SCHOOL READINESS ENROLLMENT GUIDELINES

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POLICY STATEMENT

The Early Learning Coalition of Osceola County will enroll families based on their ability to meet state and federal requirements for the approved eligibility and billing groups outlined in this policy. A child's eligibility for child care services depend on an established purpose for care. Without a purpose for care, a family may not be eligible for School Readiness (SR) services or funding. The definition for each billing group's purpose for care established in ss.1002.84(8); 1002.85 (2)(j) and 1002.87 F.S. and the Division of Early Learning/Department of Education will be used in determining initial and continued eligibility for SR services.

ENROLLMENT PRIORITIES

A. The Coalition local enrollment priorities will be determined based on funding available, community assessed needs, and following established priorities in accordance with Section 445.009.

B. **First priority** will be given to children ages 0-12 aging out at 13 (birth up to 13 years of age) from a family receiving Temporary Cash Assistance (TCAN) working (TCAW) or seeking employment, work activities or training or on Respite (RC1).) **Second priority** will be given to an at-risk child between the ages 0-8 aging out at 9 (birth up to the age of nine) who is considered at risk of neglect or abuse who resides with parents, foster parents or relatives, also involved in domestic violence or participant in a homeless program.

C. Subsequent priorities will be given based on the Coalition's local enrollment priorities as follows:
Third priority - A child aged 0-5 not in school (birth up to 5 years old not enrolled in school) who is from a working family that is economically disadvantaged and meets a purpose for care by working a minimum of 20 hours per week, or attending educational training minimum 20 hours per week, disabled or over the age of 65 not receiving TANF. Also, may include enrollment of eligible siblings aged 0-5 not in school with funding availability.

Fourth priority - A child aged 0-5 not in school (birth up to 5 years old not enrolled in school) whose parent transitions from the work program (Transitional Child Care -TCC) into employment under s. 1003.21(1)(a)2.

Fifth priority - An at-risk child age 9 up to 12 aging out at 13 whose sibling is enrolled in the school readiness program within an eligibility category shall be given priority over other children who are eligible.

Sixth priority - will be given to a child in school aged 5 and who is younger than 13 years of age from a working family that is economically disadvantaged.

Seventh priority - will be given to a child in school aged out at 13 from a parent who transitions from the work program (TCC) into employment as described in s. 445.032 .

Eighth priority - A child who has special needs and has been determined eligible as a student who requires additional accommodations beyond those required by the Americans with Disabilities Act. The child's special needs and associated accommodation must be validated by a licensed health care professional, a licensed mental health professional, or an educational psychologist. Such person may not be the child's parent or relative or a person employed by a child care provider. The following documentation must be used to determine the child's eligibility for such accommodation:

a. A current individual education plan with a Florida school district;
b. A current individualized family support plan;
c. A diagnosed special need; or
d. A written determination of required accommodations by a licensed health care professional, a licensed mental health professional, or an educational psychologist.

Ninth priority - Will be given to a child who is enrolled in the federally funded Head Start Program or free Voluntary PreK Educational Program.

ELIGIBILITY CATEGORIES

1. **Definitions of Income Eligible Families**

The following categories are eligible through this funding source:

a. Employment and/or Educational Activity - A single parent who is working a minimum of twenty (20) hours per week and/or involved in eligible full-time educational activities and whose income is below 55% SMI. In two-parent families, each parent must individually be engaged in employment or education activities for a combined total of at least forty (40) hours per week.

b. The Income Eligible categories include cases where the child has been placed with relatives by the parent(s) or legal guardian, permanently or on a short-term basis, and is <u>not receiving temporary cash assistance</u>. The child's income (if any) and the guardian's income should be assessed. This would be a "Blended Family", and the application should appear in the guardian's name. The criterion for determining eligibility for a "Blended Family" is the same as Income Eligible.

c. Disability - Parents/legal guardians who receive benefits under the SSI/SSA/SSDI disability program. A doctor's statement must accompany proof of receipt of SSI/SSA/SSDI. To establish purpose for care, the statement should indicate that the individual receiving SSI/SSA/SSDI disability needs child care assistance. The purpose of the subsidized child care shall be to assist the parent/guardian in caring for the child(ren) due to the parent/guardian's disability as documented by a physician's statement OR to assist the parent/guardian in caring for the child(ren) due to the documented age of the parent/guardian (65 or older). If both parents are in the home, only one shall be required to be an SSI/SSA/SSDI recipient; however, both parents must meet the purpose for care.

