

BRIDGE SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

In 2013 the York Area Early Learning Investment Commission members in partnership with the United Way of York County and OCDEL established The Bridge Scholarship Program to assist child care professionals who wanted to further their education. Prior to 2013 teachers could fund their continuing education through Project T.E.A.C.H. In FY 2011/12, however, funding for T.E.A.C.H. was discontinued due to state budget cuts resulting in a dramatic drop in the number of Pre K teachers taking courses. This Bridge Program was designed to dovetail with the State Voucher Program and get these teachers back in the classroom.

To be eligible to participate, teachers had to be employed at a Child Care Center which participated in Keystone Stars and to apply for the State Voucher Program. The Voucher Program reimbursed 90% of tuition cost for students who complete early childhood related courses with a grade of B or better. Because participants had to pay the tuition up front, most child care workers were unable to take advantage of the program. Enrollment in early childhood courses at HACC, Penn State York and York College dropped from approximately 145 with Project T.E.A.C.H. to only a handful in 2012.

The Bridge Scholarship Program addressed this problem by guaranteeing payment to the three institutions (regardless of the grade obtained) in return for their agreeing to defer tuition until the end of the semester. In addition, the Bridge Scholarship Program paid the 10% of tuition and fees not covered by the Voucher Program and provided a \$100 stipend for each course successfully completed.

Funding for the Bridge Scholarship Program was provided through donations and through Educational Improvement Tax Credits (EITC). To get the program started, we asked a small numbers of friends who appreciated the importance of high quality early childhood education to join the ELIC Members by pledging to contribute \$5,000 per year for three years. The United Way agreed to contribute 20% of the EITC Early Childhood Scholarship money they received to the program.

OCDEL provided support by increasing the tuition reimbursement to 95%, by allowing students to pre-qualify for the program and by paying the schools directly. This enhanced program was named Rising Stars.

Because funding for Project T.E.A.C.H. was reinstated last year, the Bridge Scholarship Program is currently being phased out.

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