



NEW HAVEN SCHOOL READINESS POLICIES AND PROCEDURES



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NEW HAVEN SCHOOL READINESS PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

The New Haven Early Childhood Council (NHECC) has established the following policies to guide school readiness funded programs in the administration of the grant. Many of the policies reiterate those established by the State Department of Education. Not all SDE General Policies and Program Operation Documents are listed here. School Readiness programs are responsible for complying with SDE School Readiness policies which are found on the website

[OEC Policies for State Funded Programs](#)

SR eligibility requirements for children

Children age 3 and 4 years are eligible for a school readiness funded space if they are New Haven residents and their families meet the income eligibility guidelines set forth by the Department of Social Services. DSS guidelines related to family income and size are published annually. In New Haven, we are committed to serving the children most in need of a preschool experience. Our benchmark is to have NO MORE THAN 25% of the SR funded families in ANY program over income (75% of the SMI) at the time of enrollment. The NHECC reserves the right to entertain exceptions to this rule from programs that put their request in writing.

Kindergarten eligible children in School Readiness

A child who is chronologically ready for kindergarten but whose parents and teachers believe would benefit from another year in preschool may be funded by school readiness if: 1. the child has previously attended the preschool program; 2. prior to enrolling the child, the program has put the request in writing to the SR office; and, 3. the SRC has not exceeded the limit imposed by the State Department of Education that no more than 5% of its total SR funded spaces are filled by kindergarten-eligible children.

SR child attendance requirements

Programs are to report the number of days absent/present for each SR funded child on the monthly site data report form. Programs have a responsibility to talk with families whose children have an erratic attendance record (8 or more absences in a 20 day month) to determine the cause(s) of the absences. The program will notify the SR Project Director of these situations and report on attempts to improve attendance. When children continue to show a pattern of unjustified absences, even after several attempts by the program staff to help, the program may, in consultation with the SR Office ask the family to withdraw their child from the program in order to give the space to a child who will benefit from regular attendance in a school readiness program

Children utilizing a full day or extended day space must be in need of care for a minimum of 6 hours a day. (See OEC Policies B-04)

Space utilization

As stated in the School Readiness Agreement, SR sub-grantees that do not meet their funded capacity must submit a plan no later than November 1st as to how it will increase enrollment. The NHECC reserves the right to reduce the number of contracted spaces and the funded amount of programs that do not meet this requirement. Unused slots will be offered to existing SR sub-grantees who have demonstrated an ability to maintain high utilization rates. In the event that unused SR spaces are not awarded to current sub-grantees, the NHECC will issue an RFP to solicit new SR providers.

Notification to School Readiness Office

It is important for the School Readiness office to be made aware of situations that may have a negative impact on children funded by the School Readiness grant. The following two situations are already in the SR Agreement annually signed by the Program Director and the NH Board of Education (as SR fiduciary). They are re-iterated here to stress their importance.

Intent to terminate a child's enrollment in a SR funded space: Long before a program decides to discuss with parents the termination of their child from the program, the program director should contact the SR office or the SR Education Consultants. Through various funding streams, the Council has put in place several supports for program staff, parents and children including SR Education Consultants, a Multi-Disciplinary Team and Child First. These supports, in addition to the program's own consultants, should be utilized when the first signs of a problem are noticed. Teaching staff need all the support they can get, especially with children with challenging behaviors, undiagnosed special needs or have parents with their own challenges.

Staff accused of child abuse or neglect: All programs must have policies and procedures to follow in the event of an allegation against a staff member. In addition to following this procedure—which includes calling DCF, the SR office must be notified within 48 hours. NAEYC Accredited Programs are required to follow the NAEYC policy and notify NAEYC within 72 hours.

Program Directors will complete a form developed by the SR office to report allegations of abuse or neglect by staff. Neither staff nor children are to be identified by name in the reports.

Staff Changes: All programs must notify the School Readiness office in writing of any staff changes. New hires or permanent substitutes, whether they are teachers, assistant teachers or part-time staff, must be identified on a revised staffing chart submitted within 5 business days of new hire.

Budget Guidance-OEC Policy

The Council cap on Administrative Costs will be 20%. This includes Administrative Salaries, Clerical, Other and Other Professional/Technical (not related to classroom instruction) and Benefits for the above. Also included are Administrative Supplies, Audit and Other Purchased Services (when not related to classroom services).