2. **Definitions of Welfare Transition Families**

The following categories are eligible through this funding source with a valid referral from the local workforce office or its contracted agent (if applicable):

a. Welfare Transition (WT) - Employment – Welfare transition applicants or participants who are involved in employment activities a minimum of 20 hours per week. Documentation for employment in accordance with Rule 6M-4.208, F.A.C., is required.

b. WT – Job Training or Educational Program – Welfare transition applicants or participants who are in school or in training full-time or the equivalent of 20 hours per week. Full-time is defined by the educational institute with recognition of study time, reasonable travel time, and lab time.

c. WT – Seeking Employment – TANF/TCA recipients who are not working and involved in job preparation activities. Note: If the eligibility period ends before the parent has established a purpose for care, they cannot be authorized for new funding without establishing they meet a purpose for care.

d. WT Diversion Program – Temporary child care for a parent who has applied for cash assistance and child care services to seek employment and has opted to receive diversion payments in lieu of ongoing cash assistance. Child care assistance is available under this category for 30 days from the date the up-front diversion process officially started.

e. TANF/TCA Applicants – Temporary child care for a parent who has applied for TCA and temporary child care to seek employment. Child care should only be provided for forty-five (45) days from the date the referral is authorized.

f. TANF/TCA (Child Only) – Services provided to a child who has been placed with a relative permanently or on a short-term basis, who is receiving temporary cash assistance as a TANF "child only" case. *No Referral Needed* Purpose for care must be met. Eligibility based on child income only.

g. Transitional Child Care (TCC) or Training or Education (Ted) – TCC eligibility is given to families who have lost their eligibility for TANF/TCA due to excess earned income, new or increased child support, loss of time limits (with earned income) or who opts not to receive TANF/TCA. Total family income may not exceed 200% of the Federal Poverty Level. Ted runs concurrently with TCC. The TCC authorization will support employment and if that is not sufficient to also cover hours for school, then a Ted will authorize the school hours. The care cannot be certified longer than thirty (30) days after the school term ends.

3. **Definitions of At-Risk Families**

The following categories are eligible through this funding source with a valid Childcare Application Form (referral) from the Department of Children and Families (DCF) -certified domestic violence centers and DCF- designated lead agencies on homelessness.

a. Children who are in families are under investigation of suspected abuse, neglect, abandonment or exploitation by the Department of Children and Families (DCF) or a designated sheriff's office.

b. Children from a family that is actively participating in a Diversion Program with the Department of Children and Families or its contracted providers and comply in department-prescribed activities, including education, health services, or work.
c. Children who are under the supervision of the Department of Children and Families (DCF) or its contracted provider for abuse, neglect, abandonment, or exploitation.
d. Children with court order placement, long-term custody or under the guardianship of a relative or nonrelative following termination of supervision by the Department of Children and Families or its contracted provider.
e. Children in the custody of a parent who is considered a victim of domestic violence and is receiving services through a certified domestic violence center.
f. Children in the custody of a parent who is considered homeless by a certified homeless shelter and the Department of Children and Families.
g. Children in custody of the Department of Children and Families and reside with a parent who receives comprehensive services with a licensed residential behavioral health treatment facility that includes onsite childcare.

