

## **PROGRAM STRUCTURE, ELIGIBILITY, AND HOW TO APPLY**

### **How will you ensure my SITE DIRECTOR verifies my employment status?**

We will make every effort to help site directors verify applicants' employment status through an Employment Verification ("EmVer") Form. The Employment Verification process will be designed to be brief. Site directors will be given several weeks to complete this process, they will receive reminders, MSDE will reach out to non-responding site directors, and they will be provided with a small \$35 thank you gift card for completing the process. In October and November, site directors will receive an email invitation to complete the EmVer Form, they will receive 4 reminder emails, and Regional Licensing Offices will call and email non-responders. We will also remind ECSTRA Applicants to check in with their site leader to ensure they have completed the process.

### **I have not received information about the results of my ECSTRA Application. What do I do?**

ECSTRA Applicants with a complete, valid application received individual email notifications of these ECSTRA application, eligibility verification, and ECSTRA Lottery results on 11/16/2023. Emails were sent to email addresses on file in MSDE Data Systems. Please check your spam folder. These emails contain important information. If you believe your email address is incorrect in the MSDE Data Systems, contact your Regional Licensing Office to update the email address. Include your full name and Party ID to help facilitate this process. This may help ensure that you're not missing important email communications from MSDE in the future. You may also reach out to your site leader, who will also receive a copy of the ECSTRA Application results. Finally, MSDE will post an anonymized list of ECSTRA Applications and results on the ECSTRA Program website in late November 2023.

### **I was not included because my required Maryland Child Care Credential was marked as expired and not current as of the ECSTRA Application Deadline, October 03, 2023. I think this is an error. What do I do?**

One of the eligibility requirements to participate in the ECSTRA Retention Bonus Program was that applicants must currently hold a credential (any level) through the Maryland Child Care Credential (MDCCC) Program established under § 9.5-904 of the Education Article at the time of the ECSTRA Application deadline, October 03, 2023. If MSDE's data system shows that an ECSTRA applicant did not have a current (unexpired) MDCC Credential on October 03, 2023, the ECSTRA Applicant was not eligible to participate and was not included on the Site License's Employment Verification Form. If you think MSDE's data systems are in error, reach out to the Child Care Credentialing Office with a copy of your Credential. For your reference, this is a picture of what [these look](#) like. Here is the contact information for Contact Child Care Central at 1-877-

355-1229 or email [mcccredential@conduent.com](mailto:mcccredential@conduent.com). Include your name, your Party ID, and a copy of your credential.

### What is the Enhanced Child Care Support and Teacher Retention Award (ECSTRA) Program?

The ECSTRA Program is a Retention Bonus program for eligible early educators. It pays all program participants a monetary bonus if they remain in their site and role for an up to 8-month period. The purpose of the program is to reduce turnover rates in MSDE licensed child care providers. As part of the ECSTRA Program, MSDE will also be experimenting with offering even larger retention bonuses for a small group of sites that will be randomly selected. The purpose of this experiment is to provide definitive evidence to future policy makers about the importance of offering even larger wage increases for early educators in upcoming years.

### Who Applies to the ECSTRA Program?

Individual early educators interested in participating in the ECSTRA program must complete their own application using the ECSTRA program application link. Site owners/directors/operators do not apply to the ECSTRA Program on behalf of their employees. Each employee must submit an application.

### How do I apply for the ECSTRA Program?

Please complete the application, which you can find in the [Program Information Guide](#).

### What are the basic eligibility requirements to be considered for participation in the ECSTRA Program?

Please review the [Program Information Guide](#).

### When will I know if I have been invited to participate in the ECSTRA Program?

November 16, 2023 you will be notified via email.

### I am an ECE teacher employed by a public school. Am I eligible to participate in the ECSTRA Program?

No, teachers employed by public school divisions are not eligible for the ECSTRA Program. This determination was made due to the limited availability of funds and a commitment to more fully supporting child care teachers who are far less financially compensated and more likely to experience high rates of turnover which can negatively impact teacher-child interactions.

