



Connecticut

School Readiness and Child Day Care Grant Program

Established in 1997, the School Readiness and Child Day Care Grant Program provides spaces in accredited or approved school readiness programs for all preschool children in designated school districts. The local chief elected official and the superintendent of schools jointly appoint and convene a school readiness council that is responsible for making recommendations on issues relating to school readiness.

Eligibility

Income: none (see priority criteria)

Age: children age 3 to 5 who are not eligible to enroll in school

Priority: at least 60 percent of the children enrolled must be at or below 75 percent of the state median income

Geographic: “priority schools districts” (identified based on the percentage of children eligible for free or reduced lunch) and schools with “severe need,” which are located in priority school districts or a town ranked 1 to 50 (on an ascending-order list) for town wealth

Length of Program

At least 60 percent of programs must be full-day/full-year programs

Full-day/full-year: 10 hours per day, minimum of 50 weeks

Part-day/part-year: minimum of two and a half hours per day, minimum of 180 days

School-day/school-year: minimum of seven hours per day for 180 days

Extended-day extends the hours, days, and weeks of a program not funded by School Readiness to meet the requirements of a full-day/full-year program

Eligible Providers

Public schools, public and private for-profit and nonprofit early childhood programs, and Head Start. Family child care providers are not eligible.

Number Served¹

6,369 (2003-04): 943 in public schools; 1,832 in Head Start; 2734 in non-sectarian child care centers; and 860 in faith-based child care centers

Total Annual Budget

\$46,008,090 (2004-05) from state general revenues

Monitoring

Unless exempt, any program participating in the School Readiness program must be licensed by the Department of Public Health (the state child care licensing agency).

¹ For updated figures on the program budget and number served, please see the NIEER State Preschool Yearbook at: <http://nieer.org/yearbook/states/>

Exempt programs include public schools and those accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC). Each School Readiness Council that receives a grant is responsible for monitoring their contracted programs to ensure programmatic and fiscal responsibility, accountability for children served, and that each program adheres to all requirements of the school readiness grant program. The Connecticut Department of Education does on-site monitoring every three years.

Governance

How are state pre-k programs integrated into community-based settings?

Public Act No. 97-259 states: A town seeking to apply for a grant program to provide spaces in accredited or approved school readiness programs for eligible children who reside in priority school districts shall convene a local school readiness council. Any other town may convene such a council. The chief elected official of the town (i.e., the mayor) and the superintendent of schools for the school district shall jointly appoint and convene such council. In the case of a regional school district, there may be multiple chief elected officials representing the multiple towns in the school district. Each school readiness council shall be composed of: (1) the chief elected official (s), or his designee; (2) the superintendent of schools, or a management level staff person as his designee; (3) parents; (4) representatives from local programs such as Head Start, family resource centers, nonprofit and for-profit child day care centers, group day care homes, pre-kindergarten and nursery schools, and family day care home providers; (5) representative from a health care provider in the community; and (6) other representatives from the community who provide services to children.

The chief elected official shall designate the chairperson of the school readiness council. The local school readiness council shall: (1) make recommendations to the chief elected official and the superintendent of schools on issues relating to school readiness, including any applications for grants pursuant to sections 2 and 7 of this act and section 17b-749a of the general statutes, as amended by section 5 of this act; (2) foster partnerships among providers of school readiness programs; (3) assist in the identification of the need for school readiness programs and the number of children not being served by such a program; (4) identify existing and prospective resources and services available to children and families; (5) facilitate the coordination of the delivery of services to children and families, including referral procedures; (6) exchange information with other councils, the community and organizations serving the needs of children and families; (7) make recommendations to school officials concerning transition from school readiness programs to kindergarten; and (8) encourage public participation.

Programs in priority school districts are *non-competitive*; priority school districts receive allocations using a formula based on the average of the kindergarten enrollment in the district for the previous three years. Competitive grants with a maximum of \$107,000 are available to communities with schools with “severe needs” (40 percent or more of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch) or communities that are ranked in the fifty lowest ranked wealth towns. Money flows from the state, to the entity designated by the town as the grantee. The state reviews and approves the plans submitted by the priority school district to determine if they are in compliance with the requirements. The state role is limited to setting the standards and then monitoring compliance with the standards.

Are there requirements to integrate the state pre-k and subsidized child care programs at the state or local level?

The Department of Education oversees the School Readiness program, but the legislation requires that the Commissioner of Education develop the grant programs in consultation with the Commissioner of Social Services. Staff in the two departments jointly review proposals from local School Readiness Councils, and jointly make decisions on funding, monitoring, and changes in policy. Many of the state funded centers participate in the school readiness funding and adhere to the requirements.

Procedures and Supports for Community-based Providers

What are the rules/guidelines for notifying and selecting pre-k providers?

