



Early Learning Coalition of the Nature Coast

Serving Citrus-Dixie-Gilchrist-Levy-Sumter Counties

Early Learning Program Operating Procedure (ELPOP)

Chapter 3: School Readiness Program Requirements

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Chapter 3 School Readiness Requirements

3.1 General Services

- A. Providers who receive School Readiness funding shall be considered "School Readiness providers". The Coalition may enter into an Agreement with School Readiness providers that meet the following criteria:
1. Produce current proof of license, license exempt, or registration (not required for informal care).
 2. Obtain and maintain 100% compliance with the Coalition's Health and Safety Assessment, or on the Child Care Licensing inspection.
 3. Produce current, valid, and accurate proof of insurance listing the Coalition as additionally insured as required later in this policy. Proof must be an insurance certificate.
 4. All potential providers must be in good standing with the local licensing agency (informal care is exempt from this requirement).
 5. Obtain a minimum of 80% compliance with the Coalition's ELCNC-23 School Readiness Program Pre-Assessment Tools and obtain 100% compliance with the Coalition's ELCNC-24 School Readiness Health and Safety Pre-Assessment/Assessment Tools, if the facility is not licensed.
- B. School Readiness Provider Agreement: The ELCNC-18 School Readiness Provider Agreement and ELCNC-19 School Readiness Provider Agreement Attachments must be fully executed and authorized by the Executive Director. Provider reimbursement shall be contingent upon the existence of a current executed agreement. The following provisions are applicable to School Readiness providers:
1. The agreement will, at a minimum, require the following:
 - a. The School Readiness provider must submit attendance sheets by the second working day of the month by 5:00 pm following the service month in order to receive full reimbursement. If the School Readiness provider submits attendance sheets after the second working day of the month following the service month the following penalties will apply:
 - (A) The first offense of a late submission will result in the provider's contract being placed on probation in accordance with the Coalition's School Readiness Provider Agreement Termination and Reinstatement Procedure.
 - (B) The second offense of late submission, within a twelve (12) month period, will result in the continued probation status and the provider will be subject to a 10% penalty fee assessed on the total monthly reimbursement amount.
 - (C) The third and subsequent offenses of late submissions, within a twelve (12) month period, will result in the termination of the School Readiness Provider Agreement.
 - (D) The Executive Director may extend the due date on a case by case basis where unusual circumstances caused the late submission of attendance sheets.
 - (E) The placement of a provider on probation and the assessment of penalty fees as described in this policy are subject to the Coalition's Grievance Policy.
 - b. The School Readiness provider must document attendance daily. Documentation must include the provider name, the child's legal name, the month and year, the date and time the child arrives and

departs, the signature of the person responsible for dropping off and/or picking up the child, and daily emergency contact numbers.

- c. In the event a child is absent for five (5) consecutive days with no contact from the parent, the School Readiness provider must notify the Coalition, utilizing ELCNC-211 Child Attendance Notice.
- d. The School Readiness provider must comply with the program observation requirements.
- e. The School Readiness provider must offer unlimited parental access.
- f. The School Readiness provider will require parents to pay their parent fees and document all scholarships and fee waivers approved by the Executive Director of the Coalition appropriately. The School Readiness provider must collect a minimum of 85% of assessed parent fees and report collection to the Coalition on ELCNC-28 School Readiness Provider Quarterly Report.
- g. The School Readiness provider must offer a character development program to develop basic values.
- h. The School Readiness provider must maintain required staff-to-child ratios.
- i. The School Readiness provider must offer a staff development program, requiring all staff members to complete twelve annual in-service training hours per fiscal year. School Readiness providers may utilize on-site in-service training programs to meet these requirements, if approved by the Coalition. For on-site trainings to be approved, the following process must be completed.
 - (A) The program director must submit an agenda, training materials, and a pre/post test to the Coalition for approval prior to conducting the training. The purpose of the pre/post test is to document that training objectives have been met. Once approved, the training may be offered.
 - (B) A sign in sheet must be completed at the training, along with the pre and post tests.
 - (C) Following the training, the program director must submit a copy of the agenda, sign in sheet, pre and post tests to the Coalition. The Coalition will issue certificates to document completion and approval of the training hours for each participant.
- j. The School Readiness provider must maintain a healthy and safe environment and comply with the ELCNC-24 Health and Safety Assessment Tool or Child Care Licensing requirements (as applicable). Licensed School Readiness providers must comply with all corrective action plans developed by the licensing counselor.
- k. The School Readiness provider must implement a parent involvement and education program.
- l. The School Readiness provider must submit the ELCNC-28 School Readiness Provider Quarterly Report to the Coalition by the twentieth (20th) calendar day after the end of the reporting period. For the purpose of accurately reporting parent fees collected and understanding parents may be delinquent on fees for a period of up to thirty (30) days, the Coalition must utilize the following calculation methods to determine the percentage of parent fees collected: the Coalition shall determine the parent fees assessed and collected from the beginning of the fiscal year to the thirtieth (30th) day prior to the last day of the reporting quarter and divide the amount of collected fees by the amount of assessed fees. For example, in the first quarter reporting period, the Coalition would determine the parent fees assessed and collected for the months of July and August. The second reporting period would include the fees assessed and collected for the months of July – November, the third reporting period would include July – February, and the fourth quarter would include July – May. A final calculation of the percentage of fees assessed and collected for the fiscal year must be completed by August 10th and submitted to the Coalition.

