholarships | Greater Twin Cities United Way](#)).

If you need assistance, please reach out to your assigned Billing Specialist or contact us at ELSAPaymentsupport@gtcuw.org

When do we use the “final invoice” column?

The “final invoice” column should be checked when the current invoice will be the last one for that child at your program. If a child is leaving your program or has spent all of their scholarship funds and you will not be billing them anymore for this fiscal year.

When a child leaves your program and you mark “final invoice,” please indicate in the invoice notes the last day you will be billing for this child.

Can we add multiple AA’s children on the same invoice?

Yes, all AAs can be included on one billing invoice.

Need more clarification on the payment schedule.

Our billing schedule is available on our landing page, as well as on the last tab of the invoice packet. If you need to be coached on how to read it and understand it further, please reach out to your assigned Billing Specialist or contact us at ELSAPaymentsupport@gtcuw.org

Why do children in certain counties get more money than those in others?

The Maximum Early Learning Scholarship Award Amount is based on the childcare market rate survey. Parent Aware Four Star rated programs are based on the 75th percentile of the survey results.

A decision was made to add a Hold Harmless Cap for scholarships in programs that are Four Stars, but in areas of the state in which the 75th percentile +20% is below the previous 2024 cap. This means, the chart is updated to reflect the minimum cap for a 4 star family child care is \$12,000 and a 4 Star center is \$15,000.

Are we able to report additional fees or do they need to be pre-approved?

Early Learning Scholarships can cover additional fees to families that are required for a child’s attendance in the program, such as uniforms or activity fees, and curriculum, if charged to all families.

Not allowable: Fees for late payment or late pickup; registration fees, deposits, or other fees to hold a spot for a program the child is not yet attending.

Can we adjust the submission date on the cover in case we start and finish completing an invoice on separate days?

Yes, please use the date you are submitting the invoice to our File Drop as your “submission date”, regardless of when you started filling out the invoice.

Can we adjust service periods to other dates that work with our program schedule?

No, the service dates must align with the state scholarship tracking system and our billing schedule, no other dates are allowed to be selected.

If you are confused as to which service date to select, please reach out to your assigned Billing Specialist or contact us at ELSAPaymentsupport@gtcuw.org

Children should be listed on the invoice alphabetically – by first or last name?

Alphabetical by last name.

How can I avoid having to re-type all of the children’s names every month?

Save the invoice file to your computer. When you want to create a new invoice, open up that old invoice and save it again but with a new name. You can then modify the cover page and enter in the invoice details in this new file and submit it to us.

Will the new form have the drop down features you are demonstrating?

Yes, the new form is available on our landing page and is available for use.

What is the difference between PW1 and PW2?

Pathway I scholarships are awarded directly to families who meet eligibility requirements, the funds are paid to the early childhood program the family chooses. The program must be participating in Parent Aware and accepting Early Learning Scholarships. Pathway I scholarships “follow the child” and are awarded to the family with a renewal option each year as long as the child remains age eligible.

Pathway II scholarships are awarded to families through an eligible Four-Star Parent Aware Rate program that has been granted Pathway II funds. Pathway II scholarships are paid directly to the Four-Star Parent Aware rated program with the Pathway II funding. If the family chooses a new program, the Pathway II funding stays with the early childhood program that awarded the scholarship.

The current funding cycle is for fiscal year 2024 and 2025

Pathway Questions

**Do I still send in new Pathway I applications to the Area Administrator like in the past?
Yes, please share the new online application website**

Yes, you can still submit Pathway I applications to the Area Administrator or families can use the new online application here: <https://earlylearningscholarshipshub.mn.gov>

Do we fill out a program participation agreement if we don't currently have any students on Pathway I?

This is predominantly for Pathway I. Pathway II childcare does not need a program participation agreement as your application and MOU serves as that agreement.

For Pathway II, do registration fee payments of \$125 decrease the award balance?

The registration fee if charged to the scholarship will reduce a child's balance. However, the award can be increased to cover the registration fee. Programs with Pathway II funding can award the allocation to an eligible child based on allowable costs. Higher awards mean fewer children awarded as the total allocation per program remains the same.

Do Pathway II registration fees impact the scholarship balance?

The allowability for registration fees is for both Pathways, however, a program does not get an increase in their Pathway II funds to cover registration fees.

General Questions

Who can we reach out to if I need to get payment breakdowns?

Contact MDE (now DCYF) and they can publish a report through the most recent 2024 payment date.

When will we be informed of FY 2024 rollover amounts?

Once all 2024 payments are completed, DCYF can identify the balance, roll it forward and add the allocation to FY 2025. We anticipate that this will take place in October. A summary of the balance can be provided before the actual roll forward occurs.

When you pay our program, will the payment receipt you send us show each child and the amount you are paying us for them?

The children will not be listed in compliance with personal information protection laws.

Who handles enhancements?

Department of Children, Youth, and Families approves enhancements.

Programs should seek prior approval from DCYF.ELScholarships@state.mn.us by completing the Early Learning Scholarships- Pathway I Enhancement Use Plan. To be approved, enhancements must increase the type, intensity, and duration of services provided through the program.