



ABOUT

EMPOWER ILLINOIS AND THE TAX CREDIT SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

INVEST IN KIDS ACT

In 2017, bipartisan lawmakers passed the Invest in Kids Act. This historic law — the first of its kind in Illinois — transforms lives by providing up to \$100 million in scholarships for children from low-income and working-class families in Illinois. Empower Illinois' scholarships provide parents with a way to help their children find success!

\$100,000,000 in K-12 scholarships

Scholarships are funded through private donations to scholarship granting organizations (SGOs), like Empower Illinois, who then administer the application and scholarship process. Donations to the scholarship program are eligible for a **75% State Tax Credit**.

EMPOWER ILLINOIS

Empower Illinois is the state's largest and most comprehensive SGO. We have successfully raised the most donations, received the greatest number of applications and awarded more scholarships than any other SGO in the state.

While we serve approximately 91% of all Illinois recognized private schools in their processing of donations, scholarship awards and program compliance, we also assist students and their families through the scholarship process in an effort to help make their dreams a reality.

Empower Illinois' mission is to expand quality education options for low-income and working-class families of Illinois.

HOW IT WORKS



STUDENTS APPLY

Low-income and working-class families within 300% of the Federal Poverty Level apply for a scholarship to a private K-12 school of their choice.

DONORS GIVE

Individual and corporate donors make contributions to qualified scholarship granting organizations who then fund a scholarship. In turn, donors are eligible to receive a 75% state tax credit.

SCHOLARSHIPS ARE AWARDED & LIVES ARE CHANGED

Scholarships are awarded to families who meet the income requirements, based on available funds at their school of choice.

LEARN MORE AT EMPOWERILLINOIS.ORG



WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

TO APPLY FOR A TAX CREDIT SCHOLARSHIP

► The application is a two-part process:

01.

A reservation available **January 15, 2020 at 6:30 p.m. with submission at 7 p.m.**

02.

The complete application, which requires household documents, available **January 17, 2020.**

- Visit EmpowerIllinois.org to access the reservation form and begin your application.
- New this year, the reservation will open at 6:30 p.m., half an hour before the submission time, to allow families 30 minutes to enter their information. On page one, families will enter their information. On page two, families will review and confirm their information.
- Once you complete the form and click submit on page two, you will receive your timestamp. **Your timestamp matters and may impact your chances of receiving a scholarship.**
- You will be notified by email when the complete application is available on January 17. You can complete this step whenever you are able, but **we encourage you to submit your application before January 27 to increase your chances at receiving a scholarship.**

► Before April 1, some applicants receive priority.

Per Illinois law, priority will be given to students who meet any of the following categories:

- Are members of a household whose total annual income does not exceed 185% of the federal poverty level (\$47,637.50 for a family of 4); OR
- Reside within a focus district (for a list of focus districts, visit www.revenue.state.il.us/InvestInKids/FocusDistricts.pdf); OR
- Received a scholarship from a scholarship granting organization during the previous school year; OR
- Are siblings of students currently receiving a scholarship.

► For part two of the application, choose your most recent household and income documents. Use documents from the same year throughout your application.



PROOF OF ILLINOIS RESIDENCY

Examples: Illinois driver's license, Illinois identification card or W-2



ADJUSTED GROSS INCOME

Examples: Federal tax return, (pages 1 & 2), 1099/s or W-2,

► Visit EmpowerIllinois.org for more details, such as a complete list of the types of documents accepted.



SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATION

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

HOW DO I APPLY FOR AN EMPOWER ILLINOIS SCHOLARSHIP?

The application is a two-step process. First, visit the [Empower Illinois Website](#) opening **Wednesday, January 15, at 6:30 p.m. CT with submission at 7:00 p.m. CT** to reserve your place in line. You will complete a brief, two-page online form containing parent's name, contact information, and child's name. This will time stamp your application.

After reserving your place in line, you can access the application through your student portal on **Friday, January 17**. You will receive instructions by email about setting up your student portal after your reservation has been completed. We will begin awarding scholarships on **Thursday, January 30**. Scholarship awards are subject to the availability of funds at your school of choice. However, we recommend you submit your application before **Monday, January 27** to increase your chances of receiving a scholarship. Failing to submit your application before **January 27** may cause other students who have completed their application to receive a scholarship before you, even if you reserved a place in line in front of them.

