

Common Questions

What is an Early Learning Scholarship?

Early Learning Scholarships give eligible families up to \$7500 per year to help pay for high-quality care and education in order to prepare young children for school. Children must attend a child care/preschool program with a Parent Aware rating or is currently in a full-rating cohort. Monthly payments are made to your eligible program.

How much is the scholarship?

\$7500 is the most that can be paid for an awarded child's attendance during a set 12 month period. The scholarship dollars may not cover the full cost of your child's attendance in an early learning program. Awarded children may attend part-time and/or parents may pay a portion of the tuition to extend the number of days supported by the scholarship.

Where can I use a scholarship?

A scholarship will make payments to eligible child care/preschool programs in Minnesota. Programs must be Parent Aware rated or currently in a full-rating cohort. For help finding an eligible program, contact Parent Aware staff at 1-888-291-9811 or search www.parentaware.org

What is Parent Aware?

Parent Aware is Minnesota's Rating Tool to assist families in identifying high quality early learning programs. Early learning programs participating in Parent Aware focus on activities and skills that help children prepare for school and beyond. Parents may choose eligible Head Start, school district pre-kindergarten and preschool programs, and child care programs. Learn more at www.parentaware.org.

If I apply, will I get a scholarship?

The MN Department of Education reports that about 8000 scholarships per year will be awarded, which represents about 17% of the eligible children in MN. Not every eligible applicant will receive a scholarship. Applying early in the summer or fall is recommended.

If I already applied, do I need to apply again?

Apply once for each new scholarship season that you are eligible. If your child does not receive a scholarship by June 30, you will need to apply again with a new application and new proof of income documents.

How and when will I know if my child receives a scholarship?

Scholarships are awarded throughout the year. Every July, we start over with new funds. Think Small mails letters directly to families informing them if their child is awarded a scholarship, placed on our waiting list or denied. We strive to process applications as quickly as possible and send letters within 4 to 8 weeks of receipt of the application. July–September is the busiest time of year and processing may take up to 8 weeks.

Will my child receive more than one scholarship?

Awarded children are eligible to renew for a new scholarship every 12 months until the September that they are eligible for kindergarten. Think Small will provide a renewal application prior to the 12 month time assigned to your scholarship. Families must follow participation rules to retain and renew a scholarship.

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How does the 12 month waiting list work?

We receive thousands of applications every year. Eligible children who are not awarded a scholarship are placed on our waiting list. We award children from our waiting list throughout the scholarship season as funding becomes available.

This waiting list lasts 1 year, from the start of the scholarship season in July until the following June 30th. Every June 30th, the list is deleted. Eligible families must reapply if they want their child considered for a scholarship after June.

How long will a child have an Early Learning Scholarship?

Scholarships may be available to awarded children until the child is age-eligible for kindergarten. Scholarships end the day before kindergarten for children who are 5 by September 1. Families must follow participation rules to retain a scholarship.

Will the Scholarship renew?

Scholarships are eligible to renew every 12 months until the child starts kindergarten. Awarded families do not need to send in a new application because Think Small will be in contact about how to renew a child's scholarship. When awarded children are 5 by September 1, they are eligible for kindergarten so their scholarship ends the day before their district starts kindergarten.

Where can I use the scholarship?

A scholarship must be used at an early learning program in Minnesota with a Parent Aware rating of 3 or 4 stars. For help finding an eligible program, contact Parent Aware staff at 888-291-9811 or search www.parentaware.org

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