



School of Labor and Employment Relations
Climate Jobs Institute

STATUS UPDATE ON THE ILLINOIS DISPLACED ENERGY WORKER DEPENDENT TRANSITION SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM



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The Illinois Displaced Energy Worker Dependent Transition Scholarship Program (DEWD-TSP) provides a scholarship for higher education to dependents of energy workers displaced by the closure or reduced operation of fossil fuel facilities. Despite its potential to support educational attainment and community resilience, the scholarship program saw limited uptake since its launch. This brief outlines DEWD-TSP's structure, utilization, challenges, and policy recommendations. The analysis was conducted through two interviews and data sharing with the Illinois Student Assistance Commission DEWD-TSP program administrators.

The authors completed this policy brief for *the Illinois Coal Workers & Communities Listening Project*, led by the Climate Jobs Institute at the University of Illinois in collaboration with Prairie Rivers Network, other University of Illinois programs, and the Harlem Documentary Project. This statewide research initiative analyzes state policies and documents the stories of coal workers, families, and communities to guide a just and respectful energy transition.

ABOUT THE SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

The Energy Transition Act (Public Act 102-662, Article 10) established the Illinois Displaced Energy Worker Dependent Transition Scholarship Program (DEWD-TSP) to support the dependents of energy workers who lost their jobs due to the closure or reduced operation of fossil-fuel facilities. More broadly, the Act aims to assist workers and communities affected by closures or downsizing of fossil-fuel power plants, nuclear plants, and coal mines across Illinois.

Through this legislation, DEWD-TSP provides financial assistance for dependents pursuing higher education at any Illinois public university or community college. The program is administered by the Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC), the state agency responsible for managing a wide range of college financial aid programs and scholarships.

The purpose of DEWD-TSP is to reduce financial barriers for families navigating economic disruption, promote educational attainment and workforce development, and strengthen community resilience in regions impacted by changes in the energy sector. The scholarship can be used for undergraduate or graduate study and covers the full cost of tuition and mandatory fees for one calendar year, including the summer term.

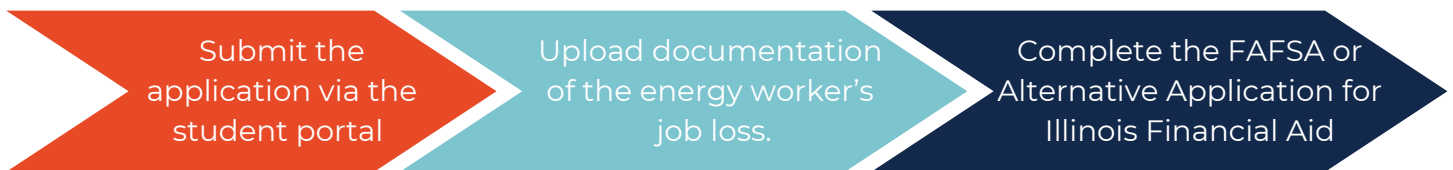
ELIGIBILITY



DEWD-TSP applicants do not need to reside in Illinois, but the scholarship program limits awards to in-district and in-state tuition and fees. To be eligible for the scholarship program, applicants must:

- Be a US citizen, eligible non-citizen, or meet RISE Act Criteria
- Be the natural, adopted, or stepchild of a displaced energy worker (layoff on or after September 15, 2026).
- Be enrolled or accepted for at least 3 credit hours at an Illinois public university or community college.
- Demonstrate financial need as shown through unmet need in a financial aid package.
- Maintain satisfactory academic progress.
- Resolve any federal student loan defaults.

APPLICATION PROCESS



2025-2026
Academic Year Deadlines

October 1, 2025: Full Year or Fall Term
March 1, 2026: Spring and/or Summer Term
June 15, 2026: Summer Term Only

PROGRAM UTILIZATION

Despite its annual \$1.1 million appropriation, the program has been significantly underutilized, with just two applicants and one awardee in the history of the program. The program’s annual appropriation is sufficient to support full tuition for dozens of students.

Fiscal year	Expenditures	Recipients
FY2022	0	0
FY2023	0	0
FY2024	\$14,119	1

CASE STUDY



In September 2022, the Joppa coal-fired power plant closure displaced approximately 90 workers and deeply impacted the surrounding community. Jeff Holland, a long-time employee, and his family felt that impact personally.

Noah Holland, Jeff's son and a valedictorian of Joppa High School, wanted to further his education in electrical engineering. Noah faced financial uncertainty surrounding his educational pursuits due to his father's job loss. The Hollands discovered DEWD-TSP through local outreach efforts, and Noah became the program's first known recipient in 2024.

