

Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG)
Executive Summary for the CCDBG State Plan for Plan Cycle FFYs 2019 – 2021

Child Care Works and Keystone STARS

- The Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) is the primary source of federal funding for Pennsylvania's subsidized child care program, Child Care Works (CCW) and its quality rating improvement system (QRIS) Keystone STARS.
- Pennsylvania's annual federal allocation is one of the largest among all U.S. states and territories.
- CCW serves about 118,000 children on average each month.
- Families must have income below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Income Guidelines (FPIG) to enter the program and income below 235 percent of the FPIG to remain in the program
- Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) families and former TANF families are prioritized. Families qualifying under the low-income program are placed on a waiting list if funds are not immediately available.
- The majority of regulated child care providers in Pennsylvania participate in Keystone STARS. This means our most vulnerable children have access to higher quality care.

Key Changes for Pennsylvania's CCDBG Plan

General

- The plan covers the next federal plan cycle for the period October 1, 2018 through September 30, 2021.
- There are eight sections to the plan that span all elements required under the CCDBG re-authorization of 2014.
- Pennsylvania's plan certifies that it is in compliance with all of the requirements with only two exceptions, both related to criminal background checks.

Promote Family Engagement through Outreach and Consumer Education (Section 2)

- The Department of Human Services' (DHS) website and public portal "COMPASS" provide a variety of information to the public about child care options, quality child care, inspection results, and information about becoming a licensed child care provider, including criminal background check requirements.
- Families can access a multitude of services and benefits, including, but not limited to, Head Start, TANF, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (SNAP), the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), and Medical Assistance (MA).
- Information and resources are available to families of children with special needs through the CONNECT helpline.
- Pennsylvania has issued policy statements and guidance to providers and parents regarding the reduction of suspension and expulsion of children from care.

Provide Stable Child Care Financial Assistance to Families (Section 3)

- Pennsylvania was among the first states to implement 12-month eligibility periods. Since December 2015, families have enjoyed longer, more stabilized periods of child care assistance, even during periods of job loss, to facilitate their quick reconnection with employment.
- Families are required to report fewer changes, and there are a limited number of circumstances under which child care assistance would end before the conclusion of the 12-month period.
- Families experiencing homelessness or domestic violence may seek waivers for verification requirements, making the initial application process easier.
- Grandparents and other caretakers who suddenly find themselves responsible for young children can expect to receive help with child care for the duration of the 12-month period, continuing child care assistance at a time when the child and family most need it.
- Families experiencing increases in wages can expect to remain in the program as long as their income does not exceed the threshold of 235 percent of the FPIG. For a family of four, this means annual income of \$58,985.
- Families pay only a small percentage of their income towards their cost of care.

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Ensure Equal Access to Child Care for Low-Income Children (Section 4)

- Parents are in the best position to know what their children need in child care. Parent choice remains an active feature of Pennsylvania’s plan.
- Recognizing this, OCDEL has worked to build capacity for quality to make it accessible to as many children as possible. Significant investments in quality are demonstrated by improved tiered reimbursement rates for providers participating in Keystone STARS. Tiered reimbursement channels the federal dollars to the quality programs that are serving the highest number of vulnerable children.
- Tiered reimbursement helps move payment rates for providers closer to the 75th percentile of the private market.
- Through grants with the Early Learning Resource Centers (ELRCs), providers enrolling subsidy children can expect timely, accurate payments for their services.
- Pennsylvania recognizes it has additional work to do to improve payment rates for providers.

Establish Standards and Monitoring Processes to Ensure the Health and Safety of Child Care Settings (Section 5)

- Pre-service and annual unannounced inspections for all child care providers, including family child care home providers, have been implemented as required.
- Training and professional development in ten core areas including pediatric first aid, Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation and prevention of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome has been implemented and is monitored on an ongoing basis.
- Full compliance with criminal background check requirements remains a challenge for the majority of states.
- Pennsylvania is in substantial compliance with these requirements and expects to achieve full compliance by no later than September 30, 2019.

Recruit and Retain a Qualified and Effective Child Care Workforce (Section 6)

- Continue to develop, update and distribute the Core Knowledge Competencies (CKCs). All training is aligned to the CKCs.
- Development and implementation of a career pathways system that define educational qualifications.
- Implementation of a comprehensive workforce registry system to capture the early childhood education (ECE) workforce data for Pennsylvania.
- Continue to grow and develop the Profession Development (PD) registry system which contains a listing of over 2,000 approved instructors.
- Continue leveraging the advisory structure for workforce policy through professional development organizations, the PD registry and other stakeholders.
- Continue to support and develop articulation efforts through higher education institutions and community colleges allowing practitioners, upon successful completion of the associate degree program in early childhood education, to transfer between 54 and 60 academic credits to a baccalaureate Pre-K to Grade 4-degree program.
- Continue to provide tuition assistance and Child Development Associate (CDA) voucher support through the T.E.A.C.H. program as well as through the Rising STARS Tuition Assistance program.
- Continue engagement of training and professional development providers, including higher education in aligning training and educational opportunities with the state’s framework.
- Continue to develop and revise Pennsylvania’s training and professional development requirements in consultation with feedback from the state’s Early Learning Council (ELC).
- Continue to support the ECE workforce through financial incentives linked to educational attainment through Education and Retention Awards.
- Support providers in implementation of sound business practices around staff benefits.
- Continue training and technical assistance (TA) efforts for providers in identifying and serving homeless children and their families.

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Support Continuous Quality Improvement (Section 7)

- Continue to support Keystone STARS grants and awards to child care providers in an effort to promote continuous quality improvement and continued provider movement to STARS 3 and 4.
- Continue to develop, expand, and offer an array of professional development for child care programs.
- Formation of an Implementation Leadership Team that includes OCDEL leadership, stakeholders and evaluation experts with the purpose of ensuring stakeholder engagement in the development and implementation of the evaluation of the new Keystone STARS.
- Development and implementation of a comprehensive evaluation (including the science framework) for the newly revised Keystone STARS standards/programming beginning in Year One (July 2017- June 2018) through Year Five (July 2021- June 2022), including the review of the core principles.
- Support and promote the implementation of program-wide Positive Behavior Interventions & Supports (PBIS) including incentivizing providers to use PBIS to demonstrate fidelity to the point structure for Keystone STARS 3 and 4 programs.
- Continue to support Early Childhood Mental Health (ECMH) consultation, available to Keystone STARS programs, with the primary purpose/goal to reduce suspensions and expulsions of children from early learning programs due to challenging behaviors.
- Expand, refine, implement and evaluate three TA platforms/models. These platforms/models include Child Care Health Consultation, STARS Coaching/TA and Infant/Toddler Consultation.
- Maintain accountability and measurable indicators of STAR level achievement through the existing PELICAN Keys to Quality (KTQ) and the STARS Management and Reliability Tracking (SMART)/Document uploader systems.

Ensure Grantee Program Integrity and Accountability (Section 8)

- Pennsylvania's plan remains solid in the areas of program integrity and accountability.
- Procedures are in place to monitor grantee performance in both programs to ensure appropriate and equitable use of federal funds.
- Regulations are in place to assist grantees in identifying program violations and potential fraud and referring those matters for investigation to the Office of Inspector General.
- Under the federal "Improper Payments Review" and annual audits, Pennsylvania has maintained one of the lowest payment error rates in the nation with no disallowed expenditures.