



Preschool Scholarship Programming Policies

Preschool Support Funding shall be used for early care, health, and education programs to assist low-income parents with tuition for preschool and other supportive services for children ages three, four, and five who are not attending kindergarten. If sufficient funding is available after addressing the needs of those who meet the basic income eligibility requirement, an ECI area Board may allow for eligibility for those who a family income is in excess of the basic income eligibility requirement through use of a sliding scale or other copayment provisions.

ECI area Boards must not supplant state or federal funds. Examples of state or federal funds that need to be considered include:

- *State-administered child care assistance for eligible families;*
- *State-funded preschool programs (Shared Visions, SWVPP for 4 year olds);*
- *Head Start for eligible children.*

I. PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

- **Quality Preschool Programs** – *The Early Childhood Iowa State Board strongly recommends that Early Childhood Iowa areas support the implementation of evidence-based, quality practices and services with proven positive outcomes for children.*

Thus, the Cedar/Jones ECI Board mandates that all participating preschool programs must implement evidence-based, quality practices and services with positive outcomes for families. Programs will be required to demonstrate proof of and be achieving high quality program standards (referenced in Attachment A) that include one or more of the following:

- *Accreditation by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)*
- *Head Start Performance Standards*
- *Achieved a Level 3, 4, or 5 on Iowa's Quality Rating System (QRS).*
- *Verified in Iowa's Quality Preschool Program Standards (IQPPS).*
- *Achieved an average score of 5 on the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS) – Revised or Family Child Care Rating Scale (FCCRS) completed by an outside evaluator with an established 85% inter-rater reliability within six months of the observation.*

If a program is not meeting high quality program standards, an exception can be made by the ECI Board to continue scholarships in the program.

Programs will be required to meet and work with the Child Care Resource and Referral Consultant and have a QRS Evaluation completed. The evaluation will determine areas of strengths and weaknesses for a program.

The program will then choose an area of weakness to focus quality improvement on and provide a written improvement plan to the ECI Board outlining the measures being taken by the program to improve quality. A timeline for completion will also be outlined.

If the ECI Board feels that measures are being taken by the preschool program to improve quality, an exception to requirement of meeting current standards can be waived before the start of each fiscal year. Exceptions are made one year at time.

- ***Utilization of Curriculum*** –Participating preschool programs must be utilizing a research or evidenced–based curriculum and will be required to identify the name of the curriculum.
- ***Utilization of an Assessment*** –Participating preschool programs are required to assess individual children using a research or evidenced-based measurement to determine if children are at age-appropriate levels. Programs will be asked to identify the name of the assessment tool used. At the end of the service, programs are required to report the number of children that are at age-appropriate levels or exhibiting growth toward an age-appropriate level along with identifying the assessment tool used in determining this.
- ***Location*** – Programs eligible for participation in the Preschool Scholarship Program must be within the boundaries of Cedar and Jones counties.
- ***Agreement*** – Programs will be required to sign an agreement acknowledging agreement to the terms and policies of the Preschool Scholarship Program.

II. CHILD ELIGIBILITY

- ***Boundaries of Preschool Scholarship Recipients*** – Eligible children shall be residents of either Cedar or Jones counties. Eligible children may also live within the boundaries of the following school districts: Anamosa,

Bennett, Durant, Midland, Monticello, North Cedar, Tipton, Olin, and West Branch.

If a child lives outside of the boundaries of Cedar or Jones counties, the preschool scholarship program manager shall first contact the ECI area that includes the county of residence of the applying child/family to determine if funding is available to support that child/family from that ECI area and to avoid duplication of payment. Upon receiving confirmation that no funding is available, the child/family will be eligible for a Cedar/Jones ECI Preschool Scholarship.

- **Age of Child** – *A child is eligible if they are three years old or older on September 15th of the current fiscal year.*
- **Poverty Guidelines** – *Eligible children will have a combined family gross income of 200% or below of federal poverty levels. Current guidelines for the start of the ECI state fiscal year will be guidelines for the entire fiscal year unless otherwise directed through Board action.*

When calculating family annual income for eligibility, calculate gross income including but not limited to salaries/wages, child support, FIP, SSI, Social Security Disability, unemployment benefits, and any other forms of income. Supporting documentation must be included with the application. The Preschool Scholarship Manager reserves the right to inquire with the parent/guardian regarding eligibility questions.

