



Nueces County Community Action Agency
Birth-To-Five Head Start Program
Educational Assistance Guidelines



Training & Technical Assistance
101 South Padre Island Drive
Corpus Christi, TX 78405
(361) 883-7201

Introduction

Nueces County Community Action Agency Birth-to-Five Head Start Program is committed to improving the quality of the services received by our children by raising the educational qualifications of the employees. According to the *Head Start Reauthorization Act of 1998*, it is mandated that “at least 50 percent of all Head Start teachers nationwide in center-based programs have – an associate, baccalaureate, or advanced degree in early childhood education, or an associate, baccalaureate, or advanced degree in a field related to early childhood education, with experience in teaching preschool children.” (Sec. 648A). Additionally, the *Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007* mandates that at least 50% of Head Start teachers have a BA/BS or higher by September 2013, and all assistant teachers must have at least a CDA or be enrolled in a CDA or degree (AA or higher) program, with completion within 2 years. EHS Child Development Specialists are required to complete their CDA within one year of hire, if they do not already hold a higher credential. To meet these objectives, NCCAA will provide opportunities for teachers and assistant teachers to further their education. Teachers and assistant teachers are the priority for educational assistance over other employees of NCCAA as the federal mandates address their positions specifically. The following guidelines may be subject to change and are contingent upon funding availability.



Educational Assistance Provisions

Educational assistance may be provided through the following channels:

1. **Tuition Assistance:** NCCAA may pay for *college tuition and book fees* in part or in full.
2. **Educational Leave:** Staff members may request *educational leave*, which will enable them to attend daytime classes while receiving regular pay. Compliance of program staff and child ratios are factors which will affect educational leave approval. Educational leave usually may not exceed four hours per week. Extended educational leave may be afforded for teachers with 12 hours or less remaining until the completion of their degree. Educational leave may be recognized in the following situations:

- In those situations when the course is not offered outside of regular daily operation hours;
- When staff has been with the agency more than 90 days, and has less than 24 credit hours remaining to complete their degree.
- On a case-by-case basis when extenuating circumstances exist.

3. **CDA's**

- NCCAA will pay CDA renewal fees for assistant teachers without an Associate's degree *only*. Performance Standards mandate that infant/toddler child development staff obtain a CDA within one year of employment, if they do not already hold a higher degree (AA or BA). The agency covers the cost of a CDA for EHS child development specialists and renewals for those without an AA.

Who Is Eligible to Receive Educational Assistance?

1. **Teachers /Child Development Specialists/Site-Based Managers:**

- a. Obtaining an Associate's or Bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education, Child Development, or a related field.

b. Teachers with an Associate's or advanced degree in an unrelated field who need to complete 18 credit hours or less in Child Development and/or Early Childhood as per a condition of employment.

2. **Assistant Teachers:**

Regular full-time assistant teachers obtaining a CDA or an Associate's degree in Early Childhood Education, Child Development, or a related field.

3. **Other NCCAA Support Staff:**

Obtaining an Associate's or Bachelor's degree in a field related to their job classification with fewer than 12 credit hours remaining from degree completion.

Please Note: A field related to Early Childhood Education or Child Development must include at least 6 courses in Child Development, Early Childhood, or Interdisciplinary Studies. Education Assistance is not available for employees seeking Graduate Degrees at this time. New employees must complete their 90 day probationary period to be eligible to receive Educational Assistance benefits.



Will I qualify automatically for assistance if I meet the requirements?

NCCAA is a non-profit organization. Therefore, we are limited by funds on how many teachers may attend school on agency money. Because of this, selection criterion will be implemented, if needed, to ensure that selection of teachers/assistant teachers receiving tuition assistance is fair and systematic. Most importantly, staff that do not follow the protocol and turn in all required documentation **cannot be** considered. The Preschool Division aims to send 13 teachers and 13 assistant teachers, for a total of 26 staff, to school on agency funding each semester.

All classroom staff is strongly encouraged to apply. Taking courses not only helps to further your career path in the agency, but is also beneficial to your own growth as a caregiver of young children. A points system is in place to evaluate the needs of all applicants (please see "Educational Assistance Worksheet" that is attached).

