



DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

Office of Learning and Professional Development

Pat McGuire Child Welfare Education Fellowship Pilot Program

Annual Report to the General Assembly

Fiscal Year 2025

10/1/2025



Office of Learning and Professional Development

Pat McGuire Child Welfare Education Fellowship Pilot Program Annual Report to the General Assembly

Purpose

The Children and Family Services Act, 20 ILCS 505/44, requires the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (“DCFS”) to submit an annual report on the implementation of the Pat McGuire Child Welfare Education Fellowship Pilot Program (“PMCWEFP Program”) to the General Assembly on or before October 1, 2023 and each October 1 thereafter during the Pilot. This Report covers July 1, 2024-June 30, 2025.

Legislative Background

DCFS is the sole State agency for the planning and coordination of programs and services for the prevention of child abuse and neglect. DCFS also provides social services to children and their families, operates children’s institutions, and provides certain other rehabilitative and residential services. DCFS contracts with purchase of service agencies for the administration of these programs. “Purchase of service agencies” are currently referred to as “Illinois Child Welfare Contributing Agencies” (“CWCAs”).

Public Act 102-0080 directed DCFS, beginning with the 2021-2022 academic year and continuing for a period of six (6) academic years, to establish and administer the PMCWEFP Program to provide financial assistance to Eligible Students who commit to seek and maintain full-time employment in a direct services position at a CWCA anywhere in the State of Illinois upon graduation from a participating institution with a degree in social work. An “Eligible Student” is defined as a student who is enrolled in a social work program of study at a participating institution of higher education (“Participating University”) and who meets all of the qualifications as determined by DCFS. A “direct services position” is employment in intact services, foster-care licensing, adoption, or permanency or a supervisor or manager in any of those practice areas. Public Act 102-0080 was effective 7/1/2021. Public Act 102-0080 also authorized DCFS to adopt such rules as necessary to implement and administer the PMCWEFP Program.

The General Assembly subsequently passed Public Act 102-0848, which amended Public Act 102-0080 to require that the PMCWEFP Program financial assistance be provided to “a diverse pool” of Eligible Students. Public Act 102-0848 was effective 7/9/2021.

Authority is reflected in the Children and Family Services Act, 20 ILCS 505/44.

The PMCWEFP Program was initially managed by staff in the Office of the DCFS Director. As a result of staff changes and DCFS administrative operational needs, the Program is managed and administered by the Office of Learning and Professional Development.

Stipends

Subject to appropriation, DCFS may provide a PMCWEFP Program stipend to Eligible Students enrolled at a Participating University up to a maximum of \$5,000 per student per semester to be applied to the student's actual costs for tuition, University fees, and books only. "Tuition, university fees, and books" includes the customary charge for instruction and books or course material and the additional fixed fees charged for specified purposes that are required generally of students who are not program applicants under the Children and Family Services Act, 20 ILCS 505/44, for each academic year for which a Program applicant actually enrolls. Allowable costs do not include costs for room and board, transportation, fees payable only once, breakage fees, or other contingent deposits that are refundable, in whole or in part. The total maximum stipend per student shall not exceed \$10,000 per student per academic year and shall not exceed \$20,000 over the course of two academic years comprised of four (4) semesters. A semester is defined for Eligible Students enrolled in a BSW Program as full-time enrollment in a Fall or Spring term at a Participating University and for Eligible Students enrolled in a MSW Program as part-time or full-time enrollment in a Fall or Spring term at a Participating University. Stipend payments are made directly to the Participating University.

PMCWEFP Program stipends cannot be applied to the costs of Summer Terms. Unallocated Program funds do not roll-over into subsequent academic or fiscal years or result in cash payments to students. Eligible Students may receive a Program stipend if they also receive a scholarship, grant, or other financial aid. However, the student must certify that the student is not the recipient of other stipends, scholarships, grants, waivers, or other financial assistance which are applied to the same costs of tuition, University fees, or books to which stipend funds are applied.

