STRONG START 2020

LOUISIANA'S PLAN

A PLANNING GUIDE
FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD
COMMUNITIES & PROVIDERS

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OVERVIEW

Since the Governor issued the statewide Stay At Home Order in March 2020, early childhood communities, providers, and the Louisiana Department of Education acted quickly to ensure the safety of children and to meet the child care needs of essential infrastructure workers.

However, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the child care sector are significant. A survey conducted by the Louisiana Policy Institute for Children found the majority of child care providers have reported a loss in revenue, and a significant number of child care providers are facing temporary or permanent closures. Early childhood communities must be equipped to offer child care providers strategic and targeted support to recover.

Additionally, in anticipation of potential facility closures or modified school and center operations in the coming year, early childhood communities and providers should begin making plans to ensure children have the experiences and support they need to develop and grow, regardless of setting.

Louisiana has made considerable progress in unifying and strengthening its early childhood system and has been focused on three key priorities for early childhood: increasing early childhood classroom quality, expanding access for economically disadvantaged families, and supporting local governance. To sustain the progress Louisiana has made as a state and to prepare for a strong start to the 2020-2021 school year, it is critical early childhood communities take steps to support the child care sector in the immediate aftermath of COVID-19 and to ensure children continue to learn and thrive in the long-term.

STRONG START FOR EVERY COMMUNITY

Early childhood communities are composed of early childhood lead agencies, Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) agencies, school systems, Head Start grantee(s), and child care providers, and it is now more critical than ever that these entities work in partnership as the state recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic.

This Early Childhood Strong Start 2020 Planning Framework outlines priorities and funding opportunities in order for early childhood communities and sites to work together to ensure:

- All **child care centers have the tools and resources they need to reopen safely** and in accordance with Office of Public Health guidelines.

- **Communities sustain and/or increase access** to opportunities for early childhood care and education in the near and long-term.

- **Teachers are prepared to lead classrooms and provide high-quality interactions** for children every day.

- **Families are supported to re-enroll** children in early childhood programs, **or to provide quality care and education in their homes** if programs are unable to reopen or remain open.

Early Childhood
IMPROVING SCHOOL READINESS

STRONG START 2020: EARLY CHILDHOOD PLANNING PRIORITIES OVERVIEW

The Planning Priorities outlined below are designed to support early childhood communities and sites as they begin planning to ensure child care centers can safely reopen, communities can sustain and/or increase access, children continue to have high-quality experiences, and families are supported. Communities and sites may be eligible for funding opportunities.

CATEGORY: The four early childhood planning categories include the most critical areas for a strong start: Health, Safety, & Operations; Sustaining & Expanding Access; Classroom Quality & Continuous Learning; and Family Engagement & Support.

PRIORITY: Each category is further subdivided into priorities for communities and sites. These priorities are aligned to the key decisions communities and sites will make for a strong start in 2020-2021. While these priorities are not required, they are recommended for communities and sites.

PRIORITY FUNDING GUIDANCE: Communities and sites may be eligible for several funding opportunities to support their Strong Start 2020 plans. Funding sources include:

- **COVID-19 Community Child Care Recovery Grants:** The Department has released a Request For Applications (RFA) for which lead agencies are eligible. Lead agencies should develop a planning and funding proposal in coordination with their CCR&R and program partners, and funding must be used to fund activities that support child care. Access the **RFA**.

- **Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSERF):** Early childhood community networks can also partner with their school system(s) to utilize ESSER funding for early childhood priorities.

- **Lead Agency and Ready Start Network Allocations:** The Department will provide flexibility for lead agencies to use lead agency and Ready Start Network allocations to support COVID-19 recovery efforts and the implementation of the Strong Start 2020 plans.

- **Louisiana Child Care Assistance Provider (LaCAP) Relief Grants:** Child care assistance providers may be eligible for a second round of grant funding to support reopening. Access information regarding **LaCAP Relief Grants**.

RESOURCES: Resources aligned to each priority are linked to support early childhood communities or sites in planning.

EARLY CHILDHOOD PLANNING CATEGORIES

1. **HEALTH, SAFETY, AND OPERATIONS:** Early childhood communities and sites plan for maintaining the health, safety and continued operation of early learning centers.

2. **SUSTAINING AND EXPANDING EARLY CHILDHOOD ACCESS:** Early childhood communities plan to sustain and expand access to early childhood programs for economically disadvantaged families that considers the needs and challenges of, as well as opportunities for, families and child care providers.

3. **CLASSROOM QUALITY AND CONTINUOUS LEARNING:** Early childhood communities and sites plan to support children's social, emotional, and academic growth through various methods of continuous learning including a plan for high-quality curriculum and professional development.

4. **FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT:** Early childhood communities and sites plan to engage and support families, and to help connect them with community, health, mental health, and social services.

EARLY CHILDHOOD STRONG START 2020 PLANNING PRIORITIES

HEALTH, SAFETY, AND OPERATIONS

Early childhood communities and sites plan for maintaining the health, safety and continued operation of early learning centers.