### I applied for the ECSTRA Program, does this mean that I will definitely be part of the ECSTRA Program?

Completing an ECSTRA Program Application is a necessary first step, but it DOES NOT guarantee you will be selected to participate. Early educators must apply, and then MSDE will review applications and conduct an initial employment verification to confirm eligibility. 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).

### How did the ECSTRA Program lottery work?

All eligible ECSTRA applicants at each licensed child care site were randomized together, so that ECSTRA Applicants working together received the same results from the ECSTRA Lottery.

### Why will some ECSTRA Program participants receive larger ECSTRA Retention Bonuses than others?

One purpose of the ECSTRA Program is to conduct essential research to help shape future compensation policies for early educators. The ECSTRA Program will determine the relationship between the varied size of retention bonuses and job satisfaction and stability in MSDE's child care workforce. 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 Maryland and for other policy contexts.

### What needs to happen at my SITE so I can apply for the ECSTRA Program?

For ECSTRA, individual early educators apply, not sites. However, when asked, site directors must verify your employment status. This occurs once at the beginning of the Program and twice during the program to determine if you have remained in your site and role and will therefore receive your ECSTRA Bonus. If your site director fails to complete the Employment Verification process, you may not be eligible to participate.

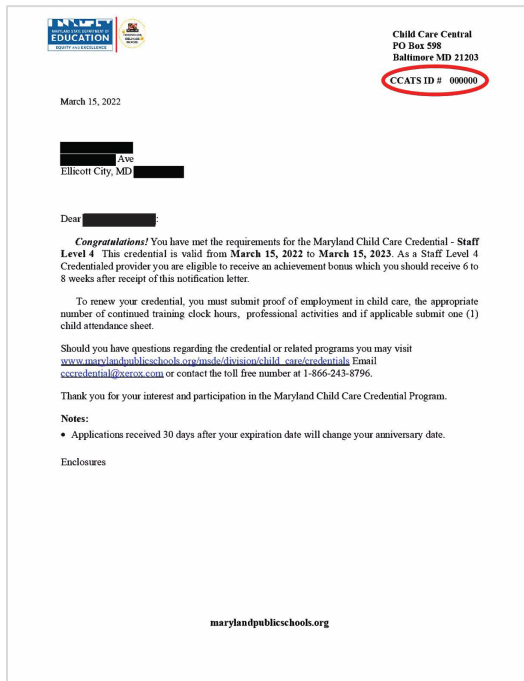
### How will you ensure my SITE DIRECTOR verifies my employment status?

We will make every effort to help site directors verify applicants' employment status. The Employment Verification process will be designed to be brief. Site directors will be given several weeks to complete this process, they will receive reminders, MSDE will reach out to non-

responding site directors, and they will be provided with a small thank you gift card for completing the process.

### How can I find out my Party ID number for the Credential Program?

Your Party ID and CCATS ID are the same. This information can be found at the top of your award letter and on the bottom of your Certificate of Achievement. Please see the images below to locate where this information can be found.



### I am a site director. Am I eligible for the ECSTRA Program?

Any early educator who meets the eligibility requirements for ECSTRA may apply. If you: (A) work in an MSDE licensed child care program, AND (B) are in an employment role that works directly with children birth to 5 (not yet in kindergarten) for at least 20 hours per week, AND (C) currently hold a valid credential through the Maryland Child Care Credential Program, you are eligible for the ECSTRA Program. If you are a site leader (owner, director, principal, operator, etc.) only and do not work directly with children age 0-5, you are not eligible. If you are a site leader who does meet all three criteria above, then you are eligible and on your application, be sure to describe your current position as "Teacher and Site Leader" (rather than "Site Leader only").

### I made a mistake on my ECSTRA Application or I have updated info. Can I re-apply?

Please take care to complete your application accurately. However, if you make a mistake you can complete the application again. MSDE will use your last, complete application.