Length of authorized care:

1. A 12-month authorization of care period will be given to economically disadvantaged families with an established purpose for care, at risk families, special needs children, and Intensive Training Account participants from the date eligibility was determined. Families' eligibility will be redetermined at the end of their 12-month authorization period for continuation of services. Services will be discontinued for families that are determined ineligible at this time and notification will be issued to parents and provider of termination.
2. **Intensive Service Account** – Child care authorization for families participating in an Individual Training Account or Intensive Service Account will be based on a documented childcare referral from the local workforce agency or its contracted provider. Length of authorization period under this program will be determined by the referring agency. Funding can be renewed during a 12-month authorization in increments determined by the referring Agency. At the completion of the initial 12-month authorization, families granted a new childcare referral will be eligible for another year of services. All families who no longer meet the pre-established purpose for care will be granted a 3-month authorization period to establish a new purpose for care. At which time the parent must meet purpose for care to remain eligible for the remainder of the 12-month eligibility period. The child will continue with the services at the same level and provider will be reimbursed during the 3-month re-establishment period.
3. **At Risk** – Child care authorization period for families under this program will be based on the submission of childcare authorization from the Department of Children and Families of Florida, subcontracted providers or designated lead Agencies for Domestic Violence and Homeless Coalitions. Authorization period of services will be determined by the referring Agency. Eligibility under at risk or protective services will continue with a valid childcare referral received in increments within a 12-month authorization period. At the completion of the initial 12-month authorization, families granted a new childcare referral will be eligible for another year of services. Families with an expired referral will be granted a

3-month authorization period to re- establish purpose for care. Once purpose for care is established the family will continue to be eligible for the remainder of the 12-month authorization period. The child will continue with the services at the same level and provider will be reimbursed during the 3-month re-establishment period.

4. **Relative Caregiver and Guardianship Assistance Program** – Child care authorization period for children served under this category will be eligible for an initial 12-month of services. Upon closure of child protective services, the Guardian must be receiving RCG payments for continuation of eligibility.
5. **Welfare** – Child care authorization period for families participating in Transitional Child Care, Temporary or Non temporary Cash Assistance Programs will be authorized with a valid childcare referral form submitted by DCF or the local workforce Agency. Authorization period will be determined by referring to the Agency. Termination of services under this program will be based on the expiration of referral or notification of termination from the Agency. A 3-month period will be authorized to re-establish purposes for care under another eligibility. And continue services for the remainder of the 12-month authorization period.

Calculating income:

- If a client has submitted a letter from their employer or a completed verification form: Multiply the number of hours worked per week by the hourly wages received by employee. Take that number and multiply by fifty-two (52) weeks in the year to determine annual work income. If the employee is not employed for all twelve (12) months by the employer, multiply by the number of payments expected each year.
- If a parent/guardian has provided four (**4) weeks of pay stubs,** determine the frequency of pay and use the following table:

If the client is paid:		Figure work income:	Divide by:	Multiply by:
Daily	Once daily	Add all pay stubs	# of pay stubs	# of days worked per week
WKLY	Once weekly	Add all pay stubs	# of pay stubs	52 weeks in a year
BIWK	Every other week	Add all pay stubs	# of pay stubs	26 pay periods in a year
SEMI	Twice a month	Add all pay stubs	# of pay stubs	24 pay periods in a year

NOTE: All the above formulas are used to obtain the annual gross income.

DOCUMENTATION REQUIREMENTS

The following documentation is required to be provided by all applicants or recipients of SR funding to determine eligibility. Required documentation must be provided during the initial eligibility/enrollment interview and subsequently thereafter during redetermination and/or upon request by the Coalition.

Income Eligible Families

Proof of legal guardianship is required (if applicable): In cases where the client requesting services is not the biological parent, proof of guardianship is necessary. This could be some form of court document showing custody or a notarized statement from the biological parent(s).

