

The T.E.A.C.H. scholarship program in Michigan gave me a head start in advancing my career in addition to enhancing my knowledge in the field of early childhood education. I was able to go back to college part time while maintaining a full-time position as a lead teacher in a Head Start program with little to no expense of my own. My employer thought highly of my skills as a teacher and selected me to participate in the T.E.A.C.H. scholarship program, and that spoke volumes to me as an employee. When I started the program, I had been out of school for 10 plus years and was a little nervous, but the help and guidance that was given to me by my counselors set the tone for success. They taught me accountability, scheduling, planning and not giving up when it got tough. I graduated with my Associate Degree in Early Childhood Education, then went on to graduate Cum Laude with a Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood Education. The T.E.A.C.H. scholarship program taught me that I could succeed and, with the right support, nothing is impossible.

The T.E.A.C.H. scholarship program is a three-way partnership for the sharing of expenses by the early educator receiving the scholarship, the sponsoring child care center or family child care home and the T.E.A.C.H. Scholarship program. T.E.A.C.H. pays for most of the tuition and books. Once you are a T.E.A.C.H. scholarship recipient, each semester a stipend is provided for travel or internet access as well as a bonus or a raise for recipients who complete their scholarship contract. The T.E.A.C.H. scholarship program is completely different from typical scholarships because typical scholarships do not provide all these benefits.

In my personal life the T.E.A.C.H. scholarship program allowed me to be a positive role model for my children. My children look at my struggles as well as accomplishments and know that their mother didn't stop until she completed her goal in achieving a higher education. The T.E.A.C.H. scholarship program gave me the confidence and the tools I needed to believe in myself. In my role as lead teacher I was able to give my students what they needed in all the developmental domains and I understood the WHY in what I was doing.

In my professional life, being a part of the T.E.A.C.H. scholarship program allowed me to move back home with a bachelor's degree and the determination to not stop there. I graduated with my master's degree in 2015 and was offered the position as Better Beginning's Coordinator for C.B. King Memorial School, Inc. In taking on this role, I have also been given the opportunity to be a true mentor to our up-and-coming early childhood community in teaching courses at UAM College of Technology in the field of early childhood. In that same year, I became a trainer for the Early Care Education Program, and in this role, I am blessed in meeting, collaborating, networking and learning the latest techniques in working with children and families in the field of early childhood.

I thank the T.E.A.C.H. program as well as the Saginaw ISD Head Start program for allowing me to participate in the program. It truly impacted my life for the better. I didn't know how I would pay for college, because like so many others in my youth, I didn't know the value of a quality education and I messed up my financial aid, and that was not an option at this point. I wouldn't have been able to continue my dream of pursuing a college degree without T.E.A.C.H. I know that without the counselors and their support, I would not have been so driven. My counselors believed in me and did everything that was within their power to help me. My counselors made sure I was registered for class on time and that I received my reimbursements. The T.E.A.C.H. scholarship taught me to think outside the box, don't give up and to never stop learning. In going back to college, I had a few storms, but as I moved closer to my goal, the rain decreased and the thunder clouds moved further into the distance, then at the end of my journey, my rainbow appeared. I thank the T.E.A.C.H. scholarship program for investing in me.

Elizabeth Coakley
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Elizabeth Coakley is a Better Beginnings Coordinator with C.B. King Memorial School, Inc. in McGehee, AR. She earned her Associate Degree in Early Childhood Education from Delta College and Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood Education from Ferris State University, both earned with T.E.A.C.H. scholarships in Michigan. Elizabeth moved to Arkansas and earned her Master's in Early Childhood Studies at Walden University before T.E.A.C.H. was available in Arkansas. Elizabeth recently joined the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Alliance Advisory Council.