

Child Care NEWS BRIEF



Child Care Services Newsletter

January 2022

Greetings from your partners at the Tennessee Department of Human Services, Child Care Services Team!

Welcome to the January 2022 edition of the Child Care Services Monthly Newsletter. We hope that you are well and staying safe and practicing self-care whenever practicable. You are providing such a critical service to children and families in Tennessee, and we appreciate your continued contributions to Tennessee's children.

UPDATE - American Rescue Plan Act Stabilization Grants Information

Update on Payment Processing for ARPA Grants

In order to ensure state compliance with issuance of payments through the Edison system there are several steps that must be completed. These steps are very thorough for accountability of funds distribution. We ask for your patience during this process to allow for careful review and vetting. Payments are in process and distribution began in January.

As of February 3, 2022, there have been 132 grants distributed. These are primarily from Cohort 1. We are continuing to process payments for Cohort 1 and are moving forward with the other cohorts as quickly as possible.

Reporting and Accountability Post Receipt of Grant Funds

The Tennessee Department of Human Services is administering these funds in collaboration with its consultant HORNE who has a team dedicated to supporting recipients of Tennessee's Child Care Stabilization Grants. HORNE will facilitate the reporting and accountability elements of the grant process.

You will receive an email from the HORNE TN Child Care Stabilization Grant Support Team shortly after receiving your funds. That email will include a copy of the Expense Tracking Workbook. Detailed instructions on how to complete the workbook will be included in the file provided.

To help you recognize communications from HORNE, the subject line of all email communications from HORNE will begin with the heading CC Stabilization Communication. When you see an email with this heading in the subject line, please review the message and take action in order to meet your grant reporting requirements.

As a reminder, award dollars must be spent on one or more of the below purposes:

- Personnel costs, benefits, premium pay, recruitment, and retention.
Rent or mortgage payments, utilities, facilities maintenance and improvements, or insurance.
Personal protective equipment, cleaning and sanitation supplies and services, or training and professional development related to health and safety practices.
Purchases of, or updates to, equipment and supplies to respond to COVID-19.
Goods and services necessary to maintain or resume child care services.
Mental health support for children and employees.

Our partners at UT-SWORPS have opened Cohort 7 for eligible Tennessee Department of Education (DOE) providers as of January 25, 2022. Eligible DOE providers include those participating in the Child Care Certificate Program and community-based, private child care agencies, including up to kindergarten services.

Only DOE regulated agencies who meet these criteria and also have been certified by DOE as meeting all applicable state and local health and safety requirements as of March 11, 2021 will be considered eligible. Any agency that has permanently closed since March 11 also will not be considered eligible.

Technical assistance is available to you should you have any questions. If you have any questions, please contact UT SWORPS at TDHS_CCP@utk.edu or call the toll-free number at 1-888-883-5514.

An FAQ document has been created to address questions related to the process and may be found at this link: https://tnchildcarehelpdesk.sworpswebapp.sworps.utk.edu/ccdf-stabilization-grant/. The most current version is available including updated questions and answers from the Cohort rounds.

Later this spring, we will issue a "clean-up" round of application notices to TDHS licensed child care agencies who may not have applied in earlier rounds, who have had a change in capacity, or who are newly licensed. More information will be provided as we finalize plans for these application notices.

We are excited these dollars have been made available to support the very critical work you provide in caring for the children of Tennessee. These funds are to build a stable and sustainable early care and education system for our existing providers, so children will continue to have access to safe, healthy and educationally rich spaces.

UPDATE - Systems Modernization

As a reminder, the Tennessee Department of Human Services is launching a series of modernized systems to aid Child Care Providers in working with our agency. These new systems will facilitate making it easier to complete critical tasks with our agency.

On January 17th, we launched our Pilot project for Phase 1 of these new systems, "go-live" for Child Care Providers participating in the Child Care Certificate Program located within our three Pilot counties: Davidson, Hawkins, and Madison. These systems are intended to improve the customer journey and reduce administrative tasks through automation.

Tech Goes Home

With the roll-out of our new technology supports through our system modernization efforts, we encourage agencies who have technology support needs to apply for this new resource. TDHS deployed the "Tech Goes Home" model available to child care agencies that includes the provision of technology devices, coaching and technical assistance on the use of the equipment and how it strengthens business operations.

Tech Goes Home Tennessee provides free training and one-on-one coaching to reduce the digital divide and support a system of high-quality early care and education for children in Tennessee. The 15-hour training course is designed to teach foundational technical skills, such as email navigation and presentation building, small business technology skills.

Tech Goes Home TN can be a resource for agencies that need technology equipment where parents can electronically sign in/out their children.

For more information and to apply, please visit the CCR&R website https://techgoeshometn.org/. Once on the website, scroll down to the three boxes and the application button is found in the first box on the left.

QRIS Status Update

As a reminder, over the past 2 years, the TDHS Child Care Team has been working with you to make progress on our transformation journey. Our Transformation journey is grounded in our "WHY Statement" - Every family should have access to QUALITY care for children and adults.

A big part of our transformation is based in redesigning our Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS), which was launched 20 years ago. When launched in 2001, Tennessee's Star Quality Program was one of the first child care quality rating programs in the country.