Proof of age for children and identification: Once they have been uploaded to the Family Portal and are placed on file, they do not need to be requested again. A birth certificate, immunization record, hospital birth certificate, passport, court order, may be used. Other acceptable documentation as per rule 6M-4.208. FAC.C. A valid photo ID for parent/guardian arranging care. Government-issued ID, driver's license, employment ID or student ID, which contains a photo of the client, are all acceptable forms of photo ID. If the document does not have a photo included, then two forms of ID showing the parent's name should be obtained such as Social Security card, pay stubs, employment record, insurance card, or other documentation secured throughout the eligibility determination process. *Unacceptable types of identification:* A photo ID made at a non-governmental agency is not an acceptable form of identification. Any type of form generated by the parent/guardian and not issued by a third-party source (For example - an application completed by the parent/guardian for another type of service) cannot be used as identity to obtain another service. One World Government IDs and ID's generated online are not acceptable.

Proof of residency: A current rent receipt, lease, pay stub, government issued document, military order or utility bill is acceptable form of residency verification. If the rent or utility bills are not in the client's name, then a residency verification form or written note completed by the landlord or leaseholder will suffice. For families who are homeless, participate in TANF, or Medicaid eligible families, the authorization submitted by the referring agency is sufficient to establish the child's residency. Proof of residency is required on an annual basis and anytime there is a change of residence. Any residency verification must include the complete street address plus the city, state, and zip code.

Employment/Earning Verification Requirements: If a client is employed, he or she must provide verification in the form of pay stubs. Four (4) weekly, two (2) bi-weekly, two (2) semi-monthly, or one (1) monthly pay stubs should be requested. An income verification form or letter on company letterhead signed by the employer indicating the hours of work and rate of pay may also be acceptable to determine limited eligibility.

Self-employed clients must provide a copy of their most recent tax return, including IRS Schedule C. If no taxes were filed or the business is new, the client must provide their current ledger/books, self-employment logs, with receipts showing business expenses and time parent/guardian spent "on the job." If using books, deductions cannot be allowed without receipts for expenses.

For clients paid by personal check, copies should be made of the checks before they are cashed. Hours worked per pay period and hourly rate or gross salary should be documented on each check. Clients may also be requested to submit an income verification form or a letter from their employer on company letterhead verifying hours worked and rate of pay to accurately establish income.

For clients paid in cash, they should bring a written statement on company letterhead from the client's employer documenting hours per week and hourly rate or gross salary.
Individuals earning income from casual labor (lawn work, side jobs, house cleaning, etc.) are considered self-employed. Acceptable forms of documentation to establish income would be written statements from each employer documenting weekly hours and rate of pay.

For clients that are paid with commissions, and no paystubs are available, they should bring a written statement on company letterhead from the client's employer documenting hours per week, and average earnings weekly based on commission. If overtime or a bonus appears on more than one paystub, this must be included in the gross earnings for that paystub. If overtime or a bonus appears on only one paystub the amount can be added annually to the client's income.

Disabled Clients: Verification of incapacitation (physician's written statement) when disability is used as a purpose for care. The client should bring a written statement from their physician indicating the duration of the disability. Verification of SSI/SSA/SSDI: An SSI/SSA/SSDI letter of eligibility or a printout showing the amount of the benefit can be considered proof of SSI/SSA/SSDI.

Documentation Other Types of Income – Documentation of any other income is required. For example: child support (whether court ordered or voluntary), alimony, veteran's or retirement benefits, unemployment or worker's compensation, dividends or interest, etc. Child Support/Alimony that is paid out of the home: Monies paid by the client for purposes of child support or alimony. The amounts must be court ordered and documented. Documentation must include the amounts that are being paid out. Examples include, but are not limited to, proof of garnished wages or written/signed statement, from the recipient, of the amounts and frequency of receipt. The monthly amount is to be deducted from the family unit's gross income.

Education/Training Verification Requirements: If a client is enrolled in an education/training program, the client must provide documentation completed by an official of the school or institution on letterhead or stationery with an official seal stating the number of classroom hours and any lab hours, date the semester/training period starts and the date it ends. Clients must maintain a minimum equivalent combination of twenty (20) hours per week to meet purpose for care.