Participating Universities are required to give preference to Eligible Students who are able to demonstrate financial need. Demonstrated financial need must be consistent with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services guidelines reflected in the Federal Register, 42 U.S.C. §9902 (2). However, financial need is not a prerequisite for Program participation and does not dictate eligibility determinations.

DCFS-University Intergovernmental Agreements

The PMCWEFP Program is only available to Eligible Students enrolled at a Participating University. To participate in the Program, a university must be an accredited public university in Illinois, maintain a social work degree program, and enter into an intergovernmental agreement with DCFS for purposes of administering the Program. Both parties are also required to designate a staff member to serve as a liaison to implement and administer the Program and Agreement. The same requirements apply for renewal of DCFS-University Intergovernmental Agreements. The term of each Agreement is two years from the date of execution by both parties. Like all DCFS intergovernmental agreements, PMCWEFP Program IDCFS-University Intergovernmental Agreements must be approved by the DCFS Office of Legal Services and are processed and overseen by the DCFS Division of Budget and Finance, Office of Contract Administration. DCFS may only use intergovernmental agreements to contract with other "public agencies" as defined in the Illinois Intergovernmental Cooperation Act, 5 ILCS 220/2, 220/5.¹ Governor Pritzker signed P.A. 104-0357 on 8/15/2025, which expanded the definition of a "Participating University" to include private universities in Illinois. The impact of this statutory modification is unclear at this time and may necessitate significant

¹ The Illinois Intergovernmental Cooperation Act, 5 ILCS 220/2, defines the term "public agency" as "any unit of local government as defined in the Illinois Constitution of 1970, any school district, any public community college district, any public building commission, the State of Illinois, any agency of the State government or of the United States, or of any other State, any political subdivision of another State, and any combination of the above pursuant to an intergovernmental agreement which includes provisions for a governing body of the agency created by the agreement" for purposes of the Act.

changes in how PMCWEFP Program administration services are acquired in FY26 after review by the DCFS Offices of Legal Services and Contract Administration.

The University Liaison at each Participating University implements and administers the Program at the university and is typically an administrative staff member or professor in the University's Social Work Department. Each University Liaison is required to recruit Eligible Students, track a student's eligibility, completion of educational requirements, the costs of each student's tuition, university fees, and books, and the application of stipend payments during an Eligible Student's enrollment at the Participating University. Stipends were not available at, or transferable to, private universities in FY25 or a public university in Illinois that did not have a social work program or effective PMCWEFP Program agreement with DCFS. The DCFS Liaison, a senior Administrator in the Office of Learning and Professional Development, implements and administers the Program at DCFS.

Each Participating University is also required to post the criteria and PMCWEFP Program eligibility requirements on its Internet website, including information which identifies that stipend awards are up to a maximum of \$10,000 per student per academic year for a maximum of two (2) academic years, with the total amount of stipends awarded to an Eligible Student up to \$20,000 for the duration of an Eligible Student's participation in the Program. This information is also reported to DCFS and the Illinois Board of Higher Education, both of which post the information on their respective Internet websites. However, each Participating University's intergovernmental agreement with DCFS must be effective at the time the university advertises or reports the availability of PMCWEFP Program stipends at the university.

Program Eligibility Requirements

Only students enrolled in a social work degree program at a Participating University who meet the educational, work payback, and repayment requirements are eligible to participate in the PMCWEFP Program. Eligible Students must meet the following Program requirements:

1. The Student shall be a citizen of the United States enrolled as a full-time Student in the Student's Junior or Senior Year in the BSW program at the University or enrolled full-time or part-time in the MSW program at the University and commit to maintaining the Student's existing enrollment status in the applicable social work course of study each Academic Year throughout the duration of the Student's participation in the Program. For purposes of the Program, full-time is defined for undergraduate and graduate Students as carrying a minimum of 12 credit hours each Fall and Spring Semesters in the social work program and part-time is defined for graduate Students as carrying a minimum of 8 credit hours each Fall and Spring Semesters in the social work program.
2. The Student shall be, and remain, in good academic standing and meet the University's personal conduct requirements in the University's applicable social work program (BSW or MSW) each semester and Academic Year.
3. The Student shall commit to graduating from the University with a BSW or MSW degree.
4. The Student shall commit to satisfactorily completing the DCFS Foundations curriculum and take and pass all exams required to obtain an Illinois Child Welfare Employee License ("CWEL").
5. The Student shall execute a contract with DCFS ("DCFS-Student Contract") prior to DCFS' payment of a Stipend.

6. The Student shall commit to, and be eligible to, work full-time in a direct services position at an Illinois CWCA upon graduation and shall commit to obtaining and maintaining the Student's CWEL in good standing. Eligibility for employment at a CWCA includes, but is not limited to, passing checks of the DCFS Child Abuse and Neglect Tracking System, Illinois Sex Offender Registry, a fingerprint-based criminal record background check by the Illinois State Police and Federal Bureau of Investigations, and DCFS licensure as a Child Welfare Employee.
7. The Student shall commit to cooperate with, and provide reasonable assistance to, the University Liaison and DCFS Liaison in their preparation of Program reports, administration of the Program, and monitoring activities throughout the duration of the Student's participation in the Program until the Student has satisfied all education, work payback, and repayment requirements.
8. Students shall certify that the Student is not the recipient of other stipends, scholarships, grants, waivers, or other financial assistance which is applied to the same costs of tuition, University fees, or books that Stipend funds are applied.
9. Students shall certify that the information and documentation the Student provides to the University Liaison regarding the Student's compliance with the Program education, work payback, and repayment requirements is true, accurate, and complete.

Students are required to provide both the Participating University and DCFS true, accurate, and complete information and documentation necessary for the implementation of the Program throughout their participation. Students acknowledge that the failure to provide such true, accurate, and complete information and documentation may result in the Student's ineligibility to participate in the Program, forfeiture of past and future Stipend payments, and repayment to DCFS, within 90 calendar days, of the total amount of Stipend payments made by DCFS and applied to the Student's University account, as determined by DCFS, while the Student was a participant in the Program. The amount of the repayment owed by the Student will be reduced by 1/9th of the total amount of Stipend payments made by DCFS and applied to the Student's University account, as determined by DCFS, for each month of any work payback requirement completed by the Student, as applicable.

If DCFS payments to which a Student is not entitled are made to a Participating University on a Student's behalf or if the Student is found to be required to repay due to default, DCFS may, after giving notification to the Student, notify the State Comptroller's Office to withhold State payments that are due to the Student in such amounts, over such periods of time, as are necessary to recover the amount of overpayment.

Student Educational Requirements

To meet the educational requirements, Eligible Students must be enrolled as either a full-time student in the student's Junior or Senior Year in a BSW Program or full-time or part-time in a MSW Program in good standing at a Participating University and successfully graduate from the Participating University with a BSW or MSW. Good academic standing is determined on the basis of the grade point average required by each university for students to be in good academic standing.

Students must immediately notify the University Liaison of any event which may impact the Student's Program eligibility or ability to satisfy the education requirements. University Liaisons, in turn, are required to notify DCFS

immediately should they become aware that a Student has become ineligible for any reason. Students shall provide the University Liaison with prior notice, if circumstances reasonably permit, of any extended leave of absence, changes to the Student's academic major(s) or enrollment status, or any event which may otherwise impact the Student's eligibility or ability to satisfy the Program education and work payback requirements. In the event of an extended leave of absence, the Student shall work with the University Liaison and a BSW or MSW program advisor, prior to beginning the leave, to create a plan for re-enrollment at the University in the applicable BSW or MSW program within two (2) years. If a Student is unable to provide the University Liaison with immediate notice of any event which may impact the Student's completion of the education requirements or prior notice of any extended leave of absence, changes to the Student's academic major(s) or enrollment status, or any event which may otherwise impact the Student's eligibility or ability to satisfy the Program education and work payback requirements, the Student shall notify the University Liaison of the change(s) in circumstances within three (3) calendar days of the change in circumstances.

