



MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

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Human Services:  
**CCPP**  
Newsletter

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## Newsletter Highlights

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Welcome to the first issue of the official Child Care Payment Program (CCPP) Newsletter. The Mississippi Department of Human Services (MDHS) is committed to providing important facts to child care providers who are interested in redeeming CCPP vouchers. As part of this commitment, this issue will address several questions that have been raised by providers. You can expect a new issue at the beginning of each month. Finally, there are many unofficial sources sharing information on topics related to MDHS policies and procedures, and we would caution you to verify any information within MDHS before drawing any conclusions or choosing a course of action. If you have any further questions, please contact MDHS via the contact information at the end of this newsletter.

We very much look forward to working with all providers in developing a system that helps child care centers provide quality care for children and families.

# What is the state's plan for early childhood? Where can I find it?

The plan is titled "A Family-Based Unified and Integrated Early Childhood System" and can be found at the top of the State Early Childhood Advisory Council (SECAC) website at [www.secac.ms.gov](http://www.secac.ms.gov).

In December 2016, SECAC presented the plan to Governor Phil Bryant. The plan will help MDHS ensure that all CCPP-approved providers are compliant with federal law. The plan takes into account the whole life of a child through three areas of child development: (1) early care and learning; (2) health, mental health, safety, and nutrition; and (3) family engagement. As part of the plan, MDHS is developing a system that promotes the best outcome for the child by supporting family as a whole; providing continuity of learning from birth to 5 in order to prepare children to enter into kindergarten; and beginning with the child care center as the starting point for high-quality early care and learning.

## What are the Child Care Payment Program (CCPP) requirements under the new plan?

The plan follows the federal guidelines of the Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG) Act of 2014, which provides the funding for CCPP. The 2014 law requires CCPP-approved centers to do two things:

- 1. Make child care safer by defining 12 health and safety requirements for child care providers and by requiring background checks and inspection of facilities. (Licensed centers are already doing this.)**

To receive CCPP vouchers, child care providers must meet all 12 federal health and safety standards. This requirement involves participating in federally mandated health and safety training, implementing health and safety standards, and engaging in regular inspections to ensure continued compliance with health and safety standards. To meet this requirement, MDHS has adopted policies that require all staff working in CCPP-approved centers to complete an initial training that covers the federally mandated health and safety topics within three months of hire. Community colleges will offer these initial health and safety trainings through the newly established Early Childhood Academies. In Mississippi, centers can provide additional health and safety requirement assurances by demonstrating that they are licensed under the general rules of the Mississippi State Department of Health.

- 2. Improve the overall quality of early learning programs.**

Under CCDBG, child care providers are required to engage in activities that support children's early learning. All states receiving CCDBG funds must have policies and procedures in place to ensure that the state will implement "early learning and developmental guidelines that are appropriate for children from birth to kindergarten entry, describing what children should know and be able to do and covering the essential domains of early childhood development for use statewide by child care providers" (658E(c)(2)(R)). To ensure compliance with this requirement, all CCPP-eligible providers must demonstrate that they engage in early learning activities that align with the state's early learning and development guidelines and standards provided by the Mississippi Department of Education.

Providers are also federally required to engage in continuous quality improvement to enhance the overall quality of early learning activities within child care centers. MDHS has adopted an innovative way to enhance quality in child care centers through coaching, technical assistance, and professional development. Supported by early childhood best practices, this process will allow early childhood specialists to provide centers with customized, targeted assistance designed to improve instruction and the implementation of early childhood best practices. With this process, no center will be ever rated as in the past. This new approach ensures that all centers redeeming vouchers will operate at the same level of quality by simply receiving the necessary technical assistance from the newly created Early Childhood Academies at local community colleges.

To ensure that MDHS can assist centers with their unique needs and goals, centers will engage in an annual self-assessment. The self-assessment will allow centers to reflect on their practices and establish new goals for the upcoming year, and it will help MDHS and the Early Childhood Academies provide centers with the assistance needed to accomplish the goals. Information provided on the self-assessment will only be used to identify the appropriate level of technical assistance and professional development so that all CCPP-approved centers can operate at an equal level of quality.