With DEWD-TSP's support, Noah enrolled at Southern Illinois University to pursue a degree in electrical engineering. His story illustrates the transformative potential of the scholarship program and underscores the importance of local community outreach.

"We are so thankful, and we talk about our experience all the time," said Rayette Holland, Noah's mother and Joppa's village clerk. "You don't ever want to tell your kid they can't further their education, but we knew Jeff wasn't going to have a job."

(Case study completed through an interview with the Holland family by Prairie Rivers Network in September 2024).



Children gather at the Southern Illinois Coal Miners Memorial during the Marissa Coal Festival in Marissa, Illinois, on August 9, 2025.

"I was amazed that there was such a niche scholarship available for someone in my exact situation and was very excited to apply when I heard about it."

– Noah Holland, DEWD recipient



IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES AND INSIGHTS

Since its launch, DEWD-TSP saw limited participation — only two applicants and one awardee. Staff at the Illinois Student Assistance Commission said they see clear value in the program for eligible families, but outreach and awareness remain major barriers for the scholarship program’s intended audience. Promotion efforts to date include discussing the scholarship program during monthly ISAC updates and school partner webinars, and notifying financial aid offices when applications open. Even with these efforts, staff reported in an interview that they “aren’t hitting the right places” and are eager to explore new pathways for communication and engagement.

DEWD-TSP also faces challenges around renewal eligibility. While ISAC initially interpreted the scholarship program as a one-time award, a recent legal review suggests it could support awarding multiple one-year scholarships in subsequent years through reapplication — an adjustment that would increase appeal. ISAC plans to clarify rules or pursue statutory change to make multiple one-year awards possible.

Opportunities for strengthening DEWD-TSP include revisiting eligibility criteria and reviewing the statutory timeline. One of the most narrowly targeted programs in ISAC’s portfolio, DEWD-TSP focuses solely on displaced energy workers’ dependents.

Expanding eligibility to include displaced workers themselves — many of whom seek retraining or career transitions — could significantly increase utilization and strengthen the scholarship program’s alignment with the Energy Transition Act’s goals. Additionally, clarifying rules around private and out-of-state education (currently capped at in-state tuition and fees) could broaden access and flexibility for eligible students. Further, the statute covers job losses dating back to September 15, 2016, but some facilities closed before that date. Reviewing the statutory timeline and rules holistically could ensure all impacted families and workers are included.



The Baldwin Power Plant operates in rural Randolph County. Slated to close in 2027, the Baldwin Power Plant currently provides about 120 jobs in the area.

To improve utilization and maximize impact, ISAC should consider the following actions.

EXPAND OUTREACH

- Partner with unions, local governments, local schools, companies, and community organizations.
- Develop targeted campaigns in regions affected by plant and mine closures.
- Create a list of eligible facilities and communities to guide outreach to schools where students would likely be eligible.

CLARIFY AND UPDATE RULES

- Clarify that the scholarship is an one-year scholarship that can be awarded to the same student in multiple years through reapplication.
- Review eligibility criteria and statutory timelines.
- Explore expansion to displaced workers themselves, either through statutory amendment or creation of a companion scholarship program focused on education, retraining, and career transition for energy workers directly impacted by closures.
- Reconsider limitations on out-of-state education.

ENHANCE COMMUNICATION INFRASTRUCTURE

- Invest in marketing and communications for lesser-known programs, such as DEWD-TSP.
- Provide training and toolkits for school counselors, American Job Centers, and financial aid offices.

INCREASE STATE CAPACITY

- Strengthen interagency coordination between ISAC, the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO), and other agencies implementing the Energy Transition Act.
- Provide dedicated staffing or funding within ISAC to support targeted outreach, data analysis, and administration of transition-related scholarships.
- Establish clearer lines of communication with local workforce boards and educational institutions to ensure eligible families and workers are identified and supported throughout the application process.



ABOUT THE CLIMATE JOBS INSTITUTE

The Climate Jobs Institute at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign was established in 2022 to inform the Illinois clean energy transition through research that foregrounds workers and their communities. We guide state climate policy to reduce emissions and promote high-quality job creation. Through research rooted in climate and economic justice, we envision a clean energy future where workers and communities prosper.



Two princess flames are photographed in West Frankfort, Illinois, on May 10, 2025.

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Nick Talan photographed these images for *the Illinois Coal Workers & Communities Listening Project*. The cover depicts the Coal Miners Memorial in Herrin, Illinois.