



NC DEPARTMENT OF
**HEALTH AND
HUMAN SERVICES**
Division of Child Development and Early
Education

ROY COOPER • Governor
MANDY COHEN, MD, MPH • Secretary
ARIEL FORD • Director

February 25, 2021

Dr. Ellen Wheatley
Acting Director
Office of Child Care
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services - Administration of Child and Families
330 C Street, S.W.
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Acting Director Wheatley:

The NC Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) and the NC Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE) have taken a multi-pronged approach to supporting families and child care programs during the COVID-19 pandemic. We have deliberately implemented strategies that are inter-related and mutually reinforcing to provide financial stability to the essential child care industry. The four main areas of focus in North Carolina's Pandemic Relief efforts have been:

- Child Care Health and Safety
- Child Care Access and Affordability
- Child Care Operational Supports
- Child Care Workforce Supports

After months of struggling to stay open and continuing to serve children and families, child care providers are still vulnerable. While North Carolina has made significant progress in combating the COVID-19 virus, the State is prepared to continue financial support for our child care industry. The CCDF Lead Agency is excited to share our plan for the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Funds which will provide vital investments to our struggling child care industry.

Direct Child Care Services (Subsidies)

North Carolina plans to use CRRSA funds to provide direct child care services in the form of parent co-payments for **ALL** families participating in the child care subsidy program. This strategy will provide child care subsidy assistance to struggling families, including health care sector employees, emergency responders, sanitation workers, farm and other food service workers and/or other essential workers.

Implementation of Virus Mitigation Policies and Practices

The Division of Child Development and Early Education does plan to use CRRSA funds to purchase up to three clear masks for all child care employees working in licensed child care facilities. As we continue to support child care centers and family child care homes serving our youngest children, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends masks be worn by teachers, care workers, and other adults interacting with the child. However, wearing masks around infants and children during the first five years of life may reduce their ability to learn from auditory and visual cues – and this may negatively influence

NC DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES • DIVISION OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND EARLY EDUCATION

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speech and language learning. Covering faces could also limit children's ability to recognize familiar people and determine when someone is happy, sad, or angry. By providing clear face masks to early childhood educators we hope to reduce the potential negative impacts on early learning.

Grants or Assistance (Other than Subsidies) to Stabilize Child Care Providers

North Carolina's Lead Agency plans to use the CRRSA funds to continue to provide Operational Grants to our child care industry. Operational Grants have been the most requested support by providers and advocates. These flexible dollars allow providers to use the funds on fixed or operating expenses, improve cash flow, and/or assists child care providers to meet specific needs. DCDEE already has the infrastructure in place to issue payments directly to programs. The Operational Grants awards will be distributed to **all** licensed centers and homes using a formula based on the following factors: number of children served, star rating, enrollment in the subsidy program, and infant and toddler enrollment.

Assistance to Providers Not Participating in the Subsidy System Prior to the Pandemic

As required in Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSA), North Carolina plans to use a portion of their allocated funds to provide assistance to CCDF-eligible child care providers not participating in the subsidy system prior to the COVID-19 public health emergency by providing Operational Grants to **ALL** licensed child care centers and homes.

Other

In addition to the previously mentioned activities, the lead agency plans to use a portion of CRRSA funds on three other identified activities: 1) Infrastructure Supports/Building, 2) Teacher/Employee Supports, and 3) Summer Learning Loss Program.

- ***Infrastructure Supports/Building*** – DCDEE plans to modernize their learning technologies and data systems to better support data integration and accountability measures.
- ***Teacher/Employee Supports*** – DCDEE plans to invest in strategies to build and maintain a high-quality early childhood workforce.
- ***Summer Learning Loss Program*** - The child care industry in North Carolina has been deeply impacted by COVID-19. NC DHHS has worked hard to provide policy and financial supports to programs during this challenging time. Our state NC Pre-K program has served 32% less children than in previous years and many of our working families have been unable to provide the needed supports to ensure their children are ready for Kindergarten. As a result, many children have had limited instructional experiences and there is a need for a summer learning loss program to mitigate the learning loss encountered during the pandemic.

North Carolina would like to thank the Office of Child Care – Administration of Children and Families for their advocacy efforts to support our child care industry.

Sincerely,

/s/

Ariel Ford
Director

/s/

Kristi L. Snuggs
Deputy Director