

# key approaches for implementation

### background

The Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) Act is the law that authorizes the federal child care subsidy program known as the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF). It is the primary federal funding source for providing low-income families that are working or participating in education and training with help paying for child care and to improving the quality of care for all children. Connecticut's subsidy program is Care 4 Kids.

In September 2016, the final rule was released, making regulatory changes to the CCDF program based on the CCDBG Act of 2014. These changes strengthen requirements to protect the health and safety of children in child care; help parents make informed consumer choices and access information to support child development; provide equal access to stable child care for low-income children; and enhance the quality of child care and the early childhood workforce.

### connecticut's key strategies for implementation of the plan

#### Section 1: Statewide Leadership and Coordination

- Develop a memorandum of agreement with the State Department of Education articulating roles and responsibilities on the coordination of best practices on inclusion in early childhood education preschool settings.
- Improve the referral pathway into education programs for children experiencing homelessness. OEC is exploring opportunities to leverage existing training utilized by McKinney Vento liaisons to increase providers' understanding of the definition of homelessness used in the McKinney Vento Act and to educate providers on how to identify and care for children experiencing homelessness.
- Explore opportunities to expand pre-service teacher preparation to include educational attainment through its partnership with the Connecticut State Colleges & Universities (CSCU). One pilot idea includes providing access to child care for individuals attending early childhood training programs at one of Connecticut's community colleges. The OEC will work with CSCU to collect data on this population to assess the feasibility and scale of this pilot.

#### Section 2: Promoting Family Engagement through Outreach and Education

- Future enhancements to the 2-1-1 Child Care website will make inspection and complaint history accessible to parents on the provider search engine.
- In collaboration with the CT State Department of Education, the OEC's Early Care and Education Division is working with communities to pilot a policy to reduce suspension and expulsion in state funded pre-k programs.

#### Section 3: Provide Stable Child Care Financial Assistance to Families

- States are required to provide for a graduated phase-out of assistance for families whose income has increased above the state's initial income threshold at the time of redetermination but remains below the 2nd tiered eligibility threshold. The Office of Early Childhood utilized data from the United Way ALICE Project Report 2016 to confirm the second eligibility threshold. The ALICE Project calculates a Household Survival Budget based on the average actual costs of basic necessities (housing,



child care, food, health care, and transportation) in Connecticut, adjusted for different counties and household types. The cost of living in Connecticut is high, based on the ALICE Report calculations, the average Household Survival Budget for a household of a family of 3 would be \$59,216. This annual budget accounts for cost of household basics such as housing, child care, food, transportation, health care, taxes, and other miscellaneous essentials.

- Parents must report a non-temporary job loss during the 12-month eligibility period within 10 days. Care 4 Kids will issue a 3-month job search certificate. At the end of the 3-month job search, if the parent has a new job, a new application is completed to determine family eligibility.

#### **Section 4: Ensure Equal Access to High Quality Child Care for Low-Income Children**

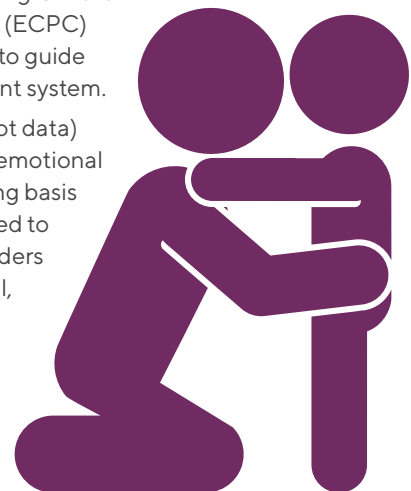
- Work with national experts on an Alternative Methodology Study (AMS) using the “Provider Cost of Quality Calculator” to identify key elements and associated costs for the delivery of high quality care.
- Analyze payment rates in order to ensure equal access and family choice.
- Increase reimbursement for Care 4 Kids providers serving children with special needs from 15% to 25%.
- Provide tiered reimbursement for providers who achieve national accreditation.