School Readiness Fees

All Programs are to follow the State fee guidance. For families with incomes greater than 100% of SMI the per child fee established by the NHECC is 10% of family income. It is 6% if the child is only attending for 6 hours/day or less. (See additional NHECC Fee Policies)



NON-SECTARIAN POLICY

All New Haven School Readiness sub-grantees must adhere to the Nonsectarian Policy for School Readiness Programs as stated in State GP-09-01. This includes:

1. The program must be open to all children, and cannot exclude a child based on the family's religious creed or lack thereof;
2. The program cannot attempt to persuade or convert children or their families to a religion or a particular religious persuasion;
3. The program will not implement religious observances, such as prayer, grace, confession, church attendance, religious instruction, etc.;
4. The program must accommodate the practice of a child or staff member's personal religious beliefs where the practice is required during the program hours (e.g., Islamic designated time for prayers);
5. The program may not require children or their families enrolled in the School Readiness program to participate in faith-based or church sponsored activities or services;
6. Program may not discriminate in hiring based on religious affiliation or lack of religious affiliation; and ,
7. Unless it is not practicable, classes should be conducted in rooms that are free of religious symbols and items.

The NHECC adds:

8. The program may not inquire about a family's religious beliefs as part of the initial application process. However, once the family has been accepted in the program additional information may be requested that would help teachers in planning curricula sensitive to children's cultural and religious background. Programs should refer to NEAYC Standard 7&8: Families and Community Relationships for more guidance.



MINIMUM STANDARD FOR PROGRAMS EXEMPT FROM LICENSING BY THE CONNECTICUT STATE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH (DPH)

The New Haven Early Childhood Council encourages programs exempt from DPH licensing to apply for School Readiness funding. To ensure the health and safety of all children the Council expects all programs to meet the minimum health and safety requirements set forth by DPH Day Care Licensing Regulations.

School Readiness funded classrooms will comply with the following:

1. a minimum teacher/child ratio of 1:10 at all times
2. there are always at least 2 adults on the premises at all times
3. at least one staff member trained in Infant/Child CPR and First Aid is present at all times
4. there is a minimum of 35 square feet per child of usable indoor space
5. the outdoor play space is safe, supervised by at least 2 staff members when in use and provides at least 75 square feet a space for each child.
6. a nutritious snack is served in the morning and afternoon, and children have lunch daily.
7. the program has consultants in the following areas available to program staff: education, social service, health, dental, and nutrition



GRIEVANCE POLICY

The New Haven Early Childhood Council (NHECC) recognizes that open and regular communication between program staff and parents is critical to creating a partnership in the best interest of children. Daily communication between parents and staff offers opportunities to share important information that can make the transition from home to school easier, “paint a picture” for the parents of the child’s day during their absence, and creates a sense of common purpose between parent and staff. Offering daily examples of the child’s successes and challenges in the spirit of working as a team makes imparting difficult information a little easier because a relationship of mutual respect has been established.

The NHECC, the Provider Council and the State Department of Education have outlined how successful partnerships are developed. At times, difficult issues between parents and program staff will arise. Clearly stated guidelines for how parents and staff can resolve problems are key to bringing closure to difficult situations. To this end the NHECC requires all SR programs to develop a written grievance policy that they will share with SR funded families. The policy must include:

- to whom parents should address their concerns initially and, if not resolved, each subsequent level of the organization where the issue can be discussed
- the policy must clearly state that if the program and its board of directors/ governance group cannot resolve the matter, the parents will be referred to the School Readiness office. The Council believes that it will be rare for any matter to rise to this level of involvement

The SR Project Director upon hearing the issue will:

- determine if it is a school readiness issue and ask the parents what steps they have previously taken
- discuss the parents’ concern with the program director (with the parents’ knowledge)
- and, finally, make suggestions to bring the matter to resolution

Any parent or program not satisfied with the suggested solution may contact the NHECC Co-Chairs in writing and request a meeting with the Council’s Grant Committee.

All programs will be required to submit a Grievance Policy as part of the School Readiness application.

If the program’s grievance policy, including how and when to contact the SR office is not in the parent handbook, the program will provide this information to SR families in writing at the time of enrollment.



Professional Development and Staff Qualifications

Includes: [GP A-01 State-Funded Program Staff Qualifications](#)
[GP A-03 Early Childhood Professional Registry \("the Registry"\)](#)

Recent research has illustrated the important role early care and education professionals play in the lives of young children. There is a direct correlation between teacher education levels, the quality of the classroom environment and children's readiness for kindergarten. As we provide opportunities for children to experience the joy of learning, we both encourage and expect that all teachers in school readiness funded programs will seek to expand their own understanding of the field of early care and education.

The Council recognizes that most program staff work long hours for which they are not adequately compensated. The Council applauds all teachers who, despite these obstacles have continued their education and training in the field of early care and education.