- m. The School Readiness provider must certify and utilize a Coalition-approved developmentally appropriate curriculum designed to enhance the age-appropriate progress of children in attaining the performance standards adopted by the Agency for Workforce Innovation. The certification is included in the ELCNC-19 School Readiness Provider Agreement Attachments. The ELCNC-29 Coalition-Approved Curricula is available for reference on the Coalition's website.
- n. The School Readiness provider's program must enhance the age-appropriate progress of each child in the development of the following School Readiness skills:
 - (A) Compliance with rules, limitations, and routines
 - (B) Ability to perform tasks
 - (C) Interactions with adults
 - (D) Interactions with peers
 - (E) Ability to cope with challenges
 - (F) Self-help skills
 - (G) Ability to express the child's needs
 - (H) Verbal communication skills
 - (I) Problem-solving skills
 - (J) Following of verbal directions
 - (K) Demonstration of curiosity, persistence, and exploratory behavior
 - (L) Interest in books and other printed materials
 - (M) Paying attention to stories
 - (N) Participation in art and music activities
 - (O) Ability to identify colors, geometric shapes, letters of the alphabet, numbers and spatial and temporal relationships.
- o. Provider Meeting Attendance: The School Readiness provider must attend provider meetings in person, send a representative, or participate via teleconference. The Coalition acknowledges that occasionally a School Readiness provider will be unable to attend a provider meeting at short notice due to circumstances beyond their control. The Coalition may excuse a provider's absence from a meeting if notified in writing of the circumstances surrounding the absence and if it is the Coalition's judgment that the reason for the absence is valid. Providers whose School Readiness contracts are placed on in-active status due to lack of enrollment of School Readiness children are excused from attendance at provider meetings scheduled during the period of the inactive status.
- p. License Certifications: The School Readiness provider must be a legally operating child care provider and must submit current license certifications, registration letters, license-exempt certifications, or other applicable documents to the Coalition in accordance with the terms of the provider's ELCNC-18 School Readiness Provider Agreement.