If the Student fails to notify the University Liaison of an extended leave of absence prior to beginning that leave, fails to meet with the University Liaison and a BSW or MSW program advisor to create a plan for re-enrollment at the University in the applicable BSW or MSW program, or chooses not to create a plan for re-enrollment, the Student shall, within ninety (90) calendar days of beginning the extended leave, repay DCFS the total amount of all Stipend payments made by DCFS and applied to the Student's University account, as determined by DCFS, while the Student was a participant in the Program. If the Student fails to meet the terms of the Student's plan for re-enrollment, the Student shall, within ninety (90) calendar days of the date specified in the plan for re-enrollment, repay DCFS the total amount of all Stipend payments made by DCFS and applied to the Student's University account, as determined by DCFS, while the Student was a participant in the Program.

Eligible Students must also notify the University Liaison in writing, from the time of entering the Program through the Student's completion of the education requirements, of changes in address, home/residence telephone numbers, mobile telephone numbers, and campus/University and personal e-mail addresses, within fifteen (15) calendar days of such changes.

Students who fail to satisfactorily complete the education requirements must repay the total amount of stipend payments made by DCFS and applied to the student's University account, as determined by DCFS, within 90 calendar days of their last day of participation in the Program.

Application Process

The DCFS Liaison holds annual orientations with each University Liaison to reiterate the Program requirements, answer any questions that they may have, and provide additional copies of all Program documents that the University Liaison will need to effectively administer and implement the Program at the Participating University, including copies of the executed DCFS-University Intergovernmental Agreement, Fact Sheet, Stipend Application, and Demographic Chart template. The Program requirements are reflected in the Fact Sheet and DCFS-University Agreement, as well as the DCFS-Student Agreement provided later to the University Liaison and Eligible Students awarded a stipend. The DCFS Liaison also meets with each University Liaison to discuss specific issues or questions upon request and as circumstances warrant.

Because University Liaisons have the most direct contact with students and continuous access to information about students enrolled at the university, University Liaisons are responsible for identifying and selecting a diverse pool of Eligible Students to participate in the Program, subject to DCFS' review and approval. The University Liaison coordinates with DCFS and hosts informational meetings for students interested in participating in the Program

before the start of each semester to discuss the Program and provide interested students the Program Fact Sheet and Stipend Application. Students submit separate applications each semester because eligibility is not static and only Eligible Students may be considered and approved by DCFS. The submission of an application or other documents is not a guarantee that the student will be approved by DCFS to receive a stipend and does not create a legal right to a stipend.

After reviewing each application and certifying each applicant's eligibility, the University Liaison submits the completed applications, along with a completed Demographic/Contact sheet reflecting the contact information and educational status of each applicant, to the DCFS Liaison for review and final approval. The University Liaison is responsible for verifying that each applicant meets the Program eligibility requirements at the time the student completes the application and the University Liaison submits the application to the DCFS Liaison. University Liaisons also track each Student's eligibility to participate in the Program during the Student's enrollment at the Participating University and provides DCFS with regular reports on its progress in implementing the Program.

The DCFS Office of Learning and Professional Development reviews each completed application submitted by University Liaisons and makes final determinations of whether the applications are complete and the applicant meets the Program eligibility requirements. Incomplete or illegible applications are returned to the University Liaisons for correction and re-submission. If the application is complete and the applicant meets the Program eligibility requirements, the application is approved and the DCFS Liaison sends an award letter, DCFS-Student Agreement, and a copy of the Program Fact Sheet to each Eligible Student awarded a stipend and the applicable University Liaison. University Liaisons are responsible for acquiring each student's execution of the DCFS-Student Agreement and forwarding it to the DCFS Liaison for final approval and execution. The DCFS Liaison also provides each University Liaison a step-by-step DCFS-Student Agreement Execution Guide contemporaneously with the award notice under separate cover to ensure that the University Liaison is well positioned to assist students in accurately and completely executing the DCFS-Student Agreement, which includes a State-mandated Disclosure Form as well.

