

DCY Guidance Letter 24-023
DIVISION OF TRAINING & TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

TO: County Department of Job and Family Services Directors

FROM: Diane Fox, Deputy Director

DATE: July 8, 2024

SUBJECT: Changes to the Early Childhood Education Eligibility Determination Process

Background:

The Ohio Department of Children and Youth (DCY) is working to align and streamline the state's early care and education programming. These activities have included the development of revisions to Step Up to Quality, Ohio's Quality Rating and Improvement System, for early care and education programs. Included under the early care and education efforts are the following programs and grants:

- Licensing
- Publicly Funded Child Care (PFCC) Program
- Early Childhood Education (ECE) Program
- Step Up To Quality
- Child Care Choice Program
- Preschool Special Education

DCY is working to make the eligibility and application process easier for families who may need to access support or information on one or more of Ohio's Early Care and Education programs throughout their children's lives.

The ECE program offers high quality preschool experiences to approximately 31,000 children. The network of ECE providers now includes a diverse provider group including school districts, community-based centers and family child care providers. Over 60% of the ECE providers for the 2023-2024 school year also participate in the PFCC program.

Historically, eligibility determination for the ECE program has been the responsibility of the local ECE providers with income verification and attendance records needing to be maintained locally.

Change:

Beginning in August 2024, ECE providers will be required to partner with the County Departments of Job and Family Services (CDJFS) to provide county staff with the applications that have been gathered and accepted by the provider for State Fiscal Year (SFY) 25 services. The CDJFS will process those

applications through the Ohio Benefits system. Utilizing the Ohio Benefits system should result in the following family and administrative improvements:

- Families will have one entry point for all early care and education programs and may have access to additional resources within the Ohio Benefits programs including Medicaid, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and Cash Assistance.
- ECE Providers and CDJFS staff can utilize a streamlined application process for ECE, PFCC and the Child Care Choice program to support families.
- Enrollments in multiple programs can be managed to effectively guarantee that services and funding do not overlap.

Guidance:

Eligibility for the Early Childhood Education Program

To be eligible for preschool services, families must have children who meet the following criteria:

- Family is economically disadvantaged with an income that falls at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL);
- Child has a disability and is on an Individualized Education Plan;
- Child has a case plan or family service plan as defined in ORC 2151.412; or a child placed in Kinship Care as documented through Kinship Permanency Incentive Program payments; or
- Child is in a family experiencing homelessness.

Application Processing

All applications already processed by local ECE providers for the State Fiscal Year 25 Program Year will be honored and will be shared with CDJFS agencies for entry into the Ohio Benefits System.

Beginning October 1, 2024, all new applicants will be required to complete a JFS 07200 Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Cash Assistance, Medical and/or Child Care Assistance Application. There are two ways an application may be completed:

- Paper Application, this application may be submitted by fax, email, mailing, or by dropping off at the local CDJFS agency. Applications can be found at: <https://www.odjfs.state.oh.us/forms/num/JFS07200/pdf/>
- Ohio Benefits Self-Service Portal (SSP), using the SSP families will be able to complete an e-application to apply for child care assistance. Families will also be able to upload required verification and submit the application to the local county job and family services.

County Support

Funding will be available to the CDJFS for processing ECE applications.

Training Stipend – July 24, 2024

The CDJFS will be responsible for determining ECE program eligibility based off of the PFCC application in Ohio Benefits. Training for this additional eligibility process will be held on Wednesday, July 24, 2024, from 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm, the regularly scheduled Early Care and Education monthly county child care meeting. All counties are urged to take part in this training and at least one county representative must be in attendance to be eligible for the training stipend. Your county representative for the training does not need to be an agency director. This will be the **only** training for processing ECE program applications. Agencies that do not attended this training will not be eligible for the training stipend.

To join the meeting on July 24, please click the link below.

https://teams.microsoft.com/l/meetup-join/19%3ameeting_ZDUxM2U4MjQtMWNmNC00YTk4LWI3MWItMzdiMTRIODZIMDY1%40thread.v2/0?context=%7B%22Tid%22%3A%2250f8fcc4-94d8-4f07-84eb-36ed57c7c8a2%22%2C%22Oid%22%3A%228e865985-ca17-4238-ae67-2fbc44ec602b%22%2C%22IsBroadcastMeeting%22%3Atrue%2C%22role%22%3A%22a%22%7D&btype=a&role=a

CDJFS agencies that attend the training on July 24, 2024, will receive a one-time payment based on the Category assigned below:

Category	Amount	Total	Counties
Extra-Large	\$100,000.00	\$300,000.00	Cuyahoga, Franklin, Hamilton
Large	\$75,000.00	\$675,000.00	Butler, Lake, Lorain, Lucas, Mahoning Montgomery, Stark, Summit, Warren
Medium	\$50,000.00	\$750,000.00	Allen, Clark, Clermont, Columbiana, Delaware, Fairfield, Greene, Licking, Medina, Miami, Portage, Richland, Trumbull, Wood, Wayne
Small	\$25,000.00	\$1,525,000.00	All Other Counties
Total		\$3,250,000.00	

All payments will be issued through the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services County Finance Allocation process.

Training stipends are available as cash and considered earned at the time of receipt. There are no further restrictions on the use of the funding and will not be considered federal funds but “local dollars.”

Early Childhood Education Provider Training and Resources

ECE providers will be able to participate in a webinar on July 9, 2024, to review these changes. The ECE Team at DCY will be available for on-going technical assistance. Information on the webinar will be sent directly to the ECE providers. In addition to the initial webinar, information will be provided in the Early Childhood Education 2024-2025 Manual and Appendices.

Questions:

CDJFS staff with questions should contact the Early Care and Education Technical Assistance email at child_care_county_technical_assistance@childrenandyouth.ohio.gov.