- Every year of employment with NCCAA is worth 4 points. Partial points will be awarded (i.e. 1.5 years = 6 points)
- GPA on a 4.0 scale will be counted as points equal to the grade (i.e. 2.5 GPA = 2.5 points)
- Staff who are Head Start parents will also receive 1 additional point to overall score.

For example – Teacher ABC has worked with the agency for 3 years and has a 2.75 GPA, so she has 14.75 points.

- Teachers will be notified about eligibility upon final selections for the semester.



How many courses will NCCAA pay for under the Educational Assistance Program?

The number of courses NCCAA will pay for during the September – August school year will vary according to the number of credit hours that the staff member has already accrued towards the target degree and the degree that the staff member is pursuing:

Associate's Degree

- <15 credit hours: 2 courses per school year
- 16-39 credit hours: 3 courses per school year
- 40 credit hours-Graduation: 4 courses per school year

Books

Employees who successfully complete courses may keep their textbooks for professional use. If a student withdraws from a course or gets an incomplete or failing grade, and does not pass or retake the course upon the next available class. The staff will be responsible for reimbursing NCCAA for the cost of the book(s).

Bachelor's Degree

- NCCAA will pay for both tuition and book fees for four courses per school year (September-August) of transferable core curriculum at a two-year college **OR**
- NCCAA will pay up to \$2500 per year for tuition at a local university, which can be used in either one semester or spread through out the school year as needed.

Books

NCCAA will pay up to \$200 in book fees per semester at a university, not to exceed \$600 per school calendar year (September – August). Employees who successfully complete courses may keep their textbooks for professional use. If a student withdraws from a course or gets an incomplete or failing grade, and does not pass or retake the course upon the next available class. The staff will be responsible for reimbursing NCCAA for the cost of the book(s).

∫

How Do I Sign Up?

1. Tuition and Book Fees Assistance

To be eligible for educational assistance:

- ❖ Apply for financial aid. The T/TA Specialist is available to assist staff members in completing financial applications. If a Pell Grant is denied, then NCCAA will pay for the eligible staff member upon receiving proof of financial aid rejection, which is provided by the college or university. The FAFSA priority deadlines are as follows:

Fall semester deadline: March 15

Spring semester deadline: October 1

- ❖ To receive assistance, a completed education packet must be submitted to the T/TA Specialist **three weeks** (twenty-one calendar days) prior to the start date of the course. Completed packets must include **all** of the following:
 1. A signed and approved degree. Degree plans may be obtained from the department's advisor at the college or university.
 2. Proof of financial aid (Pell Grant) rejection.
 3. An *Educational Assistance Agreement* form, provided by the T/TA Specialist, agreeing to the terms of receiving educational assistance benefits. Failure to submit this form will result in denial of eligibility.
 4. Proof of registration for the semester. Discuss your degree plan, tentative course schedule, and projected date of completion with the T/TA Specialist. Registration can be done via telephone, web or on-site at the college or university.

Staff must submit course grades within 30 calendar days of completion of the academic semester, or they will be responsible for paying back the tuition/book assistance.

2. Educational Leave (see page 2)

- ❖ Choose a tentative course schedule to present to your immediate supervisor.
- ❖ Request approval for educational leave by completing an Employee Notification Form.
- ❖ Register for course(s) via telephone, web, or on site after receiving managerial approval.
- ❖ Submit course grades within 30 calendar days of completion of the academic semester.
- ❖ Keep in mind that staff can only be considered for educational leave if they have 12 hours or less remaining until degree completion and has been with the agency more than 90 days.

Conditions of Ineligibility

As established by terms outlined in NCCAA Employee Handbook

1. Course Withdrawal

- **Employees who voluntarily withdraw from a course or approved educational activity while receiving NCCAA Educational Assistance will become ineligible to receive Educational Assistance for one full year from the end of the semester in which the ineligibility occurred.** For example, a withdrawal in the Spring of 2017 will result in ineligibility until Summer of 2018.
- Employees will be responsible for reimbursing NCCAA in full for fees incurred such as tuition and textbook(s) costs for the approved education activity via payroll deduction or otherwise at the option of the Agency.

2. Failing Grades

Employees must successfully complete a course with an "A", "B", or "C" in the major field of study. A "D" in the major field of study will be considered a failing grade.

