

ECE Provider Conference Call
Tuesday, April 20, 2021
6:00 p.m.

The call began at 6:00 p.m.

Kimberly Krzanowski, Executive Director for the Office of Early Learning, DOE: Kim welcomed everyone and thanked them for joining the call. She noted the call would be recorded and minutes would be available and sent out to the various listservs. She thanked everyone who submitted questions prior to the meeting. It is the goal to answer as many questions as possible during this call, but please know that some issues are still being discussed and we may need additional time to address your questions. Tonight's agenda will include updates from the Department of Education's (DOE) Office of Child Care Licensing (OCCL), the Office of Early Learning (OEL), Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) and a presentation on the new Stabilization Grants by Tom Hall and Yvette Sanchez-Fuentes.

Betty Gail Timm, Director, DOE, Office of Child Care Licensing: Thank you for the care you continue to provide to children and families. Earlier today, OCCL sent revised guidance to providers. If you did not receive it, please contact the OCCL office nearest you to ensure we have the correct email address for you. This guidance informed you that field trips may be resumed and bus transportation may occur if social distancing can be maintained.

Monitoring visits resume May 3, 2021 for those providers whose licenses expire in June.

OCCL was asked the question regarding possible changes to the modified group sizes. Group size restrictions are based on guidance from our partners at the Division of Public Health in order to minimize the spread of COVID-19. Group size guidance has not changed. If you have any questions, please contact your licensing specialist.

Kimberly Krzanowski, Executive Director for the Office of Early Learning, DOE: Kim answered some questions that had been received, including:

Q. Regarding CDA and Delaware Stars, if CDAs are going to be encouraged by Delaware Stars, will there be funding to help obtain the 120 clock hours of training – like Training for Early Care and Education 1 & 2 and the CDA assessment fee that is available statewide?

A. Yes, there will be funding support to obtain CDA. Specifics on timeline are still being discussed, but know that there will be funding to support this change in qualifications.

Q. How is Delaware Stars going to recognize programs for serving their community during this time?
A. Certificates of Appreciation were issued to all licensed programs in late December/early January that were signed by the Governor and Secretary Bunting. We will continue to think of other ways to recognize programs and are always open to feedback from the community.

Q. _____ that were active in Delaware Stars and remained open when we were needed most?
A. At this time, verifications are not being conducted. However, based on feedback from the community, we are actively working with our technology department on placing a communication on the search feature of the OCCL website that addresses why programs are unable to change Delaware Stars level at this time.

Thomas Hall, Deputy Chief, Division of Social Services, DHSS/POC Office

Good evening, this is Tom Hall the Deputy Director for the Division of Social Services. Thank you for allowing me this time. DSS continues to provide updates to providers through our Provider Portal, Listserv, and the MyChildDE.org website, and provides direct assistance to providers through the POCResource mailbox and POC helpline.

I will share where we are in terms of the payment supports for our POC providers. Additionally, we received questions prior to the call that folks asked us to address. I will cover some of those questions during my part of tonight's meeting, the majority of the rest of the questions will be addressed in Yvette's and my presentation about the new stabilization grant program.

Current Payments Structure

1. Pre-COVID Baseline/Floor Payments

- In January we established pre-pandemic baseline amounts or floor payment for all POC providers. For most providers that payment is based on their February 2020 POC billing. Through this effort we are distributing over \$2 million a month in additional funds to POC providers.
- It is very important that sites enter attendance information in the portal no later than the 3rd Monday of the month to ensure they receive a baseline supplemental payment.
- We will continue the baseline payments through at least June 2021.

2. Family Co-Pays

- DSS continues to pay the parent co-pay. This effort will also continue through at least June 2021.
- Please do not collect copays and please reimburse any families that may have paid in advance for the month of November.

