

**PDO Policy
Communication
#25-01**



Pennsylvania
**Office of Child Development
and Early Learning**

Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning
Bureau of Early Learning Policy and Professional Development

Issue Date: December 30, 2025

Effective Date: December 30, 2025

End Date: N/A

Subject: PDO Youth Pathway and Enrollment Prioritization

To: Professional Development Organizations (PDOs)

Priority: High

Category: Informational

Action: Read and follow “Action Steps”

Required Response: None

PURPOSE

To provide guidance to Early Care and Education (ECE) Professional Development Organizations (PDOs) related to the allowable inclusion of Youth Pathway students using Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) funds and to provide guidance related to the expected prioritization of student enrollment.

BACKGROUND

The Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) holds grant agreements with three ECE PDOs. The PDOs are responsible for coordinating and facilitating access to credit-bearing stackable, and portable coursework and credentials for the ECE workforce. These grant agreements are currently funded using CCDF funds administered through the federal Office of Child Care (OCC).

The PDOs serving the ECE workforce across the Commonwealth are the Northwest Institute of Research (NWIR), the Public Health and Management Corporation (PHMC), and Shippensburg University (PASSHE).

OCDEL has reviewed all relevant policies for allowable use of CCDF funds and has received confirmation from OCC that Youth Pathway programs are an allowable use of CCDF funds. These efforts also support the mission of the federal administration by recruiting students to the high-demand field of Early Childhood Education; providing an alternative pathway to traditional post-secondary education and supporting the economy.

As such, PDOs may continue their work with high school students under their current grant agreements* with OCDEL using already allocated CCDF funding to support Youth Pathway programming. Current Youth Pathway programs funded with Preschool Development Grant (PDG) funds will sustain the current cohort of Youth Pathway students. Future cohorts may now be included under CCDF.

The addition of the Youth Pathway to the current PDO scope of work and the conclusion of PDG funding necessitate the need to develop student enrollment prioritization levels. PDOs are expected to fully utilize the prioritization model discussed below when making student enrollment decisions.

*DHS Grant Agreements: 4100100030, 4100100033, 4100100032

DISCUSSION

Youth Pathway

Youth Pathway programming encompasses pathways to recruit high school aged students into the field of ECE. Youth Pathway programs must be approved by OCDEL prior to use of PDO-funding. Currently approved programs include expansion of existing Career and Technical Centers' ECE Programs of Study, Dual Enrollment Programs, and Diversified Occupations Programs, approved by the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

Youth Pathway eligibility includes students enrolled in high school who are also enrolled in or wish to enroll in one of the following:

- Career and Technical Early Childhood Education Programs of Study,
- Dual Enrollment Programs, or
- PDE-approved Diversified Occupations Programs.

PDO-funded students must meet any requirements of the specific program of study they are enrolled in (e.g. 15 hour work requirement for the Diversified Occupations Program). Additionally, PDO-funded students must sign (or have guardian sign) an ECE PDO Commitment Form.

Once a Youth Pathway student graduates high school, they must meet all PDO eligibility requirements to continue being funded through the PDO. It is understood that the work requirement is the most relevant barrier to a former Youth Pathway student

receiving continued funding, however, this requirement allows for the student to commit to continued work in the field and provides the former student time to adjust to their new commitment and appropriately onboard for their new employment. At no time should a “transition period” be applied to a former youth pathway student who does not yet meet all PDO eligibility requirements.

Child Care Centers regulations 55 Pa Code §§ 3270.31 and 3270.37 dictate that an individual 16 years of age or older who is enrolled in an approved training curriculum may be used as an aide; with a minimum of an 8th grade education and enrollment in a training curriculum described at § 3270.31(c) (relating to age and training). Documentation of completed classroom training and continued enrollment must be kept in the facility file as referenced in § 3270.31(c).

Department of Human Services (DHS) licensed programs should be encouraged to hire high school students who meet the requirements above as an aide. This allows the student to be compensated for their time, meet the requirements for the PDE Diversified Occupations Program, and be counted in ratio.

If a high school student does not yet meet these aide requirements, they may be a “paid volunteer” to meet the requirements for the PDE Diversified Occupations Program. Volunteers may not be counted in ratio. As soon as a “paid volunteer” meets aide qualifications, they should be transitioned into the role of aide.

Per Child Care Centers regulations, neither aides nor volunteers are permitted to be left alone with children.

Enrollment and Recruitment Prioritization

PDOs must develop and implement a plan that prioritizes recruitment which maximizes available funding and reflects OCDEL’s goals. The following prioritization for enrollment has been previously shared with ECE PDOs; additional guidance and clarification are provided at each priority level.

Priority 1: Enrolled students who completed coursework in the immediately preceding semester and who will be completing their chosen educational goal (degree or credential) within the Fiscal Year (FY).

- Clarification: Do not limit the number of credits for students at this priority level. Allow students to enroll in needed credits in the semester to assure completion occurs.

Priority 2: Enrolled students who completed coursework in the immediately preceding semester and who will continue their coursework during the FY without a pause.

- Clarification: Credits may be limited for students at this priority level.

Priority 3: Former Youth Pathway students who graduated high school, wish to continue coursework and meet all eligibility requirements for PDO funding.

•Clarification: Students in this priority area MUST meet ALL regular eligibility requirements to enroll in a PDO funded offering; including the work requirement.

Priority 4: Paused students interested in resuming coursework during the FY.

•Clarification: Credits may be limited for students at this priority level.

Priority 5: Dropped students interested in coursework during the FY.

•Clarification: Credits may be limited for students at this priority level.

Priority 6: New PDO students (including Youth Pathway)

•Clarification: Prioritization of new students must include and highly support the recruitment of educators or leaders working in DHS licensed programs:

- serving higher numbers of Child Care Works (CCW) children,
- currently STAR 1 or 2 and working with Quality Coaches to improve quality or have received a DHS Certification citation for staff qualifications, and
- those seeking the educational goals that will place them at level A or B on the Career Pathway.

PDOs must have a written policy for limiting credits. This policy must be reviewed and approved by OCDEL. It is understood that limited funding may lead to fewer participants who are able to access the educational support provided by PDOs. OCDEL will continue to explore options for supporting the ECE Workforce with increased learning opportunities and access to higher education.

Each PDO must maintain a waitlist of students interested in funding, their desired educational goal and priority level. OCDEL reserves the right to adjust prioritization based on needs assessment data. Prioritization Plans and targets should be communicated, evaluated, and discussed with all funded subcontractors/partners.

NEXT STEPS

1. Share this policy clarification with all relevant PDO staff, and PDO partners and staff.
2. Assure protocols are in place to enact the student enrollment prioritization detailed above, and the collection of relevant information for any waitlisted students.