To this end, the New Haven School Readiness Council will:

- Provide information on workshops, conferences and courses
- Sponsor workshops and courses in topic areas as requested
- Maintain a library of books, videos, periodicals and other resources at The Early Childhood Resource Center (ECRC)
- Provide on-site consultation and training to all staff
- Offer the consultative services of a multi-disciplinary team of consultants in the areas of education, health, mental health, social work, speech, language, special education, occupational therapy and physical therapy
- Collaborate with all organizations/agencies to promote and offer high quality programs related to professional development of New Haven's early care and education community

The Council expects that funded programs will ensure that their staff is made aware of the opportunities for professional growth available to them and that the following requirements are met and documented:

It is the responsibility of EACH SUB-GRANTEE to ensure that each school readiness funded classroom meets the requirements set forth by the Office of Early Childhood.

On an annual basis program leaders are to ensure:

- Staff complete a self-evaluation survey that identifies their strengths as a teacher, areas of growth and goals for the coming year.
- Staff have a professional development plan. The plan identifies their professional goals for the year and articulates measurable outcomes.
- Staff credentials, college transcripts, continuing education training/courses, professional development plan and their annual work is on file
- Staff meet the minimum continuing education requirements as required by OEC Licensing Unit and SR Chart
- All required information is submitted to CT Charts a Course Teacher Registry in a timely manner and meets GP A-03

POLICY STATEMENT ACCESS TO A 52-WEEK SYSTEM OF CHILD CARE

The NHECC and School Readiness sub-grantees will adhere to the State SR Program Operations guidance outlined in PO-09-04 regarding definitions of space types.

In order to be sensitive to the needs of working families, SR sub-grantees receiving full day/full year and/or extended day funds will follow the Alternative Care Plan below:

- 1.) Give parents, prior to their enrolling their children in the program, written notice of all scheduled program closings.
- 2.) Document all requests from families needing 52 weeks of care.
- 3.) Share schedules among programs, with designated vacations noted.
- 4.) Work collaboratively to ensure 52 weeks of service is available to families requiring such service.
- 5.) Assist families needing 52 weeks of service to find alternative care. This may include, but is not limited to making arrangements with other providers, including agreements on payment and transfer of important health and emergency records.

All New Haven School Readiness sub-grantees agree to comply with these terms as a condition of their grant. Sub-grantees that make alternate care arrangements that are not outlined in the above statement will put their plan in writing for Council review and approval. The Council will notify the state of approved plans.



SCHOOL READINESS FEE POLICIES

The New Haven Early Childhood Council (NHECC) established an ad hoc Fees Workgroup, comprised of Council members and School Readiness (SR) sub-grantees, to make recommendations for NHECC policies that address the Office of Early Childhood's (OEC) General Policies as outlined in B-01 to B-04. The OEC policies can be found at [CT School Readiness Policies](#).

It is the intent of these recommendations to clarify and simplify the rules related to SR Fees for SR sub-grantees, families and the community. (Note: this is not a detailed list of all OEC policies related to fees. SR programs should refer to the website for additional detail and guidance. The recommendations that require NHECC approval are in bold.

Council Responsibility to programs

The Council is aware that the combination of the SR space reimbursement, parent fees and Care4Kids does not meet programs' true cost of care. Providing a high quality early childhood program that is sensitive to families' needs and values their culture and abilities requires qualified staff and well maintained facilities. The Council joins other advocates across the state in raising awareness of the true cost of care and the need to increase rates.

The Council will notify sub-grantees 30 days prior to the date any fee policy changes are to occur.

Fee Determination:

SR sub-grantees shall determine fees for School Readiness supported spaces based solely on the OEC Income Guidelines and per-Child Fee Schedules. Fees must be determined at the time of initial enrollment, and annually thereafter, using the definitions of eligible and ineligible income in B-02 and B-03 found on the OEC website [CT School Readiness Policies](#)

Sub-grantees will use the Fee Determination form created by the NH SR office. Providers must document family income and the determined fee, obtain parent/guardian signature and maintain these records for monitoring purposes. **A copy of the signed Fee Determination form and the Fee Schedule should be given to the family.**

Families eligible for Care4Kids will have their income and fee determined by Care4Kids. **Programs can elect to charge families the lesser of the two fees computed for the family—the Care4Kids family share or the SR fee.**

To maximize all funding streams, the Council encourages programs to advise and assist eligible families in applying for Care4Kids. Programs should encourage parents applying for Care4Kids to legally apply for child support *although this is no longer a Care4Kids requirement¹*.