## How can I demonstrate compliance with these requirements to MDHS?

Under the state's new early childhood plan "A Family-Based Unified and Integrated Early Childhood System," all CCPP-approved providers must be designated as standard centers. The first step to achieve the status of a standard child care center is to complete the Standard Child Care Center Application. (The Standard Child Care Center Application is still being developed. Future meetings will be held to gather input from providers before the application is finalized.) Centers must also demonstrate compliance with:

- 1. Health and safety requirement implementation and inspection, as recorded by the Mississippi State Department of Health's Child Care Facilities Licensure Branch.**
- 2. Staff participation in the federally mandated health and safety training.**
- 3. Learning activities aligned with the state's early learning guidelines and standards.**

The Standard Child Care Center Application will also contain a section for centers' required annual self-assessment, which will be used by MDHS and the Early Childhood Academies to provide technical assistance and professional development for ongoing quality improvement, if the center requests.

The application will aim to be user-friendly and will be completely online. The application will also be designed to easily facilitate updates that require minimal effort should the center decide to reapply to maintain CCPP eligibility for the subsequent year.

## What is the status of the policy manual for the Child Care Payment Program (CCPP)?

On August 2, 2016, MDHS submitted a substantially revised CCPP policy manual to the Secretary of State's Office that addressed provisions under the Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG) Act of 2014. Provider input on this revised version was collected during workgroup meetings and public hearings.

On April 12, 2017, MDHS made minor updates to the CCPP Policy manual to:

- **Allow MDHS to begin the process of designating centers as standard and comprehensive under Mississippi’s early childhood plan, “A Family-Based Unified and Integrated Early Childhood System.”**
- **Replace terms such as “licensed” and “unlicensed” with the more appropriate term “CCPP-approved.”**

A public hearing will be held to collect public comments on only the updates submitted on April 12 to the CCPP policy manual.

## What does it mean to be a standard vs. a comprehensive child care center?

*Note: The Standard and Comprehensive Child Care Center Applications are still in development. Future meetings will be held to gather input from providers before the application is finalized.*

MDHS’s goal is to support all centers in their efforts to provide high-quality early care and learning services. Quality begins with meeting the basic requirements to be a CCPP-approved provider as a standard center, as described above. Unlike the old quality rating system, all child care centers deemed eligible to accept CCPP vouchers will be designated as “high-quality” centers.

Standard Child Care Centers are centers that have met the minimum requirements to become eligible for CCPP vouchers and in doing so provide a safe and high-quality early care and learning environment.

Comprehensive Child Care Centers are centers that choose to engage in additional coaching, technical assistance, and professional development services offered through the Early Childhood Academies to engage in activities that support a holistic and integrated approach to activities in the life of a child from birth to 5. We welcome all child care centers to take advantage of these services in order to become comprehensive. Centers that choose to become comprehensive will work with Early Childhood Academy coaches to continually improve in a variety of ways that enrich child care experiences, such as enhanced implementation of curricula and standards; implementation of child assessments; early learning transition planning to support children’s continuity of learning; ongoing professional development that exceeds minimum requirements for licensure; program evaluations to inform quality improvement plans for continuous growth and optimized implementation of early childhood best practices; and family engagement practices to support the best outcomes for the child.

## Is the new standard and comprehensive center framework just another version of the QRIS?

Absolutely not. The standard and comprehensive center system is very different from the QRIS in three important ways.

- 1. The new system utilizes a customer service-based approach to enhance quality within child care centers through coaching, technical assistance, and professional development.**

Under the QRIS, the burden to enhance centers' quality rested solely on providers. In order to move up in quality ranking, providers were forced to conform to a set of requirements that came at high costs, such as earning advanced degrees, hiring more credentialed staff or paying a center's existing staff more to earn additional credentials, and achieving high scores on environmental assessments that cost a considerable amount of money to implement.

