

Highlights of New Hampshire's Child Care and Development Fund Federal Plan for FFY 2016-2018

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Section 1

Define CCDF Leadership and Coordination with Relevant Systems

- Section 1.4- Coordinate with partners to expand access and continuity of care. **NH will continue its strong collaborative partnerships to strengthen continuity of care and expand access for vulnerable children, especially in underserved areas.**

- Section 1.6 – Public-private partnerships. NH will continue to strengthen public-private partnerships, such as with the Seacoast Early Learning Alliance (SELA) around strengthening business practices for child care providers through the Shared Services model.

- Section 1.8- Disaster preparedness and response plans. States are required to have a means for continuing child care in the wake of a disaster, and must require programs to have preparedness plans, as well as training and practice drills of their plans. NH already makes provisions for on-going child care following a disaster and requires licensed child care programs to have emergency preparedness plans. Programs will need to have in place emergency preparedness training and practice drills.

Section 2

Promote Family Engagement through Outreach and Consumer Education

- Sections 2.1 & 2.2- States must make available to families, providers and the general public information about financial assistance programs, health and safety monitoring of child care providers, and consumer education information. This information will be available electronically and will help families learn about and make informed choices about accessing high quality child care. NH already provides an electronic financial assistance application (NH Easy) process for families and information on the DHHS website about various financial assistance programs. NH already posts information on the DHHS website Child Care Search, regarding child care licensing monitoring visits and corrective action plans. The Child Care Aware[®] of NH website will be enhanced to include or link to all of the required information on the consumer education website. The website will have information for families, child care providers, and the general public that will be easy to navigate. This website already includes a child care referral tool where parents can search for child care according to their specific needs. Providers can also look for upcoming training opportunities.

- Section 2.2.7- States must require CCDF providers to have policies in place to reduce and severely limit suspensions and expulsions based on child behavior. NH has created a policy for the inclusion of children in child care programs with the intent of reducing and severely limiting child expulsions and suspensions. Supports, including training and technical assistance, are currently being developed to assist providers to successfully include all children. The Preschool Technical Assistance Network (PTAN) already exists to support programs and will be used as a model for further implementation.

Section 3
Provide Stable Child Care
Financial Assistance to Families

- Section 3.1 States must establish 12-month eligibility for child care assistance. NH already has 12-month eligibility for families that are only receiving the NH Child Care Scholarship. NH will implement 12-month eligibility for all families receiving the NH Child Care Scholarship, regardless of their participation in other programs. Families will remain eligible and payments will be made even when parents experience a break in employment, such as seasonal work, summer breaks from school or medical leave. Children must continue to attend a child care program and families must continue to contribute their cost share and co-pay during their break. Fluctuating income will be annualized to calculate a standard monthly income to determine eligibility.

- Section 3.2 States have the option to terminate assistance prior to the end of the 12-month eligibility period, **ONLY** if a parent terminates their job or education/training program, **AND** the State provides at least a 3-month job search period. **NH will take this option and change job search from 40 days of paid child care in a rolling 6 month period to a 3-month (92 day) period of job search, irrespective of the number of days paid during that period.**

- Section 3.3 States must ensure that parents are not required to unduly interrupt their work to comply with reporting requirements. NH already has an online application (NH Easy), allows for phone interviews (except for one in-person interview per year), and is able to receive verification documents by mail, email, or fax that will be scanned and uploaded into the system, or allows individuals to upload documents themselves. NH has an integrated eligibility system for financial/medical assistance programs and client-reported changes are applied across all programs as applicable; therefore, families will continue to report all changes as they occur.

- Section 3.4 Family Contribution to payments. States must ensure that families have a way of “stepping off” of the NH Child Care Scholarship and not having payments end abruptly. NH already has a 7 step system that increases the family’s contribution (cost share) as income increases. Since families must remain eligible for 12 months despite going over the highest entry level income, a new Step 8 will be created. Family cost share will still increase, but payments and eligibility may continue during the remainder of the 12-month eligibility period. In addition, NH plans to reduce the number of times cost share changes during the 12-month eligibility period. Cost share will decrease with any reported decrease in income, but only increase when a family’s step level increases.

Section 4
Ensuring Access to
High Quality Child Care for
Low-Income Children

- Section 4.1- Parents must have a choice when selecting child care providers. **The NH Child Care Scholarship already allows parents to choose the type of provider that they want to use.**

- Section 4.2- States must perform a Market Rate or alternative methodology survey no more than two years before the submission of the Plan (Plan submission will now occur every 3 years). NH already has in rule to repeat a market rate survey every two years and to set provider payment rates in accordance with the current market rate survey. In this way, provider payment rates are kept current with the reported market rate.