The Preschool Scholarship Application will not be processed until the application is fully completed and all information is received in its entirety.

- **Proof of Income** – *A copy of last year's Federal Income Tax Return shall be submitted with the completed application.*

If the family/guardian does not have access to the Federal Income Tax Return, other supporting documentation for each source of income shall be included with the application. Examples include but are not limited to W-2 forms, thirty (30) days of current paystubs of the parent(s)/stepparent(s)/guardian of the child, a DHS Notice of Decision of Benefits for FIP, verification of Child Support, Social Security, or SSI.

If the family/guardian is unable to provide a copy of their Federal Income Tax Return, they should contact the preschool scholarship program manager.

- ***Application Submittal*** -- *A child's application for scholarship consideration will not be processed until a completed application and necessary support documentation has been received.*
- ***Follow-Up*** – *The preschool scholarship program manager shall contact the family/guardian of a child if an incomplete application is received via the contact information on the child's application. If after contact is made and the preschool scholarship program manager has not received return contact from the family/guardian within 7 days, a letter outlining the information needed will be sent to the family. If sufficient information is not received within 30 days, the scholarship application will be considered denied and no further follow-up will be made.*

An email will also be sent to the preschool program when additional information is being requested and when a child's application is denied.

III. PARTICIPATION PROCESSES

- ***Release of Applications*** – *Preschool scholarship applications will be released in May before the start of the upcoming preschool year. All eligible preschool programs will be emailed the application and asked to provide a copy to all incoming preschool children and their families. Applications can be submitted at any time. Notice of approval will be determined by funding processes from the Cedar/Jones ECI Board. Parents are required to sign the application acknowledging terms of the Preschool Scholarship Program.*
- ***Scholarship Reimbursement Rates*** – *Reimbursement rates will be reviewed and determined annually in the summer prior to the start of the school year by the Cedar/Jones ECI Preschool Committee.*

Reimbursement will only be made up to the amount charged by the preschool to the child and their family and will be made directly to the preschool. A copayment may be required by the preschool and will be the responsibility of the parent/guardian paid directly to the preschool.

- **Notification** – *The preschool scholarship manager will provide a list of children awarded scholarships to the respective preschools and inform parents/guardians of the scholarship award.*
- **Program Attendance** – *Preschool attendance will be monitored by the preschool and provided to the preschool scholarship manager monthly. At least 85% attendance will be required for participation in the scholarship program. If the child is sick and misses school, these days will not be included in the 85% attendance requirement if a written doctor's excuse is provided. If attendance falls below 85%, the preschool scholarship program manager will give one warning to parents. The second time attendance falls below 85%, the child may be terminated from the scholarship program and not be allowed to re-enter during the current school year. Full preschool tuition will then be the responsibility of the parent/guardian.*
- **Mid Month Entry/Exit to Programming** – *if a child enters or exits the scholarship mid-month, the preschool scholarship manager, on a case-by-case basis, will consider reimbursement for a preschool scholarship. Preschool programs will be required to contact the preschool scholarship manager if a child enters or leaves a program mid-month to discuss partial payment.*
- **Change of Status** – *Participating preschools will be responsible for immediately notifying the preschool scholarship manager if a child is no longer eligible for ECI funding or becomes eligible for other preschool services or funding.*
- **Participating program reporting requirements** – *Participating preschools will be required to submit monthly attendance and a financial claim form on participating students. It is also the responsibility of the preschool programs to work with parents to make sure students are meeting the preschool program attendance requirements. Attendance forms and monthly claims must be submitted by the 5th of the month to the preschool scholarship manager. If attendance and invoices are not turned in by the 5th of the month, the preschool will have to wait until the next month for reimbursement.*

Preschool programs will also need to report on the number of children that have been screened for developmental delays and of those children, the number of children that have been referred for additional services or treatment.

Reporting on the program performance measures is a vital part of participating in the Preschool Scholarship Program and a condition of program participation.

IV. EXCEPTIONS TO POLICY – *Exceptions to any of the current policies may be requested to the Cedar/Jones ECI Board on an individual basis.*