

SPOTLIGHT ON QUALITY: HOW STATE AND TERRITORY SUBSIDY POLICIES CAN INCREASE OPTIONS AND SUPPORT FAMILY DECISIONS

SCHOOL-AGE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

This document is the final in a three-part series that summarizes:

1. What quality school-age care is and why it matters;
2. What choices families make and why; and
3. **How State and Territory subsidy policies can increase options and support family decisions.**

According to the Office of Child Care, 43% of the children served by Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) subsidies are school-age (US DHHS, 2013). Because of the significant number of school-age children served by CCDF subsidies, it is crucial to understand how subsidy policy can support the unique aspects of serving this age group. This brief provides subsidy policy issues and State examples that CCDF administrators can consider, organized by the following three topics:

- **Supporting quality school-age care through consistent rate structures**
- **Aligning attendance policies with school calendars**
- **Providing flexibility in authorization policies to meet family needs**

Supporting Quality School-Age Care through Consistent Rate Structures

Subsidy policies can support high-quality school-age programming by providing consistent rates based on typical school-age schedules. Schedules for school-age programming typically vary by the school calendar. Weather, vacations, and school events can all affect the need for care. Determining subsidy rate structures that address these factors can be challenging. Two promising approaches to meeting this challenge include offering a blended rate and a unique school-age full time rate.

Promising Practice: Massachusetts's Blended Rate

Massachusetts has established a blended rate for their contracted providers. When a contracted program provides school-age care, they have an option to be paid based on a blended rate. A blended rate is a blend of the rates paid during the school year for part time care and the rates paid during school vacations for full time care. The blended rate provides



consistent and predictable subsidy reimbursement rates and payments, which adds stability to a school-age program's financial planning.

For more information on Massachusetts' blended rate, please visit:

<http://www.eec.state.ma.us/docs1/regs-policies/20130117-financial-assistance-policy-guide.pdf>

Promising Practice: Hawaii's Full Time Rate

Hawaii's Child Care subsidy policy defines a unique full time rate for school-age programs. This rate is based on a typical school-age full time schedule of 45 hours per month. This monthly full time rate allows for consistency in reimbursement. The monthly rate, versus an hourly or daily rate sometimes used in school-age subsidy policies, lessens the administrative burden to school-age programs and is responsive to the varying schedules that school-age children may have during a single month.

For more information on Hawaii's full time school-age rate, please visit:

<http://humanservices.hawaii.gov/bessd/files/2013/01/HAR-17-798.2-Child-Care-Services-Rules.pdf>

Aligning Attendance Policies with School Calendars

State/Territory/Tribal CCDF lead agencies can align attendance policies with school calendars. This strategy provides programs with the flexibility to accommodate changes in attendance while maintaining predictable program income. School-age children may have more varied schedules than younger children do because of extra-curricular activities like sports, dance, and individualized tutoring. In addition to authorization policies that align with school calendars, attendance and payment policies can recognize the variations that may occur weekly or seasonally.

A school-age child's need for care is dependent on a combination of the families' and the school's schedule. Days when schools are closed but the parent is working can be problematic for subsidy programs that authorize care for set hours. Subsidy programs can recognize the additional need for full day care on days when school is not in session because of weather, teacher inservice training or other school scheduling fluctuations. Providing flexible and predictable reimbursement makes it easier for programs to meet family needs and maintain quality staff and programming. Wisconsin's School-Closed Hours policy is one example of a promising strategy for aligning attendance policies with school calendars.

Promising Practice: Wisconsin School-Closed Hours

Wisconsin subsidy policy includes a designation for school-closed hours. Once a provider has authorization to provide before- and after-school care, the subsidy system automatically banks additional hours to be used for days when the school is closed due to snow days, teacher conferences, etc. When school closures occur, the school-age provider reports them separately from regular school attendance, but does not need to get additional authorization to do so. Payment for the additional hours is included in the provider's regular subsidy payment.

Providing Flexibility in Authorization Policies to Meet Family Needs

Lead CCDF agencies can consider incorporating flexibility into their authorization policies to meet family needs. Subsidy programs often authorize child care for “blocks” of hours or days based on the patterns of preschool child care. Full time and part time authorizations are usually based on the full time child care model but don't necessarily apply well to school-age programs. Full time scheduling for a school-age program can vary from as few as 10 to as many as 20 hours depending on fluctuations in school and work schedules for families.

The need for school-age care is dependent on a combination of parents/families work schedules and variations in school schedules. Parents may choose a combination of after school programming and activities and traditional child care for their school-age child. Subsidy programs don't always recognize this complexity in schedule when authorizing care for school-age children. An example of a promising strategy to address the need for flexible payment authorization policies that allow for changing school and work schedules is Connecticut's Supplemental Payment Policy.

Promising practice: Connecticut's Supplemental Payment Policy

Connecticut developed a subsidy policy that allows parents to request supplemental reimbursement for school-age children when their child care needs temporarily exceed the authorized hours of care in their certificate (voucher) by more than twenty hours in a calendar month. Some of the circumstances under which additional hours may be requested include:

- The school closes for vacation or other reasons;
- The child is required to attend child care instead of school for three or more consecutive days due to illness or other reasons;
- There is a temporary increase in work hours or the hours of an employment services activity; or



- There is a temporary change in the availability of a parent who usually provides care.

For more information on Connecticut's Supplemental Payment Policy please visit:
http://www.ct.gov/dss/cwp/view.asp?a=2353&q=305180#_Toc519328260

Reference

United States Administration for Children and Families. Office of Child Care. (2013). *FY 2011 CCDF data tables (preliminary)*. Washington, DC: U.S. Administration for Children and Families, Office of Child Care.
Retrieved from <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/occ/resource/fy-2011-data-tables-preliminary>

The School-Age Community of Practice

This brief was developed by the School-Age Community of Practice (SA CoP). The SA CoP brings together the experience and expertise of the Office of Child Care's Child Care Technical Assistance Network (CCTAN) and Office of Head Start to highlight promising practices and emerging issues related to the early care and education of school-age children, youth, and their families.

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