IF I HAVE MULTIPLE CHILDREN, DO I NEED TO MAKE A RESERVATION FOR EACH CHILD?

No. We encourage you to include all children on a single reservation.

WILL I NEED TO SUBMIT ANY DOCUMENTS TO RESERVE MY SPOT IN LINE?

No. The application is a two-step process: reserve and apply. You will not submit any documents during the reservation step. Eligibility documents are only needed when you are completing the full application.

WHAT DOCUMENTS DO I NEED TO COMPLETE THE FULL APPLICATION?

You will need **proof of Illinois residency** and your **adjusted gross income** to apply. Choose your most recent household and income documents, and use documents from the same year throughout your application.

Proof of Illinois Residency

ONE of the following for the parent/custodian completing the application:

- » Illinois driver's license
- » Illinois identification card (issued by the Secretary of State)
- » Utility bill in the custodian's name
- » Statement of benefits from WIC
- » Statement of benefits from SNAP
- » W-2
- » 1099
- » Residential lease in the parent/custodian's name
- » Federal Tax Form 1040 with current address

Adjusted Gross Income

ONE of the following for the household:

- » Federal Tax Return, pages 1 & 2*
- » W-2
- » 1099/s
- » Year-end pay stub
- » Letter, on letterhead, from employer/s indicating cash wages paid

* If your federal tax return is not available to you and you receive WIC or SNAP benefits, you may submit your statement of WIC or SNAP benefits.

HOW MUCH TIME DO I HAVE TO COMPLETE THE FULL APPLICATION?

Applicants can reserve their place in line beginning **Wednesday, January 15**, at 7:00 p.m. You will complete a brief, two-page online form containing parent's name, contact information, and child's name. This will time stamp your application.

After reserving your place in line, you can access the student application in your portal on **Friday, January 17**. We will begin awarding scholarships on **Thursday, January 30**. While there is no deadline, we recommend you submit your application before **Monday, January 27** to increase your chances of receiving a scholarship subject to the availability of funds. As mentioned above, failing to submit your application before **January 27** may cause other students who have completed their application to receive a scholarship before you, even if you reserved a place in line in front of them.

WHAT LANGUAGES WILL THE APPLICATION BE AVAILABLE IN?

The application will be available in Spanish, English and Polish.

WHAT IF I DON'T KNOW WHAT SCHOOL MY CHILD WILL BE ATTENDING?

Please list three schools that your children are likely to attend, and/or your children are applying to attend. This will increase the likelihood of matching your application to available funds. When you complete the application, you will be asked to place these schools in priority order (first, second, and third). The way you rank the schools is the order in which we will try to match funds. No awards will be finalized until enrollment has been confirmed by your school of choice.

ARE ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTS REQUIRED FOR THOSE WHO RECEIVED A TAX CREDIT SCHOLARSHIP LAST YEAR FROM AN ORGANIZATION OTHER THAN EMPOWER ILLINOIS?

If a family received a scholarship from a scholarship granting organization other than Empower Illinois last year, they may be required to provide a letter from the school they attended on that scholarship. **A family must provide this letter if they do not meet any other Category 1 criteria or have an income greater than 300% FPL.** This letter will be required during part two of the application. The letter should be on school letterhead and include:

- » Student name
- » School name
- » School year the student received the scholarship for
- » Name of the organization that provided the scholarship

WHEN WILL I RECEIVE CONFIRMATION THAT MY APPLICATION WAS RECEIVED?

You will receive a confirmation email from Empower Illinois within an hour of submitting your application.

WHEN WILL I BE NOTIFIED OF MY APPLICATION STATUS?

Empower Illinois will notify you of your application status based on your self-reported data within 10 business days of receiving your application. Your application will be reviewed and verified once funds become available at one of your school choices.

WHEN WILL I BE NOTIFIED IF I AM RECEIVING A SCHOLARSHIP?

Scholarships will be granted beginning January 30, 2020 on a rolling basis as funds are available. Check your portal page for updates on your application and award status.