3. Beginning with February – June 2021 billing, we have increased the number of paid absent days to ten children authorized for full time. There was a request that DHSS consider paying for enrollment. This new policy of increasing the number of absent days is used by several states to accomplish paying by enrollment. We are hoping to gather data regarding the use of absent days and the costs associated with increasing the limit to ten to be able to determine the cost and implications of extending this policy beyond the current healthcare emergency.

4. We continue to authorize full time services for school-age children. One of the questions we received asked whether there was consideration in increasing the POC age limit to 14. While there are conditions in which 14 year olds and older can be authorized for POC, there is not a plan to extend the general age limits beyond the current limits.

Removing Non-attending Children From Roster

Providers who would like to remove children from their roster on the portal, should send an email to the resource mail box (POCResource@delaware.gov). Please include child's MCI number.

Workforce and Rates

We received a number of questions about workforce concerns. Concerns include the possibility of an increase in the minimum wage, and the lack of qualified applicants to fill current facility needs or to add staff to expand enrollment.

We have started to meet with the Department of Labor (DOL) to discuss identifying, through their unemployment data, qualified childcare workers. The hope is to make that information available to providers for direct recruiting. We are also considering how providers can work directly with DOL for their recruiting needs. Additionally, we are looking at the opportunity to get more interested workers the training and experience they need to be able to take the jobs that are available. DOL is very interested in helping and is willing to attend these meetings if providers feel that would be helpful. As our work with DOL moves forward, we will be sure to share that progress with the provider community.

Questions about POC Rates and Rate Studies

Presently there has not been a proposal to increase POC rates in 2021, but I can share some of the work being done to inform policy makers. As I have previously reported, DSS completed the 2021 Market Rate Survey in February. That study captures the fees charged to families in Delaware accessing child care services. We have also completed a preliminary in-depth cost of care study to determine how much providers spend to deliver child care services. As previously noted, the limitation of these type of studies from the provider perspective is that businesses are limited in what they can charge by what the market will bear or by what families can afford. Typically spending is constrained by what can be charged or collected. We recognize those limitations and realize that policy makers need a broader perspective and more information if they are going to adequately make rate decisions. The next step in providing that broader perspective is our work to create a cost of quality care estimator tool. The group building that tool met last week to begin constructing that cost of quality tool which will provide information regarding what it will cost to provide quality services in some of the conditions of the current environment such as wage competitiveness, increased credentials for staff, reduced child to staff ratios, and the cost of implementing the new QRIS standards. These three tools, in addition to some of the exciting work being done in other states who are reviewing strategies to identify how to fund a statewide quality child care system, will be used to inform policy makers over the next year.

Mental Health

The American Rescue Plan Act allows for expenditures on mental health services for students or staff to be included in expenses for those granted a stabilization grant. There is not currently an avenue for ECE staff to access state employee health benefits. I think the mental health provision is in the bill to encourage providers and states to think broadly about how to support ECE staff and the children and families they serve. Someone asked could Conscious Discipline materials be included in these costs. We will need to address this in our guidance for the grants, but my initial thought is that any spending that is for services provided in the facility and directly linked to improving the mental health of staff or children would be qualified spending. Contracting for employee assistance services or arranging for group or telehealth services would also be approved spending. We will be sure to address this type of spending when we issue guidance for documenting spending for the stabilization grants.

At DSS, the POC staff are on duty and ready to accept calls and POC questions via the POC Helpline which is 302-255-9670 or via email at POCResource@delaware.gov. As always you may reach out to me directly at 255-9605 or Thomas.Hall@delaware.gov. Thank you for your hard work and dedication to Delaware's families.

Yvette Sanchez-Fuentes, Associate Secretary, Office of Early Childhood Support

Yvette Sanchez-Fuentes provided the attached PowerPoint on the soon-to-be-available funding for Stabilization Fund grants, which providers can utilize to assist with the cost of operation due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Kim Krzanowski thanked everyone for being the call and for your questions, and noted that we will continue to forward information as it becomes available.