The school readiness council shall annually issue a local request for proposals through a public notice to identify local early care and education programs that meet School Readiness standards. After a review by the council to ensure that the proposals address all the requirements of the school readiness legislation, the council makes recommendations to the Mayor and Superintendent who then submit their plan for the expenditure of funds and their responses to the local requests for proposals to the Department of Education for approval. Once approved, the school readiness council shall, within their allocation, purchase capacity in public schools, for-profit and nonprofit early childhood programs, Head Start and state funded day-care programs. The process does not vary based on the auspice of the grantee, and site visits are not part of the selection process. All programs must have teachers who meet the credential requirements upon application. Programs that are pursuing NAEYC accreditation must complete the process within three years of being awarded the funds.

What resources are available to help providers become eligible to deliver pre-k services?

Some funds are available for programs seeking accreditation. In fiscal year 2004, \$20,000 in start-up funds was available for a first-time award to a pre-kindergarten classroom serving 16 kids.

The following help the School Readiness program, but are not exclusive to it:

- School Facilities Bonding Program: Each town or regional school district may apply for a grant for a school building project. If a town or regional school district's project includes space for a school readiness program, the percentage that the local board of education is eligible to receive shall be increased by five percentage points but shall not exceed one hundred percent, for that portion of the building.
- Connecticut Health and Educational Facilities Authority (CHEFA) Bonding and Loan Program - Funds are available to early childhood programs through the CHEFA to fund renovations and construction for early care and education facilities.
- Connecticut Charts a Course provides training modules for entry level teachers, training for the CDA, as well as topical training such as medication administration and funds for scholarships.
- The Quality Enhancement Grant is provided to Priority School Districts to fund initiatives that enhance quality standards and/or expand comprehensive services for children and families. Projects should be directed to children and families enrolled in all early childhood

settings including family day care, kith and kin (informal child care) and child care providers that receive school readiness grant funds as well as those that do not. Eligible applicants are Priority School Districts who have received School Readiness and Child Day Care Grants.

- These eligible applicants (i.e., municipalities) must use the local School Readiness Council to review and recommend projects to be funded.

Do teachers working in community settings earn comparable wages and benefits once they obtain the same credential as teachers in school-based settings?

No, and this is not part of the School Readiness legislation or regulations. However, some of the larger child care centers have recently become unionized, so child care staff are moving up the pay scale, but are not yet equal with public school teachers.

Supports for Working Families

Is there any explicit discussion in the legislation or regulations of extending the day, coordinating with the child care subsidy program, or helping working families?

All programs must have a plan for collaboration with other community programs and services, and for coordination of resources in order to facilitate full-day and year-round child care and education programs for children of working parents and parents in education training programs. Sixty percent of programs must be full-day/full-year. There is even a category of School Readiness funding that goes specifically to extend the day of pre-kindergarten programs funded through other sources.

What policies help working families access pre-k and other supports?

- 60 percent of programs must be full-day/full-year
- Services that extend the school day and/or year can be funded with School Readiness funds
- Transportation is an allowable expense at the discretion of the local council
- Some councils require that 100 percent of children come from working families
- Parents must be represented on the council to ensure their needs are met
- The state provides information on the program to the CCR&R Infoline

Programs must submit collaboration agreements with supplementary services agencies every two years (i.e., with WIC, mental health, job training). Services can include:

- Assistance in securing and maintain eligibility for service such as child care, health insurance, family support;
- Referrals—programs must keep a log of any referrals and/or services provided, and conduct a follow-up survey to determine how well these collaborations are meeting family needs; and
- Help with transportation to referrals.

Funding

What is the per-child payment for the pre-k program?

Full-day, full-year program: \$7,500 per child (2003-04)

School-day/school-year program; \$6,000 (2003-04)
Part-day/school-year program: \$4,500 per child (2003-04)
Extended-day program: \$2,676 per child (2003-04)

How does the state pre-k funding affect other potential sources of funds for a provider?

The funding formula assumes the full cost of a full day/full year quality pre-kindergarten program is \$10,000. The state currently provides a maximum of \$7,500 per child and expects parent fees and child care subsidies to cover the rest. Head Start grantees can provide school readiness slots for non-Head Start children and can provide extended-day funding for children in half-day Head Start programs. Classrooms can be blended and include children with full-day/full-year School Readiness funding.

Sources

- Interview: Joyce Staples
- Website: <http://www.state.ct.us/sde/deps/readiness/>
- Program Standards: http://www.state.ct.us/sde/deps/early/preschool_framework.pdf
- “Closing the Achievement Gap Removing the Barriers to Preschool in Connecticut” supports the call for universal pre-k for all of Connecticut’s children. It is available at <http://www.state.ct.us/sde/deps/Early/PreschoolReport.pdf>

For information about national trends, read CLASP’s *All Together Now: State Experiences in Using Community-Based Child Care to Provide Pre-kindergarten* at http://www.clasp.org/publications/all_together_now.pdf.