Welfare Transition Families

a. A fully completed and valid Child Care Application and Authorization (Referral) issued by the local workforce office or its contract agent.

b. Proof of age for children that are being placed on the program. Once they have been uploaded to the Family Portal and are placed on file, they do not need to be requested again. A birth certificate, immunization record, hospital birth certificate, passport, court order may be used. Other acceptable documentation as per rule 6M-4.208. FAC.
c. Proof of residency is required upon redetermination and at any time there is a change in residence. A current photo ID, rent receipt, lease, or utility bill is acceptable form of residency verification. If the rent or utility bills are not in the client's name, then a residency verification form or written note completed by the landlord or leaseholder will suffice. Proof of residency is required on an annual basis and anytime there is a change of residence. Any residency verification must include the complete street address plus the city, state, and zip code.
d. Employment/earning verification is required upon redetermination and at any time there is a change in employment or earnings. Required documentation for employment verification can be found in Appendix A.
e. Education/training verification is required upon redetermination and at any time there is a change in education or training. A current document completed by an official of school or institution designating full-time or part-time enrollment, the date the training/semester period starts, the date it ends, and class schedule. This should be on appropriate letterhead or stationery for the school/institution or training program or contain an official seal.
f. TANF "Child Only"
    i. Proof of child income e.g. TANF award letter
    ii. Proof of child's age
    iii. Picture identification for guardian and proof of legal guardianship of TANF "Child Only"; e.g. court document assigning custody or a notarized statement from the biological parent(s).
    iv. Proof for purpose of care e.g. employment, disability, etc.
    v. Social Security number for both child and guardian
    vi. Verification of food stamp benefits, if applicable

At-Risk Families

a. The referring agency is responsible for determining eligibility for at-risk families. The referring Agency /Worker will provide the Coalition's designee with a valid child care application referral and proof of the child's age.
b. Incomplete referrals will not be accepted until all the necessary information is provided.
c. It is the referring agency's responsibility to note if the child is covered under the Rilya Wilson Act. The referring agency is responsible for noting this on the referral by checking the appropriate box.
d. Once the child care provider has been chosen by the parent and entered into the child care information system, Coalition's designee will assess a parent fee (if applicable) and generate a payment certificate that will be provided to the parent/guardian.

SR PROGRAM PROCEDURES

Determining Family Unit

A family consists of a parent or parents living together, their minor children and any other child for whom they are legally responsible. A family may also include other adult(s) that the parent considers part of the family, such as an aged grandparent, that is supported by the family.

Eligibility Determination - At the completion of the initial 12-month authorization period, families will need to submit documentation to determine continuation of care. Purpose of care must be met, and income may not exceed the 85% SMI.

Clients who lose their job within the 12-month authorization period shall be provided with a three (3) month period to re-establish their purpose for care of paid service (from the date reported of loss of employment). If the purpose of care is not established at the end of the three (3) month period, school readiness funding will be discontinued.

Break In Service:

There are several instances in which a parent may request a break-in-service (BIS). This is a time in which the parent is not responsible for their co-pay, their enrollment is suspended but their eligibility remains active until the time they need to return to care. A BIS can be authorized for a maximum of 3 months. Providers will be notified of the BIS and alerted that they will not be reimbursed during this time, and if care is provided without notification to the Coalition the parent would be responsible for the full pay. Parents are responsible for notifying the Coalition if they need to terminate early or extend the BIS to return to care.

Reasons for a BIS include but are not limited to

1. Clients with an interruption in employment, with an option to return to that employment shall maintain eligibility and child care funding for school readiness services, not to exceed three (3) months. If the interruption exceeds three (3) months, services will be considered suspended, and not reimbursed, until the parent's employment resumes. The child is not placed on the waiting list if the parent has verification that they are still employed and returning to that employment. Such circumstances may include seasonal employment, school system related employment, or maternity leave.
2. Vacation
3. Maternity Leave and when a pregnant client is determined disabled due to her pregnancy and her physician has determined that childcare for older children is medically necessary for which the following documents may be requested:
   a.) A statement from the client's doctor (physician) indicating the term of disability and reason for child care.
4. Child(ren) will be in the custody of other parent/relative.