2. The agreement will include the statement: “the provider shall comply with all School Readiness requirements as a condition of receiving School Readiness funds”.
3. The agreement will state that the School Readiness provider is required to submit current insurance certifications that include the Early Learning Coalition of the Nature Coast (including the Coalition's main office address) as a named insured on the general liability insurance policy and in accordance with the following:
 - a. The School Readiness provider shall be liable, and agree to be liable for, and shall indemnify, defend and hold the Coalition harmless from all liability, claims, suits, judgments, expenses or damages including court costs and attorney's fees arising out of intentional acts, negligence or omissions by the early learning provider in the course of the operations of the contract. This also includes the indemnification of the State for any liabilities set forth in section 768.28 Florida Statutes.
 - b. The School Readiness provider's insurance: At all times during an Agreement, the School Readiness provider shall maintain insurance policies meeting the requirements of this section.
 - c. Adequate General Liability Coverage as determined by the Coalition, at a minimum limit of \$500,000 for child care centers and \$300,000 for family child care homes per occurrence for Bodily Injury and Property Damage.
 - d. If transportation is provided as part of the School Readiness program Business Automobile Liability with minimum limits of \$500,000 per occurrence for Bodily Injury and Property Damage is required. (ELCNC-20 Insurance Affidavit must be submitted to certify whether or not transportation is provided.)
 - e. Worker's Compensation coverage for all employees, meeting the legal requirements for employees in Providers SIC code(s) or an affidavit stating that the provider is not required to carry the insurance (ELCNC-20 Insurance Affidavit).
 - f. The School Readiness provider shall provide a Certificate of Insurance signed by an authorized representative of the insurer evidencing the insurance required by this section. The Certificate of Insurance shall provide that the Coalition shall be given not less than ten (10) days written notice prior to the cancellation or restriction of coverage. A renewal or replacement Certificate of Insurance shall be provided not less than ten (10) days prior to expiration or replacement of the insurance for which a previous certificate has been provided.
 - g. Insurance Company Requirements: All insurance companies providing insurance must be authorized to conduct business in the State of Florida.
 - h. This Agreement does not limit the types of insurance that the early learning provider may desire to obtain or be required to obtain by law. The limits of coverage under each policy maintained by the early learning provider shall not be interpreted as limiting the early learning provider's liability and obligations under the Agreement.
 - i. Public school systems covered under F.S. s. 768.28 shall be required to submit a certificate of insurance only.
4. The School Readiness Agreement will not include payment for initial start-up costs to open a new School Readiness operation, for the purchase or improvement of land, or for the purchase, construction, or permanent improvement of any building or facility (per 98.54 of CCDF final rule). Any such costs in excess of earnings under the rate payment methods will be met through resources outside the Coalition.

5. The Coalition will complete ELCNC-118 Sub-recipient/Vendor Relationship Determination and the ELCNC-126 Federal Sub-recipient/Vendor Determination Checklist for each sub-contracted provider and attach a copy of the determination to the School Readiness Provider Agreement.
6. The School Readiness provider will submit to the Coalition the ELCNC-21 Signature Authority Form at any time that it becomes necessary to update the information.

C. School Readiness Provider Agreement Termination and Reinstatement Procedure:

1. School Readiness providers are required to maintain compliance with a variety of mandates, as outlined in the School Readiness Provider Agreement & Attachments. Consequences of non-compliance may range from being placed on at-risk status, probationary status, or contract termination. This policy is designed to help providers to better understand the consequences of non-compliance in a variety of areas, as well as how to go about addressing non-compliance issues.

At-risk status indicates to a School Readiness provider that attention is needed in this area. The duration of the at-risk status may vary. There are no immediate consequences to being placed on at-risk status.

Probationary status indicates that a School Readiness provider is in a state of serious non-compliance. The duration of the probationary status may vary. The consequences of probationary status include:

- o The School Readiness program is ineligible to participate in any Coalition grant opportunities, such as the Accreditation Mini Grant Program, the Inclusion Grant Program, the Provider Recruitment/Expansion Program, and the Quality Initiatives Mini Grant Program, as well as any other grant programs that may be implemented.
- o The School Readiness program's owner is ineligible to participate in the Professional Development Reimbursement Program and the Teacher Incentive Payment (TIP) Program.

Immediate termination of a School Readiness Provider Agreement may occur if a condition or situation exists that poses imminent danger to children of injury or death. This condition or situation may be identified by the Coalition, the Department of Children & Families, and/or a law enforcement agency. Also, immediate termination will occur if the School Readiness provider fails to submit appropriate insurance and licensing documentation, as outlined in the School Readiness provider agreement and attachments.