- Employees who earn a grade of “F” in any enrolled course while receiving NCCAA Educational Assistance will become ineligible to receive Educational Assistance for one full year from the end of the semester in which the ineligibility occurred.
 - Employees will be responsible for reimbursing NCCAA in full for fees incurred such as tuition and textbook(s) costs for the approved education activity via payroll deduction or otherwise at the option of the Agency.
 - **Employees who have earned a “D” in their major field of study must repeat the same course at their own expense and earn a grade of “C” or higher the following semester (or the next semester that the class is offered) in order to retain Educational Assistance benefits. A subsequent grade of “D” or lower will then result in suspension of benefits for one full year and Agency reimbursement.**
3. **Failure to Submit Grades**
- Employees who do not submit semester grades or proof of completion of an approved education activity within 30 days of completion will be subject to reimbursing the Agency for all related tuition and book fees incurred. Eligibility to receive Educational Assistance will be suspended until such documentation is received.
4. **Job Resignation**
- NCCAA is making a significant investment in its employees. **Those employees who leave within three (3) years (for baccalaureate or advanced degree) or one (1) year (for Associates degree or CDA) of completion or withdrawal from an approved activity will be subject to deduction of these fees from their final paycheck, as per the *Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007*.**
5. **Poor Job Performance (Per Employee Handbook)**

Frequently Asked Questions

What If I Am Not Sure Which Course of Study to Pursue or Have Questions Regarding Enrolling in College?

Staff members are encouraged to seek assistance in choosing a course of study. The T/TA Specialist, in conjunction with the college’s academic advisor, can help advise you to determine which courses and career track will best fit your specific needs and job classification. The T/TA Specialist is available to meet with the employees at their job site to discuss career goals and the college enrollment process.

I didn’t apply for financial aid by the deadline.
Can I apply late and get reimbursed at the end of the semester?

No. Staff members who do not go through the agency education assistance process prior to the beginning of the semester will not be reimbursed, but may be eligible to receive benefits the following semester if denial of financial aid is then presented. The T/TA Specialist will provide information on how to acquire a FAFSA. The FAFSA is available online at www.fafsa.ed.gov. **If staff signs up for courses and pays on their own, they will not be reimbursed later by the agency.**

I am on probation with financial aid.

Am I still eligible to receive Educational Assistance benefits?

Yes. If you are not eligible to receive financial aid from your college but meet all other Agency eligibility requirements, then the Agency will offer Educational Assistance upon receiving a letter of ineligibility from the Financial Aid Office of the college attended.

QUESTIONS?

Please contact T/TA with any questions regarding Educational Assistance:

T/TA Specialist,

Jeannine Johnson, T/TA Birth to Five Head Start Program, 654-7922

∫

Educational Assistance Worksheet

Employee Name: _____

Center: _____

Position: _____

Years of employment with NCCAA: _____

GPA: _____

Degree pursuing: _____

Hours earned: _____

Amount of agency assistance provided in the present program year: Tuition: _____

Books: _____

Number of Classes: _____

Requirements

	Yes	No	N/A
Has employee turned in a signed and approved degree plan?			
Has employee signed the Educational Assistance Agreement Form within the past 12 months?			
Does employee have proof of registration for the upcoming semester?			
Is all paperwork completed three weeks before the start date of the semester?			
Does employee have proof of denial of financial aid?			
For educational leave, does employee have managerial approval?			
For educational leave, is employee within 24 credit hours of degree completion?			

Ineligibility (see guidelines for length and specifications of ineligibility)

	Yes	No	N/A
Has employee turned in all grades from semesters where they received NCCAA funds?			
Has employee withdrawn from a course while receiving NCCAA funds?			
Has employee received a failing grade while receiving NCCAA funds?			
Has employee already received all of the aid they are eligible for with the agency during this school year?			

Points

Guideline	Points	Employee Information	Total
Years of employment with NCCAA	4 points per year		
Grade Point Average (on a 4.0 scale)	Equal to grade		
Head Start Parent	1 Point, if applicable		

Notes: _____

Employee is _____ granted _____ denied educational assistance for the semester _____ at _____.

Worksheet calculated by: _____ Date: _____