After the DCFS Liaison provides Eligible Students and University Liaisons the written stipend award notice, the University Liaison meets with each student awarded a stipend to complete execution of the DCFS-Student Agreement and answer any outstanding questions about the documents and Program requirements that the student may have. The University Liaison forwards the executed DCFS-Student Agreement to the DCFS Liaison for processing. DCFS-Student Agreements are managed and processed by the DCFS Office of Learning and Professional Development. The DCFS Liaison provides copies of fully-executed DCFS-Student Agreements to both the University Liaison and Student. DCFS-Student Agreements are effective upon full execution by both the Student and DCFS and, unless otherwise terminated by DCFS, expire 72 months (6 years) from the date of execution. The Terms of DCFS-Student Agreements are by DCFS fiscal years, July 1-June 30.

DCFS-Student Agreement Work Payback Requirement

Eligible Students are required to execute a DCFS-Student Agreement as a prerequisite to payment of a stipend. Stipend payments cannot be made in the absence of an executed DCFS-Student Agreement, in which the Eligible Student agrees to fulfill the specific Program education, work payback, and repayment requirements and establishes the legal rights and responsibilities of both DCFS and Eligible Students who are awarded a stipend. An Eligible Student's failure or refusal to execute a DCFS-Student Agreement automatically invalidates Program eligibility and a stipend award.

The DCFS-Student Agreement details the Program education, work payback, and repayment requirements until the work payback requirements have been satisfied or the total amount of all stipend payments made by DCFS and applied to the Student's University account are repaid in full. The Program work payback requirements provide that within six (6) months of the date of an Eligible Student's graduation from a Participating University with a BSW or MSW, the student must search for, apply for, and accept full-time Qualified Employment in a direct services position or a supervisor or manager of direct services position(s), at a CWCA located anywhere in the State of Illinois. A direct services position is employment in a position in intact services, foster-care licensing, adoption, or permanency or a supervisor or manager in any of those practice areas. Stipend recipients must maintain full-time employment in a direct services position at a CWCA located anywhere in Illinois for at least 18 months for each academic year or 9 months for each semester the Student received a Program stipend, regardless of the amount of the stipend received each semester or academic year or the total amount of the stipends received by the Student throughout the duration of the Student's participation in the Program. The work payback requirement is not prorated based on the amount of the stipend awarded to the Eligible Student. Undergraduate or graduate internships, field placements, DCFS employment, or employment at an Illinois CWCA prior to graduation do not count toward satisfaction of the Program work payback requirements. DCFS provides University Liaisons a list of current CWCA's upon request for their convenience.

Students must provide the DCFS Liaison with verification of employment that meets the work payback requirements within seven (7) calendar days of accepting such employment and every six (6) months thereafter. All work payback requirements must be completed within fifty (50) months of full execution of the DCFS-Student Agreement by both parties. The Program work payback requirements are not deferred or waived if a student enrolls in a MSW or other graduate program after undergraduate graduation. Students who receive a stipend as an undergraduate or graduate student must comply with the work payback requirement immediately after graduation. Upon request, the DCFS Liaison will provide Students information about employment opportunities statewide at CWCA's to assist them in their job search.

Eligible Students must notify the DCFS Liaison in writing, from the time of entering the Program through the Student's completion of the work payback or repayment requirements, of changes in address, home/residence telephone numbers, mobile telephone numbers, and campus/University and personal e-mail addresses, within 15 calendar days of such changes.