Amount of care authorized:

1. Child care assistance can be authorized as part-time care or full-time care. When determining the type of care for which the parent should be authorized, transportation time is included. The enrollment Specialist must use good judgment in determining the amount of time allocated for traveling. The maximum amount of time a parent may be authorized for transportation is ten (10) hours per week.

   Travel time should only be counted from the child care facility to the place of employment and back. Travel time from home to the child care facility should not be included. Transportation time must be documented on the budget sheet if the client works less than twenty-five (25) hours per week and full-time care is authorized. However, transportation time should not be included in the number of weekly hours entered in the parent transaction screen.
2. If a client is married and the spouse lives in the household, or if the other parent of the children live in the same household, whether or not they are married, both must be engaged in eligible work or education activities for a combined total of at least 40 hour per week. Children **do not** have to use child care services year-round on the Income Eligible program. This means that children can be authorized to use child care services for short periods of time throughout the year, such as just for school breaks and holidays or just for before & after school care. This should be noted on the application and in the case management. Also, a notation to this effect should be placed in the comment section on the child information screen. It is imperative that the counselor notify the provider that care is being authorized in this way and the name of the person approving this (at the child care provider) should be documented. This should also be documented in case management.
3. For Welfare Transition programs, the referring agency determines the eligibility and amount of care for the client. The Coalition or its designee cannot authorize the client for more time than is written on the referral. If the parent is in need of more care that the referral allows, they should be directed to contact the referring agency for a new referral.

Type of provider parents can choose:

The parent can choose any legally operating child care provider of his or her choice. These providers must be participating in the school readiness program through the local early learning coalition. The parent may choose from a variety of SR providers including informal providers or providers located on a military installation.

Some Examples of licensed early education or child care programs include:

1. Gold Seal accredited child care providers or providers participating in a quality rating system; Licensed child care providers;
2. Public school providers; and,
3. License exempt child care providers, including religious exempt, registered, and non-public schools.

Maximum rate paid to the provider:

The Coalition will reimburse the provider according to the maximum amounts noted according to the county in which they are located.

Copayment changes -During the initial 12 months of authorization period copayment may not be increased for families. Co pay may be decreased due to a fee waiver request, incorrect fee assessed by Coalition, change in family's income, changes in family size, employment or hours of care needed. During a family's yearly redetermination or graduation phase out, parent co pay assessed may be increased or decreased based on income and family size.

Family experiencing an emergency such as a household fire or burglary, parents participating in parenting classes, or a family that may fall below the federal poverty level, a request for a fee waiver will be documented in the file with supportive documentation of the qualified event.

Provider Transfers: Families needing to change their childcare provider must submit a transfer request to the Coalition and have a zero balance with their current provider. Before approval of transfer Coalition will verify with provider that parents have fulfilled the copayment obligation or made a repayment plan. The Coalition will complete the transfer once copayment obligation has been verified and documented.

At Risk families needing to change their childcare provider must submit a provider transfer request to the Coalition and have a zero balance with their current provider. If family is unable to fulfill their co pay obligation provider must try to arrange a repayment plan for the at-risk family. Provider will notify the Coalition if unable to make a repayment plan and document their attempt.

Disenrollment Procedures
If the coalition finds that it must disenroll children from the school readiness program, the coalition will disenroll the children in reverse order of the eligibility priorities and criteria listed beginning with children from families with the highest family incomes. A notice of disenrollment must be sent to the parent and school readiness program provider at least two (2) weeks before disenrollment to provide adequate time for the parent to arrange alternative care for the child. However, an at-risk child may not be disenrolled from the program without the written approval of the Child Welfare Program Office of the Department of Children and Families or the community-based lead agency.

PARTIES AFFECTED
All eligible and enrolled income eligible, welfare transition, and at-risk school readiness clients.

ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS / FORMS
Application, Certificate of Eligibility, Income Worksheet, Sliding Fee Scale.