- Section 4.5- Payment Practices and Timeliness of Payments. As it is possible, States are to pay child care providers in the same way a private-pay family would, including paying for occasional child absences due to holidays and/or illness. NH's payment system is based on a child's attendance at an authorized service level (FT = 31 hours or more; HT = 16-30 hours; PT = 1-15 hours). If a child attends fewer hours than their authorized service level, the payment drops and parents and/or providers incur the cost. NH plans to allow providers to bill for 7 holidays, and allow hours for approximately 5 closed days and 2 professional development days when a child is not in attendance. In addition each child will get a, yet to be determined, annual absentee allotment of hours that can be applied when a child is absent. These two things combined will help reduce the number of times a child's service level drops during the year, and encourage child attendance so that parents will experience fewer unexpected out-of-pocket expenses and providers will receive more predictable payments.

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

- Section 5.1- States are required to have adequate licensing requirements and standards. NH already has licensing requirements for providers including adequate teacher/child ratios and group sizes.
- Licensing requirement must include 10 specific health and safety standards. Some of these are already included in the Child Care Licensing Rules. The remaining standards will be included in the current rules revision project which will be completed before the rules expire next year.
- All providers must receive pre-service or orientation training in the same 10 topic areas. This includes both licensed and license-exempt child care providers. NH will seek a variety of ways to make the trainings free or low cost and accessible to providers, either online or in-person. Free national online trainings are currently being developed. The required frequency of trainings is yet to be determined.

- Section 5.2- States must complete a pre-licensure and at least one annual unannounced inspection for all licensed providers receiving CCDF. NH currently inspects all child care providers seeking licensure and ensures compliance prior to issuing a child care license. NH already has rules in place to annually monitor all licensed providers. NH will need to comply with the requirement of an annual unannounced inspection for licensed providers.
- States must complete an annual inspection of license-exempt providers, both center-based and family providers. NH does not currently inspect license-exempt providers receiving the NH Child Care Scholarship. In NH this will include all family providers whether relatives or non-relatives and whether the care is provided in the child's home or the provider's home.

- Section 5.3- Background Checks. States must perform fingerprint and background checks to include a comprehensive criminal background check, national sex offender registry and the state's child abuse and neglect registry. Checks must be performed in the individual's State of current residence as well as any State of residence for the previous 5 years. Checks must be repeated at least once every 5 years. Results of checks must be cleared before the first day of employment or enrollment. NH already performs background checks on household and personnel members for both licensed and license-exempt providers. The extent of some checks will need to be increased and checks of the child abuse and neglect registries from the State(s) of residence for the previous 5 years will need to be completed. Currently, only proof of having had the check must be submitted before the first day of employment.

Section 6
Training and Professional
Development Requirements

- Sections 6.1 & 6.2- States are required to have professional development requirements to support children's growth and development and skill of the child care workforce. NH already has a well-developed professional development system and provides for increasing levels of competency. NH will continue to provide tuition assistance for early childhood college courses for early childhood professionals working in a licensed program at least 25 hours per week.

- Section 6.3 - Early Learning and Development Guidelines. States are required to develop, maintain or implement Early Learning and Development Guidelines. NH had recently posted the new Early Learning Standards (ELS) for NH on the DHHS website. NH plans to develop trainings, both in-person and online, that will promote the use of the ELS and to create an interactive website to search and use the ELS more intentionally and individually for children.

Section 7
Support Continuous Quality
Improvement

- Section 7.2- Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). States are required to have a way to measure the level of the quality of child care programs in the State. One CCDF goal is to have more children in families with low-income enrolled in high quality child care programs. States must have a way of evaluating which programs are offering high quality care. Most states do this through a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). QRIS set standards for providers to meet and provide supports and incentives to help them achieve those standards. Parents need to know what high quality care is and looks like and how to find and access it. NH is working to revise and enhance our current QRIS with standards that include program standards, professional development standards and family engagement standards. Monitoring of the standards must be determined. QRIS also include supports (to achieve levels of quality) and incentives (for having achieved them), which will be modified to fit the revised and enhanced QRIS.

- Section 7.4- States are asked to describe their current CCR&R system. NH recently moved to a single contractor for statewide CCR&R services which is Child Care Aware[®] of NH, a CCR&R service of Southern NH Services. Child Care Aware[®] of NH will continue to provide referrals and consumer education to families, both in person, over the phone or via the web. Provider services continue to include robust training and technical assistance to improve the quality of child care. They also seek to connect families, providers and community resources to best serve and meet the needs of each.

Section 8
Ensure Grantee Program
Integrity and Accountability

- Section 8- States are required to have measures of accountability, but are also encouraged to reduce the burden for participants and staff in reporting and monitoring. States must have measures in place to identify fraud, administrative error, and program violations, whether intentional or unintentional. **Though NH will continue to require families to report changes, fewer changes will occur, so administrative errors will likely be reduced. Allowing providers to bill for days they were closed will also reduce the amount of monitoring required by CDB staff. Policies and procedures will remain in place for recouping misspent funds due to program violations or fraud.**