PRIORITIES	FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES	RESOURCES
Early learning centers are equipped and supported to meet public health guidelines for reopening, including meeting cleaning/sanitation guidelines, providing personal protective equipment (PPE) for staff, and establishing other protocols designed to ensure the health and safety of children and adults.	• COVID-19 Community Child Care Recovery Grants (eligible to support child care only) • LaCAP Relief Grants	**Office of Public Health Guidelines for Child Care** **Health and Safety Resource Guide**
Communities and sites ensure that the returning workforce is trained on and supported to follow Office of Public Health Guidelines for Child Care.	• COVID-19 Community Child Care Recovery Grants • LaCAP Relief Grants	**Office of Public Health Guidelines for Child Care**

EARLY CHILDHOOD STRONG START 2020 PLANNING PRIORITIES

SUSTAINING AND EXPANDING EARLY CHILDHOOD ACCESS

Early childhood communities plan to sustain and expand access to early childhood programs for economically disadvantaged families that considers the needs and challenges of, as well as opportunities for, families and child care providers.

PRIORITIES	FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES	RESOURCES
Communities understand the challenges their child care providers are facing, and develop a plan to support child care providers during the 2020-2021 year to ensure families continue to have access to high-quality early childhood options in the immediate and long-term.	• COVID-19 Community Child Care Recovery Grants • LaCAP Relief Grants	**Phasing in Early Learning Center Operations**
Communities work with centers to encourage, incentivize, and support center staff and teachers to return to work when safe to do so.	• COVID-19 Community Child Care Recovery Grants • LaCAP Relief Grants	**Early Childhood Workforce: Recruiting and Hiring Toolkit**
Early learning center directors have a stronger network and enhanced leadership skills to adapt to changes and continue to improve.	Individual stipends from the Kellogg foundation	**Louisiana Early Leaders Academy** (Application for Cohort 2 open May 1-22)
Communities use strategies to maximize existing funding and/or secure new funding to expand access to early childhood care and education for birth through four-year-olds, prioritizing diverse delivery wherever possible.	Lead agencies can work with school systems to utilize many funding sources to provide additional pre-k seats, including local funding and the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSERF).	**School System Planning Guide**, Appendix D **Overview of Early Childhood Funding Sources**

EARLY CHILDHOOD STRONG START 2020 PLANNING PRIORITIES

CLASSROOM QUALITY AND CONTINUOUS LEARNING

Early childhood communities and sites plan to support children's social, emotional, and academic growth through various methods of continuous learning including a plan for high-quality curriculum and professional development.

PRIORITIES	FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES	RESOURCES
Communities and sites have a plan to support children's social and emotional development which may have been interrupted or impacted by multiple transitions, breaks in routines, and disruptions in relationships with their caregivers.	• Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSERF) for Pre-K • COVID-19 Community Child Care Recovery Grants • LaCAP Relief Grants	**Addressing Unfinished Learning Gaps** **Tulane Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation** **Guide for Supporting Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Needs** **Student Engagement and Success Partner Guide**
Communities have a plan for the continuous use of high-quality curricular materials during alternate methods of instructional delivery inclusive of lesson delivery, sharing assignments, and tracking attendance and communications with students and families. Plans may include high-tech supports, low-tech supports, or a combination of both.	• Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSERF) for Pre-K • COVID-19 Community Child Care Recovery Grants • LaCAP Relief Grants	**Instructional Materials Guidance** **Addressing Unfinished Learning Gaps** **Technology for Continuous Learning** **AnLar's Home-Based Learning Toolkit**
Communities and sites develop a comprehensive plan for recruiting, training, and supporting the early childhood workforce. This plan includes onboarding new teachers and providing professional development opportunities for returning teachers focused on high-quality continuous learning and strengthening adult-child interactions.	• Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSERF) for Pre-K • COVID-19 Community Child Care Recovery Grants • LaCAP Relief Grants	**PD Vendor Guide** **Ongoing PD for Early Childhood Educators** **Early Childhood Workforce: Recruiting and Hiring Toolkit**
Communities and school sites will ensure that all children with disabilities, including those transitioning from Part C to Part B, have continuous access to service delivery including instruction and related services, regardless of school facility closure or modified operation.	• Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSERF) for Pre-K • COVID-19 Community Child Care Recovery Grants	**Timelines and Documentation During Extended School Closures for Students with Disabilities** **Continuous Education for Students with Disabilities: Direct Services** **Partnerships for Success Guide**

EARLY CHILDHOOD STRONG START 2020 PLANNING PRIORITIES

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT

Early childhood communities and sites plan to engage and support families, and to help connect them with community, health, mental health, and social services.

PRIORITIES	FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES	RESOURCES
Communities and sites create a plan to connect families and children with community resources for basic needs like child care options, food, as well as physical and mental health services.	COVID-19 Community Child Care Recovery Grants	**Understanding Types of Child Care Providers** **Find a School Meal Site** **Tulane Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation**
Communities and sites develop a plan to engage families, understand their needs and challenges, and support them to re-enroll their children in child care, Head Start, and pre-K programs.	COVID-19 Community Child Care Recovery Grants	**Coordinating Re-Enrollment for Families**
Communities and sites develop plans for regular communication with families and to provide families with resources to enhance continuous learning, interactions, and developmentally-appropriate learning activities.	COVID-19 Community Child Care Recovery Grants	**Family Communication Plan Guidance** **Guidance for Early Learning at Home** **Instructional Materials Guidance**
Communities and sites develop procedures that ensure transitional plans are created in partnership with families to support changes in setting and school/site interruption.	COVID-19 Community Child Care Recovery Grants	**Guidance for Early Childhood Transitions**