

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT DIVISION
Child Care & Early Learning
Technical Assistance Bulletin 298

Keyword: Child Care, Natural Disaster

Subject: Child Care Quality Expenditures during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Date: August 21, 2020

This Technical Assistance (TA) Bulletin provides Local Workforce Development Boards (Boards) with information on identifying opportunities to effectively leverage 2 percent of quality set-aside funds during the COVID-19 global pandemic.

Background

Based on the most recent financial reports, many Boards have very low expenditure rates of their Child Care Quality (CCQ) funds, likely due to planned activities that were canceled because of COVID-19. TWC recognizes that many of the activities that were planned at the beginning of the year are no longer practical or advisable and may be indefinitely postponed, or postponed through at least the end of Board Contract Year 2020.

The information included in this document is to help Boards identify alternative ways to expend their quality funds that may be particularly beneficial to providers at this time.

TWC encourages Boards to continue to think strategically about the use of quality funds while also being mindful of the immediate and sometimes dire needs that providers are currently facing. Soliciting provider input on current needs helps ensure that funds are spent on activities that have the most impact.

Boards generally design quality improvement activities to support providers that have agreements to serve subsidized children, with an emphasis on Texas Rising Star providers. Although TWC encourages Boards to continue support for subsidy providers, particularly Texas Rising Star providers, Boards do have the flexibility to design quality improvement activities for all regulated child care providers. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, some Boards have designed quality service strategies to help all regulated child care providers access needed personal protective equipment (PPE) and cleaning supplies. Additionally, Boards should consider strategies to support home-based providers that are particularly critical at this time, since many families prefer the smaller setting to reduce risk of exposure to COVID-19.

Note: The following categories correspond to CCQ expenditure planning and reporting categories, as defined in WD Letter 21-19, issued November 4, 2019, and titled “Child Care Quality Funds Report and Implementation and Expenditure Plan,” and its attachments.

Health and Safety

Child care programs are experiencing higher costs as a result of enhanced health and safety protocols due to COVID-19. CCQ funds may be used, under the Health and Safety category, for many of these needs, including the following:

- Grants to child care providers to allow them to address their program's unique health and safety needs (appropriate documentation must be retained by the provider), or Boards could procure health and safety items for distribution to child care providers
- PPE, such as:
 - face masks with clear panels for teachers so that young children may see the teacher's mouth or expression when he or she is talking, conducting a read-aloud, supporting infant language development, and so forth;
 - regular face masks for staff and parents who enter the building;
 - disinfectant wipes, alcohol swabs, hand sanitizer, and gloves;
 - aprons or smocks for teachers; and
 - shoe covers
- Cleaning and sanitation supplies and services, including hand soap, disinfectant concentrates, bleach, spray bottles, paper towels, lidded trash cans, safe storage for hazardous supplies, and janitorial services
- Temporary partitions to separate groups within shared spaces
- Plexiglass barriers for the front desk or sign-in area of the facility
- Hand hygiene stations at the entrance of the facility or in classrooms
- Touch-free thermometers or thermometer covers
- Bins for toys that need to be disinfected and storage for toxic sanitation supplies
- Informational and/or educational materials related to COVID-19 and other infectious diseases
- Daytime security systems for providers, such as surveillance cameras and keyless entry points
- First aid and CPR training for teachers
- The provision of health consultations and coaching to help programs implement COVID-19-related health and safety measures and to help connect children and families to critical health services

Develop, Implement, or Enhance the Texas Rising Star Program

- Supply-building grants for open providers to help maintain and/or increase the number of programs participating in the Texas Rising Star program. The US Department of Health and Human Services Office of Child Care has provided guidance that in response to a federal- or state-declared emergency, quality improvement funds may be used to provide supply-building grants that support ongoing financial assistance for allowable expenses such as rent and staffing. Boards may use this flexibility to help existing Texas Rising Star providers and, in an effort to recruit more providers into the Texas Rising Star program, may also consider expanding the eligible applicant parameters to include providers that submit an application to become a Texas Rising Star provider. For example, Boards may consider implementing a framework to provide Texas Rising Star

applicants and providers with a monthly supply-building grant to help open providers during the COVID-19 pandemic emergency, and Boards may structure the grant amounts based upon the size of the program.