If a non-compliance issue is noted, the appropriate staff member will complete an ELCNC-22 School Readiness Provider Non-Compliance Report and submit it to the Contracts and Compliance Department. The Contracts and Compliance Manager or designee will update the Coalition's tracking system and notify the provider of the at-risk or probationary status. Upon resolution of the non-compliance issue (if applicable), the staff member that submitted the original ELCNC-22 School Readiness Provider Non-Compliance Report will submit an additional ELCNC-22 School Readiness Provider Non-Compliance Report indicating an "issue resolved date", along with any appropriate documentation. The Contracts and Compliance Manager or designee will update the Coalition's tracking system and notify the provider of the lifting of the at-risk or probationary status.

a. Provider Meeting Attendance

School Readiness providers are required to attend or send a representative to provider meetings facilitated by the Coalition. The Coalition will facilitate provider meetings throughout the year to inform providers about topics that pertain to operation of a successful early childhood education business, as they relate to the School Readiness and/or Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten programs. Providers are required to attend, however if meetings are missed, there are no contractual consequences due to non-attendance.

b. Submission of Attendance Rolls and Documentation

School Readiness providers are required to submit their monthly attendance rolls no later than the second (2nd) working day of the month following the service month, by 5:00 pm. Sign in/out sheets must be

submitted no later than the seventh (7th) working day of the month following the service month, by 5:00 pm. Rolls and sign in/out sheets must be submitted to the appropriate Coalition office for the county of the child's residence.

The ELCNC-22 School Readiness Provider Non-Compliance Report will be submitted by the Finance Manager or designee.

Consequences of non-compliance with this requirement are:

At-risk status	Probationary status	Termination
At-risk status does not apply to this area of non-compliance.	At the first instance of late submission of attendance rolls or sign in/out sheets, probationary status will be imposed for the remainder of the fiscal year. The second instance of late submission of attendance rolls within the same fiscal year results in continued probationary status and a 10% penalty fee assessed on the total monthly reimbursement amount.	The third instance of late submission of attendance rolls within the same fiscal year results in termination of the School Readiness provider agreement.

The Executive Director may waive this policy on a case by case basis where unusual circumstances caused the late submission of attendance rolls. The provider must submit a written extension request or letter of appeal explaining the reason for late submission.

c. School Readiness Provider Quarterly Report

School Readiness providers are required to submit quarterly reports to the Coalition each quarter, according to deadlines established and outlined on the form itself. Providers on inactive status are waived from this requirement.

The ELCNC-22 School Readiness Provider Non-Compliance Report will be submitted by the Contract Specialist.

Consequences of non-compliance with this requirement are:

At-risk status	Probationary status	Termination
Late submission of the report results in at-risk status. If the provider submits the report within thirty (30) days of the notification of the at-risk status, the at-risk status will be lifted.	If the provider does not submit the quarterly report within thirty (30) days after notification of the at-risk status or fails to submit a second quarterly report, probationary status is imposed. Probationary status will continue until the end of the fiscal year.	If a provider does not submit three (3) quarterly reports within a fiscal year, the provider agreement will be terminated.

Late/non-submission of the Provider Quarterly Report by the due date implies non-reporting of parent fees. If the provider does not submit the Quarterly Report within thirty (30) days from the date of the at-risk status notification, the provider will be placed on probation. The provider will be required to implement a parent fee collection policy plan within ten (10) working days of the notification of probationary status.

d. Collection of Parent Fees

School Readiness providers are required to collect a minimum of 85% of assessed parent fees from families participating in their programs. Parent fee collection is reported on the quarterly reports. Providers on inactive status are waived from this requirement.

The ELCNC-22 School Readiness Provider Non-Compliance Report will be submitted by the Contract Specialist.

Consequences of non-compliance with this requirement are:

At-risk status	Probationary status	Termination
<p>The first instance of collection of less than 85% of assessed parent fees results in at-risk status. In addition, the provider is required to submit to the Coalition a plan for implementation of a parent fee collection policy within ten (10) working days. The plan must clearly state the date that parent fees are due (daily, weekly, monthly), a notice of delinquent account sent to the parent the day after parent fees become late including a statement to parents that the provider is required to notify the Coalition if the fees become more than thirty (30) days past due. This is considered to be a corrective action plan.</p> <p>The Coalition will monitor the implementation of the plan within forty-five (45) days of submission, and if the system is working well, the at-risk status will be removed. If the plan is not submitted or is not implemented satisfactorily, probationary status will be imposed.</p>	<p>The second instance of collection of less than 85% of assessed parent fees results in probationary status. In addition, the provider is required to submit to the Coalition a plan for implementation of a parent fee collection policy within ten (10) working days. The plan must clearly state the date that parent fees are due (daily, weekly, monthly), a notice of delinquent account sent to the parent the day after parent fees become late including a statement to parents that the provider is required to notify the Coalition if the fees become more than thirty (30) days past due. This is considered to be a corrective action plan.</p> <p>The Coalition will monitor the implementation of the plan within forty-five (45) days of submission, and if the system is working well, the probationary status will be removed at the end of the fiscal year.</p>	<p>If the provider fails to submit a corrective action plan while on probationary status or fails to meet the requirements of a corrective action plan developed during the probationary status the School Readiness agreement will be immediately terminated.</p>

e. Unlimited Parental Access

School Readiness providers are required to allow parents/caregivers unlimited access to their child during the hours of care. Providers submit a copy of their "open door policy" to the Coalition as an exhibit to the School Readiness provider agreement. Providers must keep on file any legal documentation showing that a particular parent or other person has restricted access to the child, to ensure child safety.

Consequences of non-compliance with this requirement are:

At-risk status	Probationary status	Termination
<p>At-risk status does not apply to this area of non-compliance.</p>	<p>Probationary status does not apply to this area of non-compliance.</p>	<p>Upon documentation of denial of unlimited parental access, the School Readiness provider agreement will be terminated.</p>

f. Health and Safety Issues – Licensed Providers

School Readiness providers are required to maintain early learning environments which are safe and healthy for the children in attendance. Compliance with applicable state law is monitored by the Department of Children and Families. Providers are required to follow the timelines for corrective action established by the Licensing Counselor for compliance.

g. Health and Safety Issues – Non-licensed Providers

School Readiness providers are required to maintain early learning environments which are safe and healthy for the children in attendance. Compliance is monitored by the Coalition utilizing the approved Health and Safety Checklist, which mirrors Department of Children and Families Child Care Licensing requirements as stated in Florida law. The Coalition will conduct at least two inspections each fiscal year of all non-licensed providers. Providers are required to comply with 100% of the applicable items on the checklist. If non-compliances are noted, providers are required to comply with any corrective action plans developed by the Coalition staff conducting the inspection. Corrective action periods will be established by the inspector as appropriate to the identified non-compliance area.

The ELCNC-22 School Readiness Provider Non-Compliance Report will be submitted by the Program Manager or designee.

Consequences of non-compliance with this requirement are:

At-risk status	Probationary status	Termination
<p>At-risk status does not apply to this area of non-compliance.</p> <p>NOTE: Non-compliance issues which pose imminent danger to a child will result in the immediate termination of the School Readiness provider agreement.</p>	<p>If the follow up inspection shows continued non-compliance, probationary status will be imposed. The provider will remain on probation until the next regularly scheduled inspection. If compliance is achieved at that time, the probationary status will be lifted. If compliance is not achieved, another corrective action plan must be developed and implemented.</p> <p>NOTE: Non-compliance issues which pose imminent danger to a child will result in the immediate termination of the School Readiness provider agreement.</p>	<p>If a provider remains on probationary status for health and safety issues for two full inspection cycles, the Coalition will consider termination of the agreement for the health and well-being of children.</p> <p>NOTE: Non-compliance issues which pose imminent danger to a child will result in the immediate termination of the School Readiness provider agreement.</p>

h. Provider Observations

School Readiness providers are required to offer quality early learning environments to meet the requirements of the School Readiness Program as set forth in Florida Statute, as well as the requirements of the School Readiness provider agreement. The Coalition's approved provider observation tool will be utilized to monitor compliance with these requirements. The observation will be completed at least once per fiscal year. Scoring percentages are developed at the program and classroom levels, as well as developing a composite score. Scores are evaluated to determine the level of compliance achieved.

The ELCNC-22 School Readiness Provider Non-Compliance Report will be submitted by the Program Manager or designee.

