



PROGRAM INFORMATION GUIDE

Enhanced Child Care Support and Teacher Retention Award (ECSTRA) Program

Maryland State Department of Education
200 West Baltimore Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21201

Deadline
October 3, 2023
No later than 5:00 p.m. EDT

MARYLAND STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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Deputy Superintendent of Teaching and Learning

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Assistant State Superintendent, Division of Early Childhood

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Program Description

Young children thrive when they have stable and engaging relationships with their caregivers. Yet child care providers struggle to pay their staff a living wage, which contributes to the alarmingly high turnover rates in child care settings. The Enhanced Child Care Support and Teacher Retention Award (ECSTRA) Program seeks to help stabilize the early childhood educator workforce by directing American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds directly to educators who remain in key child care roles, in the form of additional retention bonuses.

The ECSTRA program is inspired by a similar program in Virginia, the Teacher Recognition Program, which reduced [teacher turnover rates by 50% in child care centers](#). Across the United States, many state and local governments are seeking to support the early childhood education workforce through increasing compensation. A major challenge facing policymakers is, given constrained funding and a need to balance bonus sizes with reaching a larger population of early childhood educators, whether offering larger bonuses indeed leads to greater impacts on retention and other outcomes. Findings from the ECSTRA program will help to inform these and other questions, both for MSDE and for other policy contexts.

Maryland early educators may apply for the program and provide the Maryland State Department of Education with up-to-date and accurate information about their employment status. To participate in the ECSTRA program, individual early educators must apply for the program, meet certain eligibility criteria, and agree to participate in a lottery to determine the size of the retention bonus they will be eligible to receive. Applicants will be notified if they are in the ECSTRA program in October 2023. ECSTRA participants will receive their ECSTRA retention bonuses if they remain employed in the same program in an eligible role from the start of the ECSTRA program for at least 5 months to receive the first half of the retention bonus, and at least 8 months to receive the second half of the bonus.

Authorization

[American Rescue Plan Act \(ARPA\) of 2021](#)

GRANT OVERVIEW

Name of Grant Program

Enhanced Child Care Support and Teacher Retention Award (ECSTRA) Program

Purpose

There are two purposes of the ECSTRA Retention Bonus Program:

- First, MSDE seeks to further stabilize turnover in the child care workforce by using its ARPA funds to provide retention bonuses directly to early educators.
- Second, the ECSTRA program also seeks to document if/how larger bonuses and compensation can improve job satisfaction and stability in Maryland's child care workforce.

Dissemination

This Program Information Guide was released on August 22, 2023.

Deadline to Apply

MSDE early educators must apply no later than 5:00 p.m. EST on October 3, 2023.

Grant Period

The grant period is September 1, 2023 – September 21, 2024. The ECSTRA program will occur within these dates.

Funding Amount Available

MSDE has committed to allocating up to \$12,550,000 in ARPA funding to the ECSTRA program.

Number of ECSTRA program participants

Funds are limited. MSDE can offer a maximum of 7,500 eligible early educators an ECSTRA Retention Bonus. About 25% of eligible applicants will not be offered any ECSTRA Retention Bonus. To fairly determine who will and will not be offered an ECSTRA Retention Bonus, MSDE will conduct a random lottery process. The size of the ECSTRA Bonus will also be determined by this lottery process. The eligible educators in the lottery process could receive no bonus, \$1000, \$2000, or \$3000.

Randomized Controlled Trial

MSDE will also study and determine if providing larger retention bonuses in future years would cause greater retention in its early childhood workforce. To do this, the ECSTRA program will use a randomized controlled trial (RCT) design. An RCT is a scientific study where participants are randomly assigned to different groups. Some groups receive the treatment or intervention being evaluated, while the other groups serve as a comparison or control. By comparing the outcomes between the groups, researchers can determine if the treatment is effective or not, making RCTs an important method for evaluating new interventions. By applying to the ECSTRA program, the applicant agrees to participate in the randomized lottery process.

Eligibility

Individual early educators who meet the following criteria between August 22, 2023, and October 3, 2023 (the application period) are invited to apply:

- Currently holds a credential (any level) through the [Maryland Child Care Credential Program](#) established under [§ 9.5–904 of the Education Article](#). Don't have any credentials yet? Submit your credential application [here](#).
- Employed by an eligible [Maryland licensed child care program](#). Eligible licensed child care programs include Child Care Centers (CTRs), Letter of Compliance (LOCs), Family Child Care Homes (FCCHs), and Large Family Child Care Homes (LFCCHs). Early childhood programs administered through local education agencies are not eligible.
- Employed by the child care program for at least twenty (20) hours per week, in an employment role that works directly with children birth to 5 (not yet in kindergarten).

ARPA funding is limited. A maximum of 7,500 eligible applicants will be selected to participate in the ECSTRA program. Those who are selected to receive a bonus will be offered an ECSTRA Retention Bonus that will vary in size but is no less than \$1000 and no more than \$3000. Selected participants will receive the first half of their ECSTRA Retention Bonus if they remain in their eligible site and position for 5 months. They will receive the second half of their ECSTRA Retention Bonus if they remain for 3 additional months (for a total of 8 months).