IF I NEED HELP DURING THE RESERVATION OR APPLICATION PROCESS, WHO CAN I CONTACT?

Please contact scholars@empowerillinois.org or (309) 416-0741 if you have questions about the application process. Assistance will be available in English and Spanish.



TAX CREDIT SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO RECEIVE A SCHOLARSHIP?

K-12 students from families with limited financial resources and income up to 300 percent of the federal poverty level, are eligible to receive a tax credit scholarship. Returning scholarship recipients can make up to 400 percent of the federal poverty level. Before April 1, priority will be given to students from each of the following categories:

- » Members of a household whose previous year's total annual income does not exceed 185% of the federal poverty level (\$47,637.50 for a family of 4); OR
- » Reside within a focus district; OR
- » Received a scholarship from a scholarship granting organization during the previous school year; OR
- » Siblings of a current scholarship recipient.

After April 1, all other qualifying students will be considered for scholarships, subject to availability of funds.

WHAT IS A FOCUS DISTRICT?

Focus districts are public school districts that 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 can be found at:

www.revenue.state.il.us/InvestInKids/FocusDistricts.pdf

WILL ADDITIONAL PRIORITY/WEIGHTING BE GIVEN TO THOSE STUDENTS WHO FULFILL MORE THAN ONE OF THE PRIORITY CATEGORIES?

No, applications will generally be reviewed based on the reservation date-and-time stamp and awarded on a first-come, first-served basis, subject to the availability of funds.

WHAT HAPPENS IF THERE IS NOT ENOUGH FUNDING TO SUPPORT ALL SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATIONS?

Applications will generally be reviewed based on the reservation date-and-time stamp and awarded on a first-come, first-served basis, subject to the availability of funds at your school of choice.

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 A STUDENT RECEIVED A 2019-2020 SCHOLARSHIP, DO THEY NEED TO REAPPLY?

Yes. Scholarships are awarded for one school year and students will have to reapply annually.

CAN STUDENTS APPLY TO MORE THAN ONE SGO?

Students can apply to multiple SGOS but can only accept one scholarship through this program. 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.

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 2019-2020 school year, the statewide average operating expense per student is \$13,763.50.
- » Students identified as gifted and talented can receive up to \$15,139.85 annually.
- » Students identified as English Language Learners can receive up to \$16,516.20 annually.
- » Students identified as eligible to receive services under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act can receive up to \$27,527 annually.
- » The scholarships are commitments for one year.

WHAT DOCUMENTATION WILL BE REQUIRED FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS TO RECEIVE SCHOLARSHIPS?

Students eligible for special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) will need to provide a copy of either their current 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.

WHAT TYPE OF EXPENSES ARE COVERED THROUGH TAX CREDIT SCHOLARSHIPS?

Tuition and necessary fees for any qualified non-public school in Illinois are covered through tax credit scholarships. The scholarship cannot be used to cover transportation expenses.

HOW IS A SCHOLARSHIP PAYMENT MADE?

Scholarship payments will be made directly to the qualified school where the student is enrolled.

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 if there are available funds.

HOW IS HOUSEHOLD INCOME CALCULATED? WHAT ARE THE HOUSEHOLD INCOME LIMITS?

For 2020-2021 scholarships, your most recent 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.

2019 Federal Poverty Level (FPL) Chart

Household Members	185% FPL	250% FPL	300% FPL
1	\$23,106.50	\$31,225.00	\$37,470.00
2	\$31,283.50	\$42,275.00	\$50,730.00
3	\$39,460.50	\$53,325.00	\$63,990.00
4	\$47,637.50	\$64,375.00	\$77,250.00
5	\$55,814.50	\$74,425.00	\$90,510.00
6	\$63,991.50	\$86,475.00	\$103,770.00
7	\$72,168.50	\$97,525.00	\$117,030.00
8	\$80,345.50	\$108,575.00	\$130,290.00

**Note: If there are more than eight people in your household, add \$4,420 for each additional person.*

HOW WILL PROGRAM BENEFITS BE MONITORED AND ASSESSED?

All students who receive scholarships will be required to take the state assessment. The Illinois State Board of Education (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.

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 (in some case 10 days) of receiving an award commitment.

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](#).