Work Payback Qualified Employment

Prior to accepting any employment after graduation from a Participating University with a BSW or MSW, stipend recipients must verify with the DCFS Liaison that the proposed employment qualifies to meet the PMCWEFP Program work payback requirements ("Qualified Position" or "Qualified Employment") and provide DCFS the position description on the employer's letterhead and the supervisor's name, address, telephone number, and e-mail address.

Students must immediately notify the DCFS Liaison of any event which may impact the Student's ability to satisfy the Program work payback or repayment requirements. If an Eligible Student fails to accept or otherwise obtain Qualified Employment within six (6) months of the date of the Student's graduation, the Student is required to reimburse DCFS the total amount of all stipend payments made by DCFS and applied to the student's University account, as determined by DCFS, while the student was a participant in the Program within ninety (90) calendar days of the end of the six-month search period.

Students may change their Qualified Position within the same agency or at a different CWCA located anywhere in the State of Illinois during work payback status, provided that the new role or position is a Qualified Position.

Students must report any changes in employment to the DCFS Liaison within thirty (30) calendar days of the change until their work payback or repayment obligations have been satisfied. Time spent unemployed, between Qualified Positions, or employed in non-Qualified Positions does not count toward satisfaction of the work payback requirement.

If a Student terminates the Student's Qualified Employment or is terminated from Qualified Employment for any reason other than cause prior to completion of the work payback requirement, the Student shall search for, apply for, and accept new Qualified Employment at an Illinois CWCA located anywhere in the State of Illinois within ninety (90) calendar days of termination of employment. If the Student fails to accept new Qualified Employment within ninety (90) calendar days of termination of employment, the Student shall, within 180 days of the last day of Qualified Employment, repay DCFS the total amount of all stipend payments made by DCFS and applied to the Student's University account, as determined by DCFS, while the Student was a participant in the Program. The amount of the repayment owed by the Student will be reduced by 1/9th of the total amount of stipend payments made by DCFS and applied to the Student's University account, as determined by DCFS, for each month of the work payback requirement completed by the Student prior to termination of employment for reasons other than cause.

If a Student's Qualified Employment is terminated for cause prior to completion of the work payback requirement and the termination of employment for cause is due to the Student's failure to obtain a Child Welfare Employee License ("CWEL") or results in the suspension or revocation of the Student's CWEL, the Student shall, within ninety (90) calendar days of the date of termination of employment for cause, repay DCFS the total amount of all stipend payments made by DCFS and applied to the Student's University account, as determined by DCFS, while the Student was a participant in the Program. The amount of the repayment owed by the Student will be reduced by 1/9th of the total amount of stipend payments made by DCFS and applied to the Student's University account, as determined by DCFS, for each month of the work payback requirement completed by the Student prior to termination of employment for cause.

If a Student's Qualified Employment is terminated for cause prior to completion of the work payback requirement and the termination of employment for cause does not result in the suspension or revocation of the Student's CWEL, the Student shall search for, apply for, and accept new Qualified Employment at an Illinois CWCA located anywhere in the State of Illinois within ninety (90) calendar days of termination of employment for cause. If the Student fails to accept new Qualified Employment within ninety (90) calendar days of termination of employment for cause, the Student shall, within 180 calendar days of the last day of Qualified Employment, repay DCFS the total amount of all stipend payments made by DCFS and applied to the Student's University account, as determined by DCFS, while the Student was a participant in the Program. The amount of the repayment owed by the Student will be reduced by 1/9th of the total amount of stipend payments made by DCFS and applied to the Student's University account, as determined by DCFS, for each month of the work payback requirement completed by the Student prior to termination of employment for cause.