Consequences of non-compliance with this requirement are:

At-risk status	Probationary status	Termination
<p>If a provider achieves a composite score of 95.00% – 96.99%. A corrective action plan will be developed and implemented, and the areas of non-compliance re-evaluated after approximately thirty (30) days.</p> <p>When the corrective action items are re-evaluated, a new composite score will be developed. If the score is 95.00% - 96.99%, the School Readiness agreement will be placed in at-risk status, which will remain until the next provider observation is completed. If the score is 97.00% or above, the agreement will be considered to be in regular status.</p>	<p>If a provider achieves a composite score of 85.00% - 94.99%. A corrective action plan will be developed and implemented, and the areas of non-compliance re-evaluated after approximately thirty (30) days.</p> <p>When the corrective action items are re-evaluated, a new composite score will be developed. If the score is 85.00% - 94.99%, the School Readiness agreement will be placed on probationary status, which will remain until the next provider observation is completed. If the score is 95.00% - 96.99%, the status will be at-risk, which will remain until the next provider observation is completed. If the score is 97.00% or above, the agreement will be considered to be performing appropriately. If a provider earns a composite score of 85.00% - 94.99% after completion of the corrective action, a second provider observation will be conducted during the fiscal year.</p> <p>If a provider is on probationary status for low scores on the provider observation for a period longer than one year, the Coalition will consider termination of the School Readiness provider agreement, depending on the potential negative impact on the well-being and safety of the children. A review will be conducted by the appropriate Advisory Council or by the appropriate county Program Manager, which will make a recommendation to the Board, as needed.</p>	<p>If a provider achieves a composite score below 85.00%, the School Readiness agreement may be terminated immediately.</p> <p>At the Coalition's discretion, the provider may be offered a thirty (30) day corrective action period with intensive technical assistance. At the end of the thirty (30) days, an additional full provider observation will be completed. A second composite score will be developed. If the score is below 85.00%, the School Readiness provider agreement will be terminated immediately. If the score is 85.00% - 94.00%, the provider will be placed on probationary status. If the score is 95.00% - 96.99%, the provider will be placed on at-risk status. If the score is 97.00% or above, the provider will be considered to be performing appropriately.</p>

i. Multiple Probationary Issues

If a School Readiness provider is identified with more than two unresolved non-compliance issues and has been placed on probationary status for two separate infractions, the provider will move to termination status. The Program Manager will make a written recommendation to the Executive Director regarding the implementation of termination procedures based on the severity of the probationary issues and their potential impact on children, providing documentation as appropriate. The Executive Director will determine

whether or not there is good cause to terminate the School Readiness agreement. The Executive Director may waive this policy on a case by case basis where the non-compliances were caused by unusual circumstances. If termination occurs, the provider may submit a letter of appeal explaining the reason for the probationary issues and outlining the provider's plan to resolve the issues. The Executive Director will review the letter of appeal and will determine whether or not to make any recommendation to the Advisory Councils and/or the Board regarding the provider's eligibility for a School Readiness agreement. If the Executive Director determines that termination is in order, the provider may refer to the procedures below pertaining to the reinstatement of the School Readiness agreement if desired.

Example: Probation + Probation = Possible termination of School Readiness agreement

j. Reinstatement of a School Readiness Agreement

In the event a School Readiness provider is interested in reinstating their School Readiness agreement after it was terminated by the Coalition the following action must be taken. If the School Readiness provider agreement was terminated due to a violation of and/or non-compliance with the School Readiness agreement and the violations and/or non-compliance issues are corrected and documented appropriately, Coalition shall submit a recommendation to the local Advisory Council for reinstatement. The Coalition will not consider reinstatement earlier than three (3) months after the original termination. The recommendation will be considered if the provider is in full compliance with local licensing agency and Coalition-approved policy and procedures. If the recommendation for reinstatement by the Advisory Council is approved by the Coalition Board, the School Readiness agreement will be reinstated and the School Readiness provider will be placed on probation. Probationary periods will range from three (3) to twelve (12) months based upon Coalition Board recommendation.