#### **Section 5: Establish Standards and Monitoring Processes to Ensure the Health and Safety of Child Care Settings**

- Care 4 Providers are required to complete a pre-service and/or an orientation within 3 months of hire. Based on feedback received from providers the OEC will modify topics to align more closely with provider type and child’s age.
- Connecticut’s law requiring fingerprint-based background checks of child care providers came into effect in the late 1990’s. Any providers/staff who entered the field before that and did not change employment have not been fingerprinted. Those individuals were considered “grandfathered in.” Under the new CCDF requirement to undergo a comprehensive background check every five years, all providers, including those previously grandfathered in, will be fingerprinted.
- A new background check management system will be implemented that will automate the public sex offender registry check process. That system will be live in the summer of 2018. In addition, we are working with the state police to develop a system to access the NCIC sex offender registry. The new system will apply equally to all licensed child care providers, their staff, and in the case of child care homes, their household members over the age of 16

#### **Section 6: Recruit and Retain a Qualified and Effective Child Care Workforce**

- An external Early Childhood Professional Learning Advisory Committee (EC PLAC) will provide policy recommendations to the OEC on the development and sustained efforts of the state integrated early childhood professional development system; and assist the OEC in examining the need for quality professional development that would provide opportunity for cross-role and cross-sector workforce development. The EC PLAC will utilize the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Build it Better report and the Early Childhood Personnel Center (ECPC) plan for developing a Comprehensive System of Personnel Development to guide recommendations and help shape Connecticut’s professional development system.
- CT is piloting a QRIS. The current model (to be revised based upon the pilot data) includes training on the CT ELDS and on supporting children’s social and emotional competence. Training on the Pyramid Model is being offered on an ongoing basis and CT will be holding a 2-day institute in order to develop guidance related to community planning and collaboration to ensure that programs and providers across settings are well equipped to support all children’s social, emotional, and mental health needs.



- The OEC’s Quality Recognition and Improvement System THRIVE! offers an introductory training for all providers on Trauma and Families Experiencing Homelessness. This state-wide, free training is offered to all providers and provides evidence-based techniques for working with these children and families.
- The CT Documentation and Observation for Teaching System (CT DOTS), a framework to guide monitoring of children’s progress toward the goals within the CT ELDS will be available in 2018. The development has involved consideration of the CT ELDS. A more formal review and revision process is anticipated for the next five year cycle ending in 2023.

### Section 7: Support Continuous Quality Improvement

- Findings from the state-wide QRIS Pilot will inform further implementation of a state-wide quality improvement and recognition system. The QRIS has five pillars of quality, Health and Safety, Workforce Education, Learning and Environment, Family Engagement and Leadership and Advocacy. Twelve Listening Tours (approximately 300 providers) were held on the basic five pillars identified in the previous Cabinet work to garner support for those pillars moving forward. In 2017, a draft model was then taken out again to twelve Listening Tours (approximately 300 providers) to close the feedback loop and solidify support for a pilot. The pilot began in the Fall of 2017 with approximately 100 providers in a variety of settings and locales across CT. A program will receive a 1 to 5 rating on each of the 5 pillars. Data from the QRIS pilot will inform the final quality rating scale.
- The CT ELDS (Early Learning and Development Standards) were developed to help families, communities and schools work together to support young children’s early learning and growth. CT DOTS, a framework to guide monitoring of children’s progress toward the goals within the CT ELDS will be available in 2018. Upon release of the CT DOTS, additional training and technical assistance will be provided.
- CT is now field-testing a companion document to the CT ELDS called the Documentation and Observation for Teaching System (CT DOTS) where teachers and caregivers can document and monitor progress along the continuum of development to better inform their planning efforts.
- The OEC will expand the “Help me Grow” program to include a family friendly app to be used as a developmental screening solution for administering the ASQ.
- The OEC released a request for proposal to fund several community-based staffed family child care networks, groups of FCC providers who have voluntarily affiliated with an existing (or have formed an) organization with which they maintain an ongoing supportive relationship.
- The OEC’s public-private partnership with the CT Early Childhood Funders Collaborative provides training and technical assistance to early childhood providers (center and home-based) on fiscal strategic planning. One key component of the training will be follow-up consultation with a SCORE mentor. The OEC has collaborated with SCORE, a resource affiliate of the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) to provide this consultation.

### Section 8: Ensure Grantee Program Integrity and Accountability

This section includes topics on internal controls to ensure integrity and accountability and processes in place to investigate and recover fraudulent payments and to impose sanctions on clients or providers in response to fraud.

- Regular onsite training is provided to all staff members who administer the CCDF program.
- Regular monitoring of the CCDF program through a contract and case review process.
- Quality assurance processes for reviewing family cases.
- Monthly reviews of payment reports to ensure all payments made to providers are timely.
- The Department of Social Services Fraud Early Detection Unit (FRED) is used as a system to detect and prevent errors before the agency approves benefits.