If a Student fails to comply with any of the work payback requirements, DCFS retains its rights to enforce the terms of the DCFS-Student Agreement and seek any available legal or equitable remedies including, but not limited to, monetary damages, reasonable attorney fees, and collection costs. At its discretion, DCFS may enter into a repayment plan with the Student which extends the repayment time requirement, defer repayment, or, in extraordinary circumstances, exempt the student, in whole or in part, from the work payback requirement. All such requests must be in writing, supported by medical certifications or other documentation acceptable to DCFS, and submitted to the DCFS Liaison for review and approval. The work payback requirement will be deferred for Students who are on active duty in the United States Armed Forces.

Progress of Pilot Program

Participating Universities

DCFS recognized at the outset that the success of the Pilot Program depends, in large part, on defining clear objectives, developing a comprehensive project plan, and securing stakeholder support and engagement. DCFS encouraged its university partners to collaborate, share ideas and solutions, and provide timely feedback.

DCFS initially met with representatives of 12 Illinois public universities in 2021 to discuss the Program requirements, how the Pilot aligns with their interest in expanding opportunities available to students enrolled at their university, and to walk them through the Program implementation plan outlined above and reflected in the Fact Sheet, DCFS-University Intergovernmental Agreement, and DCFS-Student Agreement: (1) Chicago State University, (2) Governor's State University, (3) Illinois State University, (4) Northeastern Illinois University, (5) Southern Illinois University-Carbondale, (6) Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville, (7) University of Illinois-Urbana, (8) University of Illinois-Chicago, (9) University of Illinois-Springfield, (10) Western Illinois University; (11) Northern Illinois University, and (12) Eastern Illinois University. These discussions are continuous, with DCFS regularly updating the universities on Program operations and implementation. Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville declined the offer to participate in the Program. Northern Illinois University and Eastern Illinois University do not offer social work degree programs and are ineligible to participate in the Program. Eastern Illinois University, however, is in the process of initiating a BSW program and becoming a Participating University in FY26. For the two years ending 6/30/2024, four (4) universities (Chicago State University, Governor's State University, Northeastern Illinois University, and Western Illinois University) had executed participation Intergovernmental Agreements and DCFS was in continuous negotiations with the remaining five (5) universities to reach agreement on the terms of their participation.

The Intergovernmental Agreements with Chicago State University, Governor's State University, Northeastern Illinois University, and Western Illinois University all expired 6/30/2024. DCFS is currently in various stages of negotiations with the four universities to complete execution of renewal participation agreements as soon as possible.

Stipend Awards

The PMCWEFP Program embodies DCFS' commitment to providing greater access to child welfare social work education that is responsive to the professional workforce development needs of CWCAs. The goal is to award stipends to approved Eligible Students in accordance with the statute and corresponding DCFS Program requirements. DCFS also has a continuous, non-delegable fiduciary responsibility to act as a responsible steward in the expenditure of taxpayer funds. In the context of administering the PMCWEFP Program, this means that DCFS has a duty to effectively review and track all Program applications, contracts, and invoices received, eligibility determinations, awards, contract executions, completion of Program requirements, and provide support to Participating Universities and stipend recipients statewide. The DCFS Office of Learning and Professional Development worked continuously internally and externally with Illinois public universities in FY25 to expand PMCWEFP Program availability, reiterate Program requirements, and enhance both university and qualified student participation.

Because each Participating University's intergovernmental agreement with DCFS must be effective as a prerequisite to the university advertising or reporting the availability of PMCWEFP Program stipends at the university and University Liaisons identifying Eligible Students and accepting PMCWEFP Program applications, DCFS did not receive any applications or award any stipends during FY25 because all of the intergovernmental

agreements with Participating Universities expired 6/30/2024 and renewal agreements have not been completed. Negotiations are on-going. Interested universities, however, have indicated that they are poised to initiate the application process for Spring 2026.

