

Path4Ward Program FAQs

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Path4Ward supports schools and districts in implementing a pilot for low-income students who are eligible to graduate early to receive funding for postsecondary education or workforce training.

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1. What is Path4Ward?

- Path4Ward was created by SB21-106, under the title “Fourth-Year Innovation Pilot Program.” The first school districts applied for inclusion in the pilot in Fall 2022 and launched their programs in Spring 2023. A second cohort of districts applied in Fall 2023 and launched in Winter 2023. Both cohorts will conclude their pilots with the final graduating class in June 2026. The program will terminate on December 31, 2027 after the expiration of the last student scholarships.
- Path4Ward allows early high school graduates from low-income households to receive funding for postsecondary education expenses or training programs during what would have been their fourth year of high school.

2. Definitions?

- Eligible Graduate

- i. A low-income student who has graduated early from a high school participating in the pilot program.
 - ii. Low-income means a student who was eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (FRL) at any point of grades eight through twelve, OR who satisfies Pell Grant income requirements.
 - iii. Students remain eligible for up to eighteen months after official date of graduation.
- Local Education Provider
 - i. A school district, board of cooperative educational services, or charter school authorized by a school district or the state charter school institute.
- Postsecondary Program
 - i. A degree or certificate program (except in theology) offered by an institute of higher education.
 - ii. A training program approved by the CDLE.

3. Are all high school students eligible to participate?

- Students from low-income households are eligible to participate based on FRPL status and/or Pell grant eligibility.
- Students currently in 9th, 10th or 11th grade that are interested in graduating early can join future cohorts (through SY 2025-26).

4. Can I get a detailed description for the process of qualifying eligible students?

- First, a student must be checked for low-income status according to the Path4Ward Program definition. They must show either or both of:
 - i. FRL eligibility at least one point between grades eight through twelve
 - ii. Meeting income requirements for eligibility for the federal Pell Grant or a successor program, typically via completion of FAFSA or CAFSA.
- Second, these students must graduate prior to the commencement of the second semester of their fourth year, making them eligible as a 3.5-year graduate under Path4Ward, or prior to the commencement of the first semester of their fourth year, which makes them eligible as a 3-year graduate.
 - i. For quarter systems, the threshold for being a 3.5 year graduate is the third quarter of their fourth year.
 - ii. For hexter systems, the threshold for being a 3.5 year graduate is the fourth hexter of their fourth year.
 - iii. For nonstandard calendars, such as an August graduation date, or a flexible mid-year graduation date, apply the start date of the equivalent academic unit. For example, a third year student graduating in August will be considered a 3-year graduate if their August date is prior to the commencement of their school's fourth-year term, and a 3.5-year graduate if it is after the commencement of their schools' fourth-year term. You may also contact CDHE for confirmation.
- Third, these students must be coded as graduates. They must be listed with a graduation date compliant with the above requirements. They should in nearly all circumstances have an Anticipated Year of Graduation (AYG) equal to or later than their actual year of graduation,

depending on their school's academic calendar and whether they are a 3-year or 3.5-year graduate.

- i. For more information on defining AYG, please see the [CDE website](#). You may also contact CDHE for more information.

5. How are eligible students reported to CDHE?

- Each high school district must compile a list of all graduating students who meet the Path4Ward eligibility requirements each year.
- CDHE will provide spreadsheet templates including all required information for this report. Information required includes information required to verify each student's attendance at their postsecondary program, state-required reporting information, and graduation data confirming that the student is an early graduate. CDHE may modify this form and will provide updated spreadsheets as needed.
- Districts must submit this spreadsheet via Biscom secure file transmission by July 1 of each year. The total count of students as verified by CDE in this report will generate that year's district funding total.
- Districts may report additional students after July 1, however late reports do not increase the district's total.

6. Can a student become eligible after graduation?

- Yes, but only in one specific circumstance. If they fill out a FAFSA or equivalent after graduating and meet the Pell eligibility threshold requirement, they will become eligible for the Path4Ward scholarship. Currently CDHE will require the school district to verify their late FAFSA.
- A student becoming eligible in this way will still have their 18-month scholarship availability window based on their original graduation date, **not** the date on which they completed the FAFSA.

7. What about alternative programs? Graduate equivalency diplomas?

- If your district already has an alternative program approved to participate in Path4Ward, graduates from that program may participate in Path4Ward as long as they meet the standard eligibility requirements. Please pay particular attention to ensure these students' graduation dates are aligned with the above early graduation requirements.
- Graduate equivalency diplomas are not eligible for the Path4Ward program at this time.

8. How do eligible students request funds?

- There are two ways for students to notify CDHE and request funds:
 - 1) Inclusion in district report: Students can notify their counselors of a program selection prior to graduation. Counselors can then include this selection in the yearly report to CDHE. CDHE will treat this as a funding request and begin the verification process.

- 2) **Online form:** The Path4Ward [program website](#) includes a short Funding Request form which eligible students can fill out at any time to request funds, regardless of whether they expressed a program selection prior to graduation. Students may use this form to request funds for the first time, to modify their request from a previous form or from the district report, or to request verification of their eligibility. The online form also requests student contact information, which will allow CDHE to provide any needed clarification or information.
 - Counselors or parents may assist a student in completing the form. However, form submission does not finalize the funding request—student enrollment in a qualifying postsecondary program is also required. See next question.