- Curriculum and materials that support expanded services to school-age children who may need to engage in remote learning while in child care
- Curriculum focused on social-emotional learning (for example, Incredible Years and Preschool PATHS), which may be a higher priority for many children at this time
- Outdoor environment materials and equipment, especially those that support more outdoor time and social distancing, such as shade structures, climbing equipment, games, tricycles, push toys, playhouses, and sensory tables
- Developmentally appropriate technology that supports high-quality learning environments; as with all costs, technology purchases must be reasonable and necessary. Purchasing high-cost items, such as technology, may bring increased scrutiny and requires clear justification. Boards may also consider an application process, as the need for technology may be high among many Texas Rising Star providers.
- Extra supplies and learning materials, such as writing utensils, art supplies, and books, to support children’s individual use of materials or reduced sharing
- Outreach and consumer education materials, such as banners, brochures, tip sheets, posters, social media, and traditional media, that address the following:
 - Information promoting Texas Rising Star providers that remain open and provide high-quality care
 - Identifying high-quality child care during a pandemic
 - Child health information, including facts about developmental milestones and screening, as well as the importance of well-child visits and immunizations
 - Talking to children about COVID-19 and why child care and school look so different
- Provider incentives to develop public-private prekindergarten partnerships, which could be more appealing at this time because of COVID-19 and the pressures that independent school districts face to alter school schedules

Improving the Quality and Supply of Infant and Toddler Programs

- Extra supplies and classroom materials, such as extra sets of toys and books as well as “slobber” bins for storing items until they can be sanitized, to reduce sharing and manage the disinfection of items that children put in their mouths
- Overshirts, smocks, or aprons for teachers who are likely to be exposed to bodily fluids
- Professional development training specific to infant and toddler needs, such as the following:
 - Supporting language development amid social distancing
 - Supporting strong attachment and social-emotional development amid social distancing
 - Toxic stress and the impact on early (ages 0–3) brain development
 - Helping babies and toddlers adapt to change
- Incentives to support expanding infant and toddler care, including for programs that have temporarily closed infant and toddler classrooms because of financial challenges related to COVID-19

Professional Development (excluding Infant and Toddler Specific)

- Online or remote professional development training on topics such as the following:
 - Supporting social-emotional development
 - Adverse Childhood Experiences and chronic stress in caregiving staff and/or children
 - Trauma-informed care
 - Emergency and disaster preparedness
 - Understanding implicit bias, supporting diversity and equity
 - Supporting prekindergarten and school-age children with remote learning
 - Family engagement
 - Suspension and expulsion
 - Relationship-Based Professional Development (RBPD)
- Teacher or provider stipends for attainment of higher education or training
- Scholarships for Child Development Associate (CDA) certification or college expenses (for example, tuition, fees, and books)
- Combined scholarships and teacher stipends to develop an Early Childhood Education (ECE) apprenticeship program
- Technology loaner libraries that provide tablets and hotspots to support virtual professional development training when reasonable and necessary
- Wage supplements or stipends to incentivize teacher continuity during the public health challenge (hazard pay)

Other

- Shared services, as follows:
 - Child care management software and tools, such as ProCare, SmartCare, Brightwheel, and TX Childcare Tools
 - Support for development and implementation of substitute teacher pools
 - Incentives for providers to join networks or partner with umbrella organizations that enable scale and administrative stability
 - Funding for a Board staff member or the release of an RFP for another organization to build a shared services network for subsidy providers

For more information about shared services, contact shay.everitt@twc.state.tx.us.

To discuss these strategies and other ideas, Boards are encouraged to reach out to their TWC Child Care quality contact at childcare.programassistance@twc.state.tx.us.

Inquiries

Send inquiries regarding this TA Bulletin to childcare.programassistance@twc.state.tx.us.

References

[WD Letter 21-19](#), issued November 4, 2019, and titled “Child Care Quality Funds Report and Implementation and Expenditure Plan,” and its attachments:

1. [Allowable Child Care Quality Activities](#)
2. [Child Care Quality End-of-Year Report](#)
3. [Child Care Quality Implementation and Expenditure Plan Fiscal Year 2020](#)
4. Child Care and Development Fund [Quality Improvement Non-direct Care Activities Quarterly Report](#)