Pilot Program Evaluation

At its core, the goal of the Pilot Program in FY25 was for DCFS to partner with Illinois public university Schools of Social Work to provide a sustainable, consistent pipeline of new direct service staff to CWCAs and, thereby, stabilize the CWCAs delivery of child welfare direct services to families and children in DCFS care and contemporaneously provide financial assistance to a diverse pool of Eligible Students who are committed to a career in social work as demonstrated by their self-selection of a social work major in college. While establishing the Program has been successful, a number of implementation challenges have been encountered:

1. DCFS, like all State Agencies, uses a standardized Intergovernmental Agreement with public universities and other similar governmental contract providers. That is the case with the PMCWEFP Program DCFS-University Intergovernmental Agreement. In this instance, however, universities routinely request numerous material changes to the standard Agreement, which results in extended negotiations and successive execution of updated agreements by universities which had earlier executed a Program intergovernmental agreement with significantly different terms. DCFS values all input in the collaborative process with its partners and remains in negotiations with universities at this time, mindful of the need to be consistent in the terms offered to all Participating Universities. The existing DCFS-University Intergovernmental Agreement reflects DCFS' concerted effort to provide Program availability to as many diverse, Eligible Students statewide as possible.
2. The PMCWEFP Program is routinely misidentified as an unconditional scholarship and the initial determinations of Student eligibility tend to focus primarily on a Student's financial need or personal circumstances, as opposed to the Program eligibility requirements.
3. Implementation of the PMCWEFP Program requires the continuous allocation of significant, dedicated administrative resources and oversight, which are not unlimited. Administrative responsibilities to implement the Program are extensive for both DCFS and each University. Both the DCFS and University Liaisons' primary duties were expanded to include implementation of the Program, which is time sensitive. This is especially so for the DCFS Liaison, who is responsible for Program implementation at all Participating Universities. Each University Liaison is responsible for implementing and administering the Program at their individual university exclusively.
4. Applications were previously submitted to DCFS at unpredictable times during the academic year and were routinely incomplete and/or inaccurate, which necessitated multiple reviews, corrections, and re-submissions, which delayed final eligibility determinations and awards.
5. Students are reluctant to enter into legally-binding agreements as a prerequisite to stipend payments.

These challenges have delayed PMCWEFP Program implementation. Although the Pilot has expanded the opportunities available to Eligible Students, more work remains to be done to improve the messaging to Students prior to the application process and to address their apparent hesitancy about executing DCFS-Student Agreements. It is also equally as important that the University Liaisons' administrative capacity and ability to appropriately identify Eligible Students and process complete and accurate applications in a timely manner be enhanced as well.

Both DCFS and its university partners all agree and recognize the benefits of the Pilot Program and the importance of their partnership in facilitating its short-term and long-term success. Continued engagement, effective communication, and informed participation are critical to the productive implementation of the Program as the Pilot progresses. Based on the lessons learned, DCFS is presently taking steps to achieve those objectives in the following ways:

1. DCFS is engaging with universities to complete negotiations with interested Participating Universities as soon as possible.
2. DCFS is conducting beta testing of a new DCFS electronic on-line portal to enhance both the DCFS and University Liaisons administrative capacity to make the application and approval processes more efficient. Stipend recipients will also be able to access information regarding their work-payback status, report their Qualified Employment, and access needed forms. The portal is expected to be operational by January 1, 2026.
3. DCFS is updating all existing PMCWEFP documents and creating Program brochures and posters to provide to each Participating University.
4. DCFS will be convening additional orientations for University Liaisons throughout the year and providing University Liaisons additional resources on the PMCWEFP Program electronic on-line portal.
5. DCFS will be attending select university student recruitment events on campus in collaboration with Participating Universities to directly answer any outstanding questions about Program requirements, particularly DCFS-Student Agreements.
6. DCFS has established defined application periods to enhance efficiency and ensure that all applications are received in a timely manner.
7. DCFS will be identifying defined time frames within which IDCFS-Student Agreements must be fully executed so that stipend payments can be made to Participating Universities and credited to the accounts of stipend recipients in a timely manner.

Future Program evaluations will assess the effectiveness of these efforts.

Final DCFS OLPD PMCWEFP Program Annual Report 10-1-2025