¹ Added to document 8-18-15 to align with OEC policy dd

Programs with part-day/school year spaces may request a fee waiver from the Council. The request must be in writing and at least 6 months prior to the start of the school year.

SR fee information to families

All SR sub-grantees are required to establish written fee policies and disseminate them to staff and families. For programs that are 100% funded by SR funds, these policies must be in the parent handbook and include the list below. Programs with less than 100% SR spaces must still have the policies outlined below but they may be given to SR parents as a separate document such as a contract or additional information sheet.

The Council has developed a SAMPLE fee policy handbook to guide sub-grantees in the development of their own parent fee handbooks. The sample is adapted from NHPS' Parent Fee Handbook. Whether programs use this format or develop their own, the following information must be included:

1. How fee contribution is determined
 - What income information is needed from parents
 - The OEC Fee Schedule is used, **a copy given to parents**
 - **The NH SR fee calculation form is used and a copy given to parents**
2. How fees are assessed and collected
 - In addition to SR fees, all other fees parents are charged, or may be charged are in writing, **including late pick up fees**, late payment fees, etc.
 - When and how fees are collected
 - **Types of payments acceptable** (ex: only checks, no cash)
3. How income, family size, DSS cash assistance status and other eligibility factors are determined and verified
 - What paperwork is required to document the criteria listed above
4. How family confidentiality is maintained
 - Who has access to family documents
 - How are files secured to maintain confidentiality
5. Procedures for fee forgiveness, failure to pay, temporary reduction in assessed fees and the process for appealing a fee.
 - How families request fee forgiveness or temporary reduction in assessed fees and, the criteria and process the program uses to determine if fee forgiveness/temporary reduction request will be accepted or denied.
 - Failure to pay—program policy for alerting families they are in arrears, time period parents have to make payment, late fees assessed and exact number of days from date payment is due to time child will be withdrawn from the program if fees are not paid.
 - Process parents can use to appeal a fee charge

Fee carry over to next fiscal year:

All fees from SR funded families shall be used to support the School Readiness program in the fiscal year they are collected. Programs may set up a separate non-interest bearing account to hold parent fees collected by the School Readiness program. Fees from May and June can be used in the next fiscal year without Council approval.

SR sub-grantees wishing to carry over more than the May and June amounts must provide a budget and budget justification page to the SR project director for the total fee carry over no later than July 30th. The budget justification page should state the total for May and June so the committee is aware of the amount allowed. The NHECC's Grants Committee will review carry over requests and will directly seek permission from OEC as established by state policy. The Grants Committee will bring a request to the Council only in the event that the request is for the funds to be carried over for more than one year.

SR sub-grantee information to be provided to the Council:

- Monthly reports on actual fees and Care4Kids funds collected (SR Site Data Reports with documentation maintained on-site for monitoring purposes)
- Monthly expenditure reports (Reports to SR Fiscal Officer with back-up documentation on file)
- Annual submission of the monthly family cost of care rate for SR funded spaces. This is the rate charged to families who opt not to provide income information.
- **Withdrawals or terminations of children from the program, whether due to nonpayment of fees or any other reason must be reported on a monthly basis to the SR Project Director. The child's name and reason for withdrawal will be documented on a SR form and submitted at the time the PSRMR and Site Data Report are due.**



NHECC SR Non-Residency Policy

The intent of the New Haven Early Childhood Council (NHECC) Non-Residency Policy is to:

- adhere to the guidelines and requirements set forth by the Office of Early Childhood's (OEC) School Readiness (SR) Non-Residence Policy (General Policy C-06);
- not enroll non-residents but to do the best thing for families and minimize disruption in the continuity of care for children whose families move out of New Haven during the child's preschool years. This policy extends the time a preschooler that was a New Haven resident for at least three months to remain in their full day full year preschool until they complete their preschool experience.

Impact of Policy:

Over the last 10 years, SR providers have reported no more than 3-5 children move out of New Haven annually and have requested permission to stay in a SR space.

The following policy and procedures will be effective as of October 7, 2015 [NHECC approval date].

1. No program may enroll a child for a School Readiness space who is not a resident of New Haven.
2. A New Haven 'resident' is a family who documents that at the time of enrollment they resided in New Haven. Proof of residency must be maintained in the child's file and include one of the following: a lease, rental agreement or utility bill. This must be the address of where the child lives.
3. Children who are New Haven residents utilizing a New Haven School Readiness full day /full year space and move prior to completing their preschool years, may continue in the same program in a SR full day/full year space until they have completed their prek experience. [See Procedures below for how programs must notify and document adherence to utilize this option]
4. Only New Haven children who are in a School Readiness full day /full year space and have been attending the program for a minimum of 3 months are eligible for the non-resident option.
5. NHECC will serve no more than 1% non-residents of the total number of all SR spaces (approximately 11 spaces).