School Readiness provider agreements terminated due to fraud are not eligible for reinstatement.

The classifications of the probationary periods are as follows:

Three (3) months: Violation was a result of non-compliance with the School Readiness agreement requirements not related to Health and Safety issues (e.g. not attending required School Readiness provider meetings, not submitting the ELCNC-28 School Readiness Provider Quarterly Report or similar area of non-compliance)

Six (6) months: Violation was a result of non-compliance with a Health and Safety issue as documented by the Department of Children and Families Licensing Inspection or the Coalition Health and Safety Assessment, non-compliance with the Provider Observation Tool.

Twelve (12) months: Violation was a result of non-compliance in multiple areas documented on the Health and Safety Assessment and/or the Department of Children and Families Licensing Inspection, Provider Observation Tool and the School Readiness agreement requirements.

In some instances, the Executive Director may consider contract reinstatement without the three month waiting period, and may waive the process requirements above.

3.2 Reimbursement Procedures

A. Establishing Reimbursement Rates and Parent Fees (Co-payments)

1. The Coalition is responsible for negotiating fixed rates with School Readiness providers. Rates negotiated may not exceed the rates paid by the general public (private pay rate) nor will they exceed Coalition's approved School Readiness Program Provider Rate Schedule. All rates shall be determined utilizing the following levels of care:

- a. Infant care (0-12 months of age)
 - b. Toddler care (13-24 months of age)
 - c. Two year old care (25 -36 months of age)
 - d. Preschool-age children (3 years old)
 - e. Preschool-age children (4 years old)
 - f. Preschool-age children (5 years old)
 - g. In-School (age of kindergarten eligibility – less than thirteen (13) years old). Before and after school care shall be available for eligible school-age children who are enrolled in school. Part-time or full-time care shall be available for eligible children who are in school and who need services during school breaks, holidays, etc. If a child is of the age of kindergarten eligibility, full time School Readiness services may not be authorized in lieu of entry into kindergarten. A child of the age of kindergarten eligibility is eligible to receive School Readiness services in accordance with the schedule of care established at eligibility determination or redetermination, to include care in accordance with the school calendar, if applicable. The schedule of care for children of kindergarten age, who are eligible for full time School Readiness services will be transferred to the school calendar of the school they are attending/potentially would attend, effective the first day of the academic year of entry.
2. The Florida Legislature passed legislation to enable the Coalition to pay up to the full market rate for providers that have met criteria for designation as a Gold Seal Provider. Upon receipt of proof of gold seal the Coalition shall negotiate separate rates for providers who are designated as Gold Seal Providers. Should a School Readiness provider's private rate equal or exceed the maximum rate (prevailing market rate) for age and type of care, the Gold Seal rate may be negotiated up to 20% above the maximum rate or up to the School Readiness provider's private pay rate, whichever is lower. Should a School Readiness provider's rate be less than the Coalition's maximum rate (prevailing market rate) for age and type of care, the Gold Seal rate shall be the caregiver's private pay rate. Providers who receive their accreditation during a fiscal year will become eligible for Gold Seal rates the first of the month following the Coalition's receipt of their paperwork from the state, regardless of the actual effective date on the certificate. Note: Gold Seal rates will be paid as funds are available; proof of Gold Seal must be maintained in the provider file.
 3. The Coalition will determine the School Readiness Program Provider Rate Schedule at a minimum of once per year utilizing the annual market rate survey conducted by the Office of Early Learning.
 4. The Coalition will negotiate special needs rate using the Coalition's approved School Readiness Program Provider Rate Schedule for the age of the child as a guideline and taking into consideration the special services/needs of the child. Payment of special needs reimbursement rate is contingent upon the provider completing the Special Needs Payment Approval Process. Note: if a provider's private pay rate exceeds the special needs differential, the request for special needs differential will be denied.
 - a. When a parent/caregiver enrolls a child with special needs in the School Readiness program, the Client Services Counselor will notify the appropriate Program Manager. This notification should include the child's name, the facility that he/she is enrolled in, and a copy of the documentation provided by the parent/caregiver that explains the special need/disability of the child.
 - b. When a notification is received by the Program Manager, he/she will contact the assigned provider. The provider will be given a copy of the ELCNC-303 Special Needs Payment Provider Application. The Program Manager will explain the application process, ensuring that the provider understands their requirement to explain environmental adaptations that are required to meet the child's needs.

