

STUDENTS

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Who is eligible to receive a scholarship?

Students (K-12) from families with limited financial resources, up to 300 percent of the federal poverty level, are eligible to receive a tax credit scholarship. From January 1 to April 1, priority will be given to students from each of the following categories:

- Students who received a scholarship from an SGO during the previous school year;
- Students who are members of a household whose previous year's total annual income does not exceed 185% of the federal poverty level (\$45,510 for a family of 4);
- Students who reside within a focus district; and
- Students who are siblings of students currently receiving a scholarship.

After April 1, all other qualifying students will be considered for scholarships.

What is a "focus district?"

Focus districts are public school districts which have a school where at least one subgroup of students performs in the bottom 10% statewide or a graduation rate of less than 60%. A list of focus districts in can be [found here](#).

Will Empower Illinois give additional priority/weighting to those students who fulfill more than one of the priority categories?

No. Completed applications will be date-and-time stamped and awarded on a first-come, first-served basis, subject to the availability of funds.

How will multi-sibling families be considered?

Multi-sibling family applications will be accepted, but these applications will not receive their place in line until all required documentation for all students is provided and complete. A parent/guardian may also choose to fill out separate applications for each of their children if one child's information is available sooner.

What happens if there is not enough funding to support all scholarship applications?

Completed applications will be date-and-time stamped and awarded on a first-come, first-served basis, subject to the availability of funds.

If after April 1 there are existing 'priority group' students/applications who applied before April 1 and have not yet received scholarships, state regulations require that these students be served (subject to availability of funds) before non-priority group students and/or priority group students who applied after April 1.

If funding runs out when a family with multiple children applies and is next in line, Empower Illinois will contact the family to decide how to proceed.

How is the amount of a scholarship determined? What is the maximum scholarship a student can receive?

In order to qualify for a scholarship, a student's family will have to give official documentation of their household income.

- For students whose household income is less than 185% of the Federal Poverty Level, the scholarship will be 100% of tuition and necessary fees;
- For students whose household income is between 185% and 250%, scholarships will be 75% of tuition and necessary fees; and
- For students whose household income is between 250% and 300%, scholarships will be 50% of tuition and necessary fees.

The maximum scholarship equals tuition and necessary fees or the statewide average operating expense per student, whichever is lower.

- For the 2018-2019 school year, the statewide average operating expense per student is \$12,973.
- Students identified as gifted and talented can receive up to \$14,270 annually.
- Students identified as English Language Learners can receive up to \$15,567 annually.
- Students identified as eligible to receive services under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act can receive up to \$25,946 annually.
- The scholarships are commitments for 1 year and will follow the student to a new school, subject to the availability of funds.

What documentation will be required for special education students to receive scholarships worth the higher dollar amount described above?

Students eligible for special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) will need to provide a copy of either their Individualized Education Program (IEP) or Individualized Service Plan (ISP) from their public school district.

Will special education services be the responsibility of a student's local district or their new school?

Your local district is still responsible for offering services but the individual right to services (from the district) is not as strong as it would be if a child remained in public school. We recommend you talk with the private school you are interested in having your child attend in order to get a better sense of what services might be available to your child before making any decision.

How is household income calculated? What are the household income limits?

For 2018-2019 scholarships, 2016 or 2017 federal adjusted gross income is the basis. This amount does not include the income of children under 18 attending elementary or secondary school on a full-time basis. Foster children are deemed to have a household income that does not exceed 185% of the federal poverty level. We will provide additional information regarding situations where the 1040 is unavailable.

2017 Federal Poverty Level (FPL) Chart

Household Members	185% FPL	250% FPL	300% FPL
1	\$22,311	\$30,150	\$36,180
2	\$30,044	\$40,600	\$48,720
3	\$37,777	\$51,050	\$61,260
4	\$45,510	\$61,500	\$73,800
5	\$53,243	\$71,950	\$86,340
6	\$60,976	\$82,400	\$98,880
7	\$68,709	\$92,850	\$111,420
8	\$76,442	\$103,300	\$123,960

**Note: If more than eight people in your household, for each additional person, add \$4,180 to the baseline FPL number for a family of 8 (\$41,320) and then multiply by 1.85, 2.5 and 3 to arrive at the corresponding income limits.*

How will program benefits be monitored and assessed?

All students who receive scholarships will be required to take the state assessment. ISBE will select an independent research organization to conduct an annual study examining the year-to-year learning gains of students receiving scholarships and a comparison of these learning gains to public school students with similar demographic backgrounds.

When are the scholarships available?

Scholarships are for the 2018-2019 academic year and are available on a first-come, first-served basis. Scholarship applications will be accepted by Empower Illinois beginning January 31, 2018. Scholarships will be awarded to priority students February – April. After April 1, additional awards will be sent.

Will the SCOs' application materials be available in Spanish? Will paper applications be available?

Yes, applications will be available in Spanish.

The application process will be conducted online only. Our contact center will be available to assist parents with navigating the online application. Support will likely also be provided through local schools.

What type of expenses are covered through Tax Credit Scholarships?

Tuition and necessary fees for any non-public school in Illinois are covered through tax credit scholarships.

Can the scholarship be used to cover transportation expenses?

No.

When will students/families be notified if they have been granted a scholarship?

SGOs will be responsible for notifying families. The law presently requires SGOs to process applications received before April 1 within ten business days of receipt of a completed application package that includes all required documentation. The law does not impose an application processing deadline for applications received after April 1. However, we would anticipate that the processing timelines will be similar for all applications.

How is a scholarship payment made?

Scholarship payments will be made directly to the qualified school where the student is enrolled, on a quarterly basis based on a 200-day school year calendar.

If a student decides to transfer schools mid-year, will the scholarship transfer with the student?

The scholarships will follow the student to a new school, subject to the availability of funds.

What are the terms of the scholarship? Will students have to apply annually?

Scholarships are awarded for 1 school year and students will have to reapply annually. Renewing scholarship recipients will be priorities for additional school years.

Do students need to be accepted to a participating school before they can apply for a scholarship?

Students may begin the scholarship application process prior to gaining acceptance to the school of their choice. Students however will be required to confirm enrollment at a participating school within 30 days of receiving an award commitment.

Can students apply to more than 1 SGO?

Students can apply to multiple SGOs but are not allowed to be granted more than 1 scholarship per year through this program. Students are encouraged to learn which SGO their target schools are working with and apply directly to that SGO. If a student accepts a scholarship from another SGO after applying to Empower Illinois, the family must notify Empower Illinois within three (3) business days. Failure to do so may affect the student's future eligibility for Empower Illinois awards.

Can the scholarship money be used at any non-public school?

No, the scholarship money can only be used to attend non-public schools that are "recognized" by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE). A list of those schools that are currently recognized by ISBE can be found [here](#).

Some schools are in the process of being recognized by ISBE but are not yet recognized. If a student selects one of these schools (marked as "PENDING RECOGNITION" on Empower Illinois' student application and website) while applying for a scholarship and the school has not gained recognition from ISBE by the earlier of (1) the time the student must submit to Empower Illinois a school enrollment letter or (2) a date specified by the state of Illinois, then a student awarded a scholarship will not be permitted to use the scholarship to attend the school. A student who selects a school that is marked as PENDING RECOGNITION may not be able to use scholarship money to attend that school. Empower Illinois will not provide scholarship funds for a student to attend a school that is not recognized by ISBE, even if the school is in the process of gaining recognition by ISBE.

How do I get help with the application process?

You may contact Empower Illinois directly at info@empowerillinois.org or contact your school.