



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

OFFICE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD



Connecticut Administered State-Funded Program General Policy A-05

Eligibility, Enrollment and Attendance in State-Funded Programs

- X OEC Early Start CT Programs
 - X OEC Smart Start CT Programs
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POLICY

The Office of Early Childhood (OEC) funds early care and education programs to provide services to eligible children and families. This policy addresses requirements related to eligibility, enrollment, and attendance in Early Start CT (ESCT) and Smart Start programs.

Programs must have a policy that they share with families detailing the enrollment process in an understandable and accessible manner. Enrolling families must provide a child's birth certificate (or passport) to confirm the legal name and age of the child. The program must retain a copy of a birth certificate (or passport) for every child who receives state funds.

Age Eligibility

- **ESCT**
 - Infants and Toddlers: 6 weeks to 3 years of age
 - Preschool: 2 years, 8 months – 5 years of age (not eligible for kindergarten)
 - i. There must be parent and program approval for a child between 2 years, 8 months and 2 years, 11 months of age to enroll in a preschool space
 - School Age: Enrolled in kindergarten – 12 years of age
- **Smart Start**
 - Preschool: 3, 4, and 5 years of age (not eligible for kindergarten)

Income Eligibility

Family income eligibility will be determined before enrollment and assessed at a minimum annually thereafter.

- **Early Start CT**
 - Sixty percent (60%) of families enrolled must have an income that is at or below seventy-five percent (75%) of the state median income ([SMI](#)) level.



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- **Smart Start**

- Smart Start programs must prioritize enrollment based on each district's approved application for funding. This funding is prioritized for districts that allocate at least sixty percent (60%) of their spaces to children from families whose income is at or below seventy-five percent (75%) of the state median income (SMI) level.

Residency Requirements

ESCT and Smart Start programs that operate within a board of education must enroll families who meet state funding eligibility requirements as well as local board of education requirements.

- **ESCT**

- Programs will enroll families who reside in the state of Connecticut.
 - Families who *reside* in Massachusetts, New York, or Rhode Island but work in Connecticut and receive a state child care subsidy (i.e., Care For Kids) which may be used in Connecticut, are eligible for enrollment.

- **Smart Start**

- Proof of residency is required for enrollment.

Attendance Requirements

An enrolled child participating in the program must attend at least one (1) day in each monthly reporting period.

- Attendance at the minimum of one (1) day per monthly reporting period cannot occur more than twice in a state fiscal year.

OTHER IMPORTANT POLICY CONSIDERATIONS:

- A family has eight (8) weeks to provide a copy of a birth certificate for any child born outside of Connecticut.
- Failure to provide a birth certificate makes the child ineligible for an ESCT space.
- If the child's birth certificate is written in a language other than English, it must be accompanied by an English translation completed by a certified translator or native speaker of that language.
- If a family is unable to provide a birth certificate, a valid and non-expired passport may be used to determine the child's date of birth and legal name.
- It is the program's responsibility to determine family eligibility across income, residency, space type and age **before** enrollment.
 - The program is required to maintain documentation of each family's eligibility. These records must be available to OEC staff upon request.



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- Programs should refer to General Policies B-01 and B-02 for guidance related to determining family fees in conjunction with determining eligibility.
 - Once enrolled in an ESCT funded space, families will remain income-eligible until their youngest child ages out of the program, provided the family pays all applicable fees and meets all applicable eligibility criteria.
- Programs are encouraged to partner with families to ensure that children attend programs regularly to receive the full benefit of services. Building strong relationships with children and families supports continued engagement and regular attendance. When attendance issues arise, programs should support families to address barriers and challenges in order to facilitate a return to full, meaningful engagement with the program.

DEFINITIONS

- I. **Attends:**
 - a. An enrolled child who is present at the program at least one day in each monthly reporting period, and,
 - b. The minimum threshold of one (1) day per monthly reporting period may only occur twice in each fiscal year.
- II. **Enrolled:**
 - a. The family is eligible for program services.
 - b. The child has been scheduled to begin attending the program.
 - c. The child shall be deemed to remain enrolled provided:
 - i. Neither the program nor the family terminates the child's enrollment;
 - ii. The child attends the program at least one (1) day in each monthly reporting period, or,
 - iii. An agreement exists between the provider and the family to hold the space for the child, and the family continues to pay the established fee even if the child fails to attend at least one (1) day in each monthly reporting period.
- III. **Family:** A parent(s), a parent's spouse, and their minor children who reside together.
 - a. A child who receives Temporary Family Assistance (TFA) and who lives with a supervising relative who does not receive TFA, shall be considered a family of one.
 - b. A child in foster care authorized by the Department of Children and Families (DCF) shall be considered a family of one.



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- IV. **Parent:** A person of majority age who has legally been granted “in loco parentis” status or who is a child’s parent by blood, marriage, or adoption.
- a. Parents who pay more than half the support of their minor child(ren) living with another family or family member, as reported to the federal Internal Revenue Service (IRS) in their last annual IRS filing, may include such child(ren) as a member of their family (i.e., family size) for determining the family’s fee.

CIRCUMSTANCES OUTSIDE OF THIS POLICY STATEMENT

When cases relating to eligibility that do not fit into the circumstances described within this policy arise, programs, and/or contractors should contact the appropriate OEC Program Manager for individual guidance.

To the extent any provisions of this General Policy are found inconsistent with any contract or grant provisions, the contract or grant shall govern.

For further information concerning this GENERAL POLICY please contact your OEC Program Manager or visit <https://www.ctoec.org/contact-us/>