The Council will review this policy after one year of implementation. Requests for non-resident exemptions, as defined above, will be tracked and reported to the Council after one year's experience. In particular, the Council will review documentation showing utilization by School Readiness programs, and consider at that one year review any recommendations for modification or continuation of this policy.

Families who move out of New Haven mid-term:

Procedures for SR full day/full year programs:

- Contact the SR office to request approval of SR non-resident option
- Include documentation—date of enrollment, proof of NH residency prior to move, non-residency period requested, age of child
- SR Project Director reports requests and actions to Grants Committee of the NHECC



Suspension and Expulsion of a child's enrollment in a SR funded space

Background

The goal of the School Readiness Program is to provide a high-quality prekindergarten experience to all New Haven's children. To address the needs of teachers and families trying to understand and help children with challenging behaviors requires a multi-layered approach: a commitment to understand the underlying issues that impact behavior; resources to support teachers, parents and children; professional development and a clearly articulated plan of support. The New Haven Early Childhood Council (NHECC) and the Office of Early Childhood provide such support.

NHECC recognizes that preschool expulsions and suspensions of children is a rare occurrence and that all SR program staff work hard to support children with challenging behaviors using positive anticipatory guidance. In the event that a child's behavior becomes a concern, please refer to the policy procedures that follow.

The Office of Early Childhood expects that all local councils will develop an expulsion and suspension policy based on national and state guidance and best practice. An ad hoc committee of the Provider Council worked with the SR office to draft this policy, keeping in mind what is in the best interest of children.

There is a national and state focus on reducing suspensions and expulsions in the early years^{2 3}. These policies encourage a more rigorous approach to: identifying disabilities; reducing racial disparities in suspensions and expulsions; providing critical supports; and, enrolling children in high-quality early learning environments during this important period in a child's development. In a national study published in 2005 over 10% of preschool teachers in state-funded programs said they expelled at least one preschooler in the last year⁴.

² [Standing Together Against Suspension & Expulsion in Early Childhood](#) NAEYC-A Joint Statement

³ [Policy Statement on Expulsion and Suspension Policies in Early Childhood Settings](#) U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Department of Education

⁴ Gilliam, W.S. (2005) Prekindergarteners left behind: Expulsion rates in state prekindergarten systems. New York, NY: Foundation for Child Development)

NHECC Policy

The following procedures are to be followed before expulsion, suspension or reducing the hours of a child in a School Readiness funded space.

- 1) SR program director will contact the SR office or the SR Education to notify us of the concerning behavior. (This reiterates policies already articulated in the SR Agreement). This notification will be in writing on form developed by the SR office.
- 2) The director, classroom teacher, and family will meet to discuss the child's behavior and develop a written plan to work together to support the child. The plan will be implemented for a minimum of four weeks. The plan may include a referral to one of our many community agencies which can provide additional support to the child, family and staff. The plan and supports should be initiated when concerns first emerge and shared with the SR office.
- 3) The various professional supports should include but not be limited to: the program's required consultants (education, social worker, pediatric provider); SR Education Consultants; ACES Interdisciplinary Team; NHPS Early Childhood Assessment Team (ECAT); Early Childhood Consultation Partnership (ECCP); and Clifford Beers Child Guidance Clinic. These supports and a plan should be initiated when concerns first emerge. Teaching staff will be provided with as much support as can be offered.
- 4) The SR Office will be notified before any plan that includes a reduction in the daily hours a child attends the program is implemented.
- 5) During four weeks of the initial plan implementation, the plan should be further assessed and modifications made by parents and teachers to enhance success for the child.
- 6) If teachers report continued repetition or escalation of aggressive behaviors that leave a mark or injury on another person, the plan will be modified to specifically address these behaviors with regard to safety for the child and others.
- 7) In rare circumstances, when the child continues to be distressed or poses a danger to themselves or others, or families do not partner, the program will meet to discuss next steps in consultation with the SR Office in order to place the child in the most appropriate setting.
- 8) A SR program's discipline policy must reflect the above and be given to parents, included in the staff handbook and be part of the program's annual professional development. The SR office may require a program to document each parent's acknowledgment of receipt of the policy. (OEC Licensing Unit requires a discipline policy. Programs that are license-exempt should also have a discipline policy.)

Each program's policy (for parents and staff) will be developed using the guidance above and be submitted to the SR office no later than February 1, 2017.