We are so excited that our journey with you continues! We have valued your voice and participation in informing the development of the new structure to drive quality so that every child has the opportunity for successful outcomes and is empowered to thrive!

Five Big Ideas for Quality Improvement

Big Idea #1

Recommendation: Merge licensing and quality assessment roles and provide ongoing engagement in all licensed programs to gain a more accurate picture of program quality

Actions Completed: The Department implemented a staff reorganization in Winter/Spring 2021 and created the role of Licensing Consultant. The Licensing Consultant will serve as monitor/evaluator/supporter/partner. The role of the former Assessment Program was merged into this new Licensing Consultant position.

Big Idea #2

Recommendation: Identify "Essential Quality Indicators" that include teacher-child interactions and health and safety practices as markers of program quality.

Actions Completed: Indicators most reflective of successful child outcomes and best practices in Tennessee based on Tennessee Early Learning Development Standards, Caring for Our Children, and Reflective Practice are used as key elements in tool design.

Big Idea #3

Recommendation: Offer relationship-based quality improvement supports that vary in type, content, and intensity based on a program's needs and strengths.

Actions: TDHS will use a relationship-based approach to support providers in meeting basic licensing expectations and in continuous quality improvement.

Through our ongoing visits and observations, TDHS staff will provide regular feedback to all agencies about how to strengthen quality across the essential quality indicators.

Based upon monitoring and evaluation results, agencies will be connected with resources to strengthen program quality, consistent with level of need. Supports such as enhancement grants, training, technical assistance, and coaching are currently available.

Big Idea #4

Recommendation: Provide financial supports that reinvest in quality through improvement grants and progress-based incentives.

Actions: Financial supports will be invested using deliberate strategies to support quality improvement.

Specific consideration will be given for how to incentivize quality improvement in programs serving low-income children.

Specific consideration will be given for how to incentivize quality improvement for all programs regardless of the ranking at which they start.

Big Idea #5

Recommendation: Structure the Quality Rating to help families identify programs that meet their child's needs.

Actions: The overall program score will be presented in a way that is easily recognizable and understandable to parents.

Parents will be able to see the scoring components that contribute to an overall program rating. This will allow parents to look more specifically at the program aspects that are most important to their family.

Information available to parents will represent the full picture of a program's operations, including licensure compliance, quality considerations, rules violations, and legal enforcement actions. The new eLicensing system that is part of technology modernization will support this approach.

We anticipate the finalization of the new QRIS process around May 2022 in alignment with our system modernization rollout. In the meantime, we are tracking that includes for the completion of the QRIS redesign. This too involves a multi-layered process that timeline:

- Rules revisions -routing through promulgation process with anticipated approval in May 2022
Development of training materials for internal and external customers
Technology system design (e-licensing system with expected Spring launch date),
Training (training for TDHS staff scheduled for March, training for providers scheduled for April 2022)
Transition Period (opportunities to utilize the tool prior to roll out for staff and provider understanding and adoption). This will include freezing all current QRIS scores on March 31, 2022. Scores will remain as is until October 2023 as all agencies will be on the same annual QRIS cycle of October through September, starting October 2022.
Multiple information sessions in April for child care providers and community partners on new rules and how the QRIS will function (this is in addition to specific training on the new tool and process)
Full Implementation scheduled for October 2022 for TDHS licensed child care agencies

We will continue to provide you with information through every step of this process through newsletters and direct communication. We are so excited to go through this journey with you!

Child Care Certificate Program

With the close of the Pandemic Child Care Payment Assistance Program on August 31, 2021, we received a high volume of applications from customers for Smart Steps Child Care Payment Assistance. We are very pleased that families are utilizing this child care financial support. Prior to the pandemic, we generally served approximately 35,000 children on an annual basis.

Child Care Services continues to explore strategies to improve our processes in order to provide the best possible customer service.

UPDATE-TNPAL

The Tennessee Professional Archive of Learning (TNPAL) is the official system of record for qualifications, training, and professional development for child care providers licensed by the Tennessee Department of Human Services (TDHS) effective January 1, 2022.

Don't have a TNPAL account? Signing up is easy!

TNPAL is waiting for you! Early childhood professionals may visit www.tnpal.org and create a TNPAL account using a web browser on any computer, phone, or tablet.

Already have a TNPAL account?

It's equally important for both early childhood professionals and agency directors to affiliate their TNPAL user accounts with their TDHS-licensed child care agency.

Agency directors, please remember to acknowledge these associations for your agency's early childhood professionals to utilize the full potential of TNPAL.

Want to dive deeper? Learn more from the Lean Into You podcast.

Earlier this year, CCR&R highlighted TNPAL in an episode of its Lean Into You podcast. Entitled "Level Up Your Professional Development with TNPAL", the episode featuring Lisa Walsh, Registry and Training manager with TECTA, may be found online by clicking the URL below.

Please remember: TNPAL is now the Department's system of record for capturing staff qualifications and completed training hours as of January 1, 2022.

TDHS is committed to promoting early childhood environments that are safe, healthy, and educationally rich. Thank you for offering Tennessee families learning opportunities and environments that will help their children thrive.

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