## **MAINTAINING ELIGIBILITY (FOR THOSE INVITED TO PARTICIPATE IN ECSTRA)**

The following FAQs apply to early educators who apply to ECSTRA and are invited to participate in November 2023.

### **My site leader has changed. How do I ensure their contact information is updated so they receive the Employment Verification (EmVer) Form?**

EmVer Forms will be sent via email in March 2024 and again in June 2024. EmVer Forms will be sent to the preferred email address provided by the site leader on their October 2023 EmVer Form. Regional Licensing Offices will also conduct outreach. If a site leader receives an EmVer form but is no longer the correct contact for that site, they will have the opportunity to provide an email address for the new site leader. A site leader must complete the EmVer Forms in order for ECSTRA Participants at their site to receive any ECSTRA Retention Bonuses. If your site leader has changed, please email your Licensing Specialist.

### **How long do I need to remain in my role to receive my ECSTRA Bonus?**

ECSTRA Bonuses will be paid in two halves. You must remain employed from the start of ECSTRA Program (October 25, 2023):

- ...through retention period 1, for at least 5 months (end date March 13, 2024) to receive the first half.
- ...through retention period 2, for at least 8 months (end date June 05, 2024) to receive the second half.

### **What do I need to do to receive my ECSTRA Bonus?**

You must remain employed in the same program in an eligible role from the start of ECSTRA Program October 25, 2023) for at least 5 months (March 13, 2024) to receive first half of bonus, and at least 8 months (June 05, 2024) to receive the second half of the bonus. When asked, your site director must confirm your employment status (see FAQs above).

### **I was invited to participate in the ECSTRA Program, but I chose to leave before the retention period end dates (see above). Can I still receive the ECSTRA Retention Bonus?**

No. The ECSTRA Program is intended to increase stability and retention in child care sites. If you choose to leave before one of the retention period end dates, you will not receive the corresponding ECSTRA Retention Bonus.

**I voluntarily moved from the site where I first applied to another site. Will I still be eligible to receive the ECSTRA Bonuses?**

No. Retaining and rewarding talented early educators and providing consistency for young children is key to improving early learning experiences in child care settings. As such, movement of early educators among different sites disqualifies them from receiving their ECSTRA Bonus.

**When I was invited to participate in the ECSTRA Program, I was working at least 20 hrs/week in an eligible role. I asked my site to reduce my hours. Will I still be eligible to receive the ECSTRA Bonus?**

No. If you voluntarily reduce your hours below 20 hours per week, then you will not receive your ECSTRA Retention Bonus.

**When I was invited to participate in the ECSTRA Program, I was working in an eligible role directly with children aged birth to five (before kindergarten). Now I am no longer working with the same age group. Will I still be eligible to receive the ECSTRA Bonus?**

No. The ECSTRA Program is designed to support early educators working directly with this age group.

**During one of the ECSTRA program retention periods (see above), I voluntarily took a break from working in either my original child care site or my eligible role. But I returned before the retention period end date(s). Will I still be eligible to receive the ECSTRA Bonus?**

No. The ECSTRA Program is intended to help stabilize the turnover in child care sites. Therefore, continuous employment in your site and role is required to receive your ECSTRA Bonus. There are exceptions for maternity, family medical, or sick leave. See next FAQ.

**During a part of the ECSTRA Program retention periods, I was away from my site on maternity leave, family medical leave, or sick leave. Will I still be eligible to receive the ECSTRA Bonus?**

Yes, you will still be eligible to receive the ECSTRA Bonus if you either return to your eligible site/role before the retention period's end date or you reach an agreement with your site to return to your site and role after your leave ends.

**My site closed during one of the ECSTRA Program retention periods. Will I still be eligible to receive my ECSTRA Bonus?**

If an ECSTRA Program participant's site closes prematurely, the participant may remain eligible to receive their ECSTRA Retention Bonus if they move to a new eligible site and role no later than the retention period end date. Their new site director will be asked to verify their employment status. However, remember that voluntary site changes disqualify participants from receiving their ECSTRA Bonus.