Application Submission Instructions

Individual early educators interested in participating in the ECSTRA program must complete their own application using the [ECSTRA program application link](#). The ECSTRA program application will open August 22, 2023, and the deadline to apply will be October 3, 2023, no later than 5:00pm EST. Early educators will submit information that will be used to confirm:

- eligibility for the ECSTRA program (see [above](#)),
- that the early educator has read about and understands how the ECSTRA program works,
- agreement to participate in the ECSTRA program as described, and
- that by applying to the ECSTRA program, the applicant agrees to participate in research.

Program Contact

Justin Dayhoff

Assistant State Superintendent

410-767-0439

justin.dayhoff@maryland.gov

Shayna Cook

Assistant State Superintendent

410-767-0342

shayna.cook@maryland.gov

Use of Funds

Funds may only be used for allowable costs listed below: Up to \$12,550,000 for ECSTRA Retention Bonuses to eligible early childhood educators (see [eligibility requirements](#) above). Funds are limited. MSDE can offer a maximum of 7,500 eligible early educators an ECSTRA Retention Bonus. About 25% of eligible applicants will not be offered any ECSTRA Retention Bonus. To fairly determine who will and will not be offered an ECSTRA Retention Bonus, MSDE will use a random lottery. The size of the ECSTRA Bonus will also be determined by this lottery (no bonus, \$1000, \$2000, or \$3000) as follows:

- Group 1: Approximately 25% will be randomly selected to not be offered any retention bonus.
- Group 2: Approximately 25% will be randomly selected to be offered a \$1000 retention bonus.
- Group 3: Approximately 25% will be randomly selected to be offered a \$2000 retention bonus.
- Group 4: Approximately 25% will be randomly selected to be offered a \$3000 retention bonus.

Reminder: ECSTRA program participants only receive their retention bonus if they remain employed in the same site in an eligible role for a minimum of 5 months (for the first half of bonus) and 8 months (for second half of bonus). For instance, if a participant is randomly assigned to Group 2, they will only receive the first half of their bonus (\$500) if they are retained for 5 months (though March/April 2024), and they will only receive the second half of their bonus (\$500) if they are retained for 8 months (through June 2024).

Steps of the ECSTRA program

Step	Dates	What Happens
1	August 22, 2023 – October 3, 2023	<p>APPLY:</p> <p>Think you're eligible? Apply! Submit an online application using this link.</p> <p>Remember: Applying does not guarantee you will be selected for the ECSTRA program, since funds are limited.</p>
2	October 4, 2023 – October 31, 2023	<p>APPLICATIONS REVIEWED:</p> <p>MSDE reviews all applications. Outreach to child care sites to verify eligibility and employment status. Since funds are limited, MSDE will hold a random lottery to fairly decide who will become an ECSTRA participant and who will not.</p>
3	November 1, 2023 – November 8, 2023	<p>SELECTED PARTICIPANTS NOTIFIED:</p> <p>All applicants are told if they were randomly selected to be an ECSTRA program participant or not. Those who ARE selected as an ECSTRA participant are told how much their future Retention Bonus will be (\$1000, \$2000, or \$3000).</p> <p>The retention period begins.</p>
4	5 Months Later (March/April 2024)	<p>5-MONTH RETENTION CHECKED:</p> <p>MSDE reaches out to child care sites to verify which ECSTRA participants are still employed in their eligible site and role. MSDE begins distributing first half of Retention Bonus to those who have remained.</p>
5	3 Months Later (June 2024)	<p>8-MONTH RETENTION CHECKED:</p> <p>MSDE reaches out to child care sites to verify which ECSTRA participants are still employed in their eligible site and role. MSDE distributes 2nd half of Retention Bonus to those who have remained.</p>

STEP 1: ECSTRA PROGRAM APPLICATION

Individual early educators interested in participating in the ECSTRA program must complete the application process using the [ECSTRA program application Link](#). Early educators will submit information that will be used to confirm (a) eligibility for the ECSTRA program, (b) that the early educator has read about and understands how the ECSTRA program works, and (c) agreement to participate in the ECSTRA program as described.

Before starting the Application, applicants should review the [eligibility](#) criteria and collect the following information about themselves:

- Applicant's Party ID Number: This is a 4–7-digit registration number found on your Maryland Child Care Credential. Don't know your Party ID? Find it on the bottom of your Credential Certificate, contact Child Care Central at 1-877-355-1229, or email mcccredential@conduent.com. You may also contact your [Regional Licensing Office](#) for help.
- Applicant's current child care program/employer ID #:
 - At a child care center? You will need the center license #.
 - At a family child care provider? You will need the provider registration #.
 - You can look up this information [here](#).

The application will also require applicants to:

- Provide their name and contact information (email, phone)
- Confirm they have completed a credential (any level) through the [Maryland Child Care Credential Program](#)
- Select current role type (to confirm they are employed in a role that performs direct child care to children aged 0 to 5 (before kindergarten))
- Confirm the average number of hours employed per week.
- Confirm they have read this Information Guide, understand how the ECSTRA program works, and agree to participate in the ECSTRA program as described.