Within the new system, the standard and comprehensive center application processes will be designed to understand how centers uniquely address standard and comprehensive center requirements without imposing uniform center practices. The standard and comprehensive center application processes will be center and director driven, which will allow centers/directors to demonstrate how they support children's early learning. Information provided through these processes will also allow the state to provide the assistance and support necessary to ensure that every center operates at high quality (as opposed to ranking centers using a rating system). Quality enhancement will be done by providing the necessary assistance through MDHS and Early Childhood Academies to level the playing field across all eligible child care centers. MDHS and the Early Childhood Academies are ultimately responsible for providing the resources and support for centers to enhance their quality.

## **2. Under the new system, child care centers will never be ranked.**

By using a tiered approach, the QRIS imposed a culture that stigmatized child care centers on their costly path to achieve "high quality" as a five-star center. Under the new system, by virtue of being compliant with federal requirements, all centers eligible to receive CCPP vouchers will be deemed high quality. By achieving a standard designation through the Standard Child Care Center Application, centers can ensure that they maintain a healthy and safe learning environment, engage in early learning activities that align with state early learning guidelines/standards, and participate in continuous quality improvement. The system will be designed to ensure that all children receiving vouchers have equal access to a high-quality early care and learning environment and will be prepared to enter kindergarten ready to learn.

## **3. The new system focuses on the quality of learning experiences for children rather than environmental-quality factors.**

While environmental-quality factors are important and can certainly enhance child care settings, environmental-quality factors alone do not ensure a high-quality learning experience for the child and are secondary to properly implemented, age-appropriate instructional practices. Under the new system, early learning serves as the core for quality improvement. Support and assistance offered through MDHS and Early Learning Academies will be designed to enhance child care experiences by bringing expertise in instructional practice, instilling behavioral modeling and classroom and center management in the child care center, and working with child care providers to develop a custom-made quality improvement plan that fits within centers' existing capacity to continually improve on a variety of early childhood-related topics.

# **Why is MDHS asking for personal staff information as part of the application process?**

As the agency responsible for administering federal child care funds, MDHS must be able to demonstrate to federal regulators at all times that staff within all CCPP-approved child care centers are compliant with federal requirements, specifically federal health and safety training and background-check requirements.

Collecting personal information like SSNs protects child care staff from needing to be retrained or having to go through the background check process each time they transition into, out of, and between child care centers. In other words, unnecessary burdens and costs to providers can be eliminated by collecting personal information to make it clear to federal regulators that all staff are in compliance.

Providing personal information through the application is voluntary. Be advised, however, that if personal information is not provided, it will be difficult for MDHS to demonstrate a center's compliance with federal requirements. All personal information will be protected with appropriate measures to maintain privacy and confidentiality as required by federal law.

## **Are voucher reimbursement rates determined by responses to the Standard Child Care Center Application?**

No. The Standard Child Care Center Application collects information needed to designate a center as standard based on federal requirements and to inform the type of support and assistance a center may need if the center requests it. Reimbursement rates are still being determined. The rates will be calculated using results of the Market Rate Survey, the age of the child, and whether a center is designated as standard or comprehensive. The purpose of the Market Rate Survey is to collect information about the types of child care services offered and the rates charged to the general public for those services. Reimbursement rates will not change based on how a center responds to items in the Standard Child Care Center Application. More information about reimbursement rates will be available in upcoming CCPP newsletters.

## **Contact**

For more information about the Child Care Payment Program, please visit [www.secac.ms.gov](http://www.secac.ms.gov).

For questions or additional comments regarding CCPP administration, please contact Candice Pittman at [Candice.Pittman@mdhs.ms.gov](mailto:Candice.Pittman@mdhs.ms.gov).

For questions or additional comments regarding technical assistance, professional development, or coaching, please contact Micca Knox at [mknnox@mccb.edu](mailto:mknnox@mccb.edu).