**My site is part of a franchise with multiple locations. I was involuntarily moved to a different site within the same franchise. Will I still be eligible to receive the ECSTRA Bonus?**

Yes. If you are involuntarily moved to a different site within the same franchise, you will still be eligible to receive your ECSTRA Bonus. Keep in mind, however, that voluntary site moves always disqualify participants from receiving an ECSTRA Retention Bonus.

**My site director moved me to an ineligible role and/or ended my employment due to problems with my work performance. Can I move to a new site and role and remain eligible to receive my ECSTRA Bonus?**

No. If you are removed from your eligible role or site based on performance, you are no longer eligible to receive an ECSTRA Bonus.

**My site director told me they need to reduce my hours below 20 hours/week for budgetary reasons. Will I still be eligible to receive the ECSTRA Bonus?**

If your hours are reduced by your site director to below 20 hours/week for budgetary reasons during the ECSTRA Program period, you will remain eligible to receive the ECSTRA Bonus (provided that you continue to meet all other requirements).

## **PROGRAM PAYMENTS (FOR THOSE WHO MAINTAIN ELIGIBILITY)**

The following FAQs apply to ECSTRA participants who maintain eligibility throughout the ECSTRA Program period.

**When will I get my ECSTRA Retention Bonuses?**

Invited ECSTRA Program participants who remain employed in the same program in an eligible role for at least 5 months (March 13, 2024) will receive the first half of their ECSTRA Bonus in approximately April 2024. Those who stay at least 8 months (June 05, 2024) will receive the second half of their ECSTRA Bonus in approximately June 2024.

**Is the ECSTRA Program Retention Bonuses payment taxable? Will taxes be taken out of my payment?**

Yes. ECSTRA Program Retention Bonuses are considered income and are taxable. The bonus will be included in the 1099 tax form sent annually by the Comptroller's Office.

**Do I need to complete a W-9 form to receive my ECSTRA Bonus?**

W-9 forms are collected for employees who hold a credential through the Maryland Child Care Credential Program (MCCC). Since holding a credential through MCCC is an eligibility requirement

for the ECSTRA Program, we anticipate that MSDE will already have your W-9. Please contact the Maryland Child Care Credential Program to confirm.

### How will I receive my ECSTRA Bonus?

You will receive your ECSTRA Bonus by check or direct deposit.

### How can I look out for my ECSTRA Bonus?

Just before payments are processed, you will be notified via email about whether you will be receiving an ECSTRA Bonus.

### What can I do with the money I receive as part of the ECSTRA Program?

Just like other salary pay, there are no rules, guidelines, or limits on what participants can choose to do with the ECSTRA Bonus. There is no expectation that participants use this ECSTRA Bonus for work related expenses. Participants can determine for themselves how to use the funds received through ECSTRA.

### Do I have to cash the check immediately after receiving it?

Participants are strongly encouraged to cash or deposit checks as early as possible. Checks must be cashed either by the expiration date on the check or no later than 08/31/2024 (whichever is earlier). The expiration date will be listed on the check. If checks are NOT cashed or deposited prior to expiration, they will NOT be automatically reissued without additional confirmations required from participants.

### What do I do if I have a problem finding, cashing, or depositing the check?

Please contact the [Comptroller of Maryland](#) for direct assistance.

### I think my payment method info is incorrect. How can I update it?

If you need to update your direct deposit information, please complete this form and email it and any attachments to [GADCSC@marylandtaxes.gov](mailto:GADCSC@marylandtaxes.gov).

Also, submit a change of address form to the Maryland Child Care Credential Program. The form can be found on the Division of Early Childhood [website](#).

### What needs to happen at my site so I can receive my ECSTRA Bonus?

When asked, your site leader must verify your employment status. This occurs once at the beginning of the Program and twice during the program to determine if you have remained in your site and role and will therefore receive your ECSTRA Bonus. If your site leader fails to complete the Employment Verification process, you will not be eligible to receive your ECSTRA Bonus.