STEP 2: APPLICATION REVIEW PROCESS

MSDE will review applications as follows:

- At the close of the application window (October 3, 2023), MSDE will review the submitted application documentation to ensure all required submissions are received and confirm which applicants are eligible to participate in the ECSTRA program.
- Between October 4, 2023 and October 31, 2023, MSDE will work in conjunction with university research partners to reach out to site directors to verify if the applicant's employment status still meets the ECSTRA program eligibility requirements. Each applicant's program director (employer) must confirm employment status. Program directors will be provided small financial rewards to thank them for their time completing this activity.
- MSDE will use the funding amount information laid out in the "[Use of Funds](#)" section, above, to determine who will become an ECSTRA Bonus Program Participant. Since funds are limited, about

25% of eligible applicants will not be offered any ECSTRA Retention Bonus. To fairly determine who will and will not be offered an ECSTRA Retention Bonus, MSDE will use a random lottery. The size of the ECSTRA Bonus will also be determined by this lottery process (i.e., no bonus, \$1000, \$2000, or \$3000). The lottery will be implemented so that ECSTRA program participation spots will be held for both family child care providers and center-based programs, and the lottery will be conducted to ensure that early educators throughout Maryland have access to the ECSTRA program by apportioning ECSTRA program spots by Maryland jurisdiction (twenty-three counties and Baltimore City).

STEP 3: SELECTED PARTICIPANTS NOTIFIED

Applicants will be notified if they were randomly selected to participate in the ECSTRA program in November 2023. Since funds are limited, not all applicants will be randomly selected to participate in the ECSTRA Bonus Program. Notification will be sent by email from MSDE. That November 2023 email will inform applicants: (a) if they were or were not selected to participate in the ECSTRA Bonus Program and – if so—the total dollar amount of the ECSTRA Retention Bonus they can receive if they remain employed in their program/role for up to 8 months. MSDE will include program next steps in the award letter, including relevant attachments and reporting information to ensure proper distribution of bonuses to eligible staff. The notification email marks the beginning of the 5-month and 8-month retention period.

STEPS 4 & 5: EMPLOYMENT RETENTION STATUS CHECK AND RETENTION BONUSSES DISTRIBUTED

In March 2024, MSDE will reach out to child care sites to verify which ECSTRA Participants are still employed in their eligible site and role after 5 months. Each applicant's program director (employer) must confirm employment status. Program directors will be provided small financial rewards to thank them for their time completing this activity. For ECSTRA program participants who are still employed in their same eligible site and role, MSDE will distribute the 1st half of the Retention Bonus to those who have remained.

In May/June 2024, MSDE will reach out to child care sites to verify which ECSTRA Participants are still employed in their eligible site and role after 8 months. Each applicant's program director (employer) must confirm employment status. Program directors will be provided small financial rewards to thank them for their time completing this activity. For ECSTRA program participants who are still employed in their same eligible site and role, MSDE will distribute the 2nd half of the Retention Bonus to those who have remained.

Non-Discrimination Statement

The Maryland State Department of Education does not discriminate on the basis of age, ancestry/national origin, color, disability, gender identity/expression, marital status, race, religion, sex, or sexual orientation in matters affecting employment or in providing access to programs and activities and provides equal access to the Boy Scouts and other designated youth groups. For inquiries related to Department policy, please contact:

Equity Assurance and Compliance Office

Office of the Deputy State Superintendent for Operations Maryland State Department of Education

200 W. Baltimore Street - 2nd Floor Baltimore, Maryland 21201-2595 410-767-0123 - voice 410-767-0431 - fax.

410-333-6442 - TTY/TDD

The General Education Provisions Act (GEPa), Section 427

Each application must develop and describe the steps the applicant proposes to take to ensure equitable access to, and equitable participation in, the project or activity to be conducted with such assistance, by addressing the special needs of students, teachers, and other program beneficiaries in order to overcome barriers to equitable participation.

Customer Service Support Sessions

The MSDE will hold six customer service support sessions for providers. During these sessions, MSDE personnel will review the application form submission process and answer any questions about the program or process. Click on the dates and times below to attend a session:

August 23, 2023

10:00-11:00 am

[Video link](#)

August 24, 2023

6:00-7:00 pm

[Video link](#)

August 30, 2023

11:00 am - 12:00 pm

[Video link](#)

September 6, 2023

11:00 am - 12:00 pm

[Video link](#)

September 13, 2023

1:00-2:00 pm (Office Hours)

[Video link](#)

September 14, 2023

6:00-7:00 pm (Office Hours)

[Video link](#)

QUESTIONS

If you have questions about the application or the process, please contact the Program Monitor:

Dr. Shayna Cook

Assistant State Superintendent

410-767-0342

shayna.cook@maryland.gov

A list of frequently asked questions (FAQ) and answers is [here](#), and the customer service support sessions will be available on the MSDE Grants office [website](#).