9. When do graduates receive money? How?

- Funds will be disbursed to the graduate’s enrolled postsecondary program two weeks after their selected programs’ census day or equivalent—usually the tenth day of classes. The census day is when the graduate is officially considered a current graduate, apprentice, intern, or appropriate equivalent and when (for higher education institutions) tuition and fees are billed.
 - i. Please note that funds **do not** arrive directly with the student or family. Funds are transferred to the postsecondary program first, and may later be transferred to the student or family according to the reimbursement rules detailed in #8.
- CDHE will work with the postsecondary program to transfer funds to them. These funds will be applied to the postsecondary program’s charges: tuition, fees, etc.
- Remaining funds will be remitted to the enrolled graduate according to the postsecondary program’s fiscal schedule, or else by the end of the first period of study. As these dates differ between programs, CDHE encourages graduates to discuss the likely remittance timelines in place at their selected program.
- At this time, CDHE will contact selected postsecondary programs to help onboard them with program procedures. This is subject to change as the program grows.

10. What are allowable uses for scholarship funds received by students?

- The institution will allocate funds toward the payment of tuition, fees, or other expenses. Remaining funds, in the amount at most equal to the amount expended on tuition, fees, and other institutional expenses are then available to be reimbursed to the student for other qualifying expenditures, such as textbooks, equipment, or transportation.
 - i. For example, a student with a 3.5-year scholarship of \$2,468.03 who enrolls in a program with a \$1,100 tuition may be reimbursed up to \$1,100 of their remaining scholarship funds, leaving \$268.03 which must be accessed by enrolling in a further postsecondary program. If the program has a \$100 tuition, they may be reimbursed a further \$100, leaving \$2,268.03 for future programs. Finally, if they enroll in a program with a \$2,000 tuition, the entire remaining amount of \$468.03 will be reimbursed.

- State and private occupational (as defined in section 23-64-103 (20)) higher education institutions and training program providers who meet the eligibility and quality requirements for funding under the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) are eligible.

11. When/how will funds be available for students?

- Schools must inform CDE and CDHE of eligible graduates by July 1 each year.
- When the student begins their postsecondary program, CDHE will distribute funds to that program for payment of tuition, fees, and other costs of attendance.
- The postsecondary program must remit remaining funds (if any) to the student to use for paying books, transportation, and other qualifying costs of attendance. See 23-3.3-1002.
 - i. The timing and method of funds remittance may vary between postsecondary programs, but as a general principle, remittance must at a minimum be disbursed by the end of the initial term of study.

12. What if a graduate does not complete the class/program they are using funds for?

- If the graduate does not complete the program after their funds are expended, CDHE will contact the program to request reporting about why that graduate stopped-out. In this situation, there is no clawback or other requirement of the graduate, although CDHE would be willing to note any comments from the student as well.
- If the graduate withdraws from the program prior to fees being charged, CDHE will have the postsecondary program return their funds to the Department. These funds will likely remain available to the graduate should they enroll in, and then begin, a new program—which may be the same program or a different program. However, the expiry date will not change.

13. What if a graduate fails to use all of their funds within the 18-month period?

- Any funds that a graduate has not used by the end of the 18th month after their graduation will no longer be available to them.
- Funds that are remitted to a graduate after the payment of their postsecondary program's tuition and fees are not considered "unused" from this perspective. Only funds that were never utilized by enrollment in an eligible postsecondary program will be returned to the General Fund.

14. When/how will funds be available for districts?

- CDHE will disburse district funds based on the count of eligible early graduates reported by July 1 each year.
- CDHE must verify these reports with CDE, and the CDE-confirmed count will be used to calculate district share.
- CDE will then disburse funds based on their verified eligible early graduate count for each district.
- Funds are not restricted. The statute encourages districts to allocate their funds towards counseling programs for students making use of the program.

- However, CDHE will compile a cumulative program report by November 1, 2026, which will include an expenditures report on the cost of running the program. Districts will be required to report on Path4Ward program expenditures, although the use of specific Path4Ward income will not need to be reported. (CDHE and CDE will already have program income data.)

15. How does participating in this pilot program affect/impact graduation rates and/or funding?

- Per statute, a student who graduates prior to their fourth year of high school receives the greater of: 75% of the FY 2021-22 average state share of per pupil revenue, or \$3,500, as determined during the 2021 legislative session. CDHE and CDE have calculated this amount to be \$4,113.38.
- Per statute, a student who graduates prior to the second semester of their fourth year receives the greater of: 45% of the FY 2021-22 average state share of per pupil revenue, or \$2,000. CDHE and CDE have calculated this amount to be \$2,468.03.
- Per statute, districts will receive 25% of the average state funding allocation for each student. Schools are encouraged to direct this funding towards academic counseling and support for students who could participate in this pilot program. CDHE and CDE have calculated this amount to be \$1,371.13.
- These amounts are fixed and do not change over the course of the pilot program.
- The effect on graduation rates is a subject of study within the pilot program.