Special needs funding will only be approved if there are adaptations required to allow the child to succeed in the classroom environment that require additional funding.

- c. The provider will return the completed application to the Program Manager. The Program Manager will review the application to determine if the provider's plan to meet the needs of the child requires additional funding.
 - d. If additional funding is NOT approved, the Program Manager will notify the provider of the denial in writing, specifying the reasoning behind the denial. The Program Manager will supply a copy of the denial letter, along with the original application to the Contracts Department to be filed in the provider's contract file.
 - e. If addition funding IS approved, the Program Manager will notify the Contracts Department in writing, and will submit the notification with the application form. The Program Manager will keep a copy of the approved application.
 - f. The Contracts Department will contact the School Readiness provider to complete a contract amendment for the purpose of establishing special needs rates for the child.
 - g. Once the amendment is completed, the Contracts Department will forward the amended rates to the Coalition's Finance Department. Finance Department staff will enter the appropriate special needs rates into EFS for the provider and notify the Client Services Department in writing when the process is complete. Client Services staff will adjust the child's care level in the Statewide System and complete routine notification and documentation procedures for fee change events.
 - h. The Program Manager will provide a copy of the approved application to the Education Specialist assigned to the facility. Within thirty (30) days of the special needs payment approval, the Education Specialist will visit the child's classroom to determine if the provider is implementing their plan. The Education Specialist will monitor the implementation of the environmental adaptations at least twice per year. An ELCNC-32 Provider Contact Form will be utilized to note the outcomes of the visits. The Program Manager will review the Provider Contact Forms to ensure that the provider is implementing their plan.
 - i. If, at any time, it is determined that the provider is not implementing environmental adaptations for the special needs child, the Program Manager will notify the Client Services Manager. The Client Services Manager will notify the appropriate Client Services Counselor in writing that the eligibility for special needs rates for the child has been terminated. The Client Services Manager will also send notification to the Contracts Department for the provider's file.
5. The Coalition is responsible for establishing a parent fee (the parent co-payment) based on the Coalition's approved Parent Fee Schedule for each child. The parent fee schedule is based on the family size, income, and federal poverty guidelines. The School Readiness provider is responsible for collecting the parent fee and will certify on a monthly basis that the parent fee has been collected. Non-payment of parent fees is a reason for termination of financially assisted School Readiness services. In the event of a change in School Readiness providers or termination of financially assisted School Readiness services, no parent will be responsible for more than thirty (30) days of past due fees.
- a. If payment of an outstanding parent fee has not been resolved within thirty (30) calendar days of the provider signature date on ELCNC-211 Child Attendance Notice, the family is terminated from the School Readiness program. The School Readiness provider will be notified immediately by the Coalition, via telephone and fax or mail, utilizing ELCNC-221 School Readiness Program Notice of Termination. A copy of the termination notice must be forwarded to the parent. The Client

Services Counselor will contact the referring agency to verify termination, if applicable. This termination policy does not apply to children under Protective Investigation/Protective Supervision.

If the provider is paid in full by the parent after the thirty (30) day notice of termination is issued, and prior to the date of termination indicated on the notice, the termination will be rescinded, upon receipt of ELCNC-211 Child Attendance Notice, with the reinstatement section of the form completed by the provider; alternatively, the provider may submit ELCNC-201 School Readiness Program Provider Transfer Form – Zero Balance, if the balance owed is paid and a provider transfer is anticipated. Counselor reporting responsibilities for the “termination rescinded” status apply.

- b. Should a parent prefer a School Readiness provider whose private pay rate paid by the general public exceeds the negotiated School Readiness rate the parent will be responsible for the difference between the provider’s private rate and the Coalition’s subsidy rate when the following conditions are met: the parent/guardian is aware of the charges prior to enrolling his or her child; the parent/guardian and provider understand that the charges are between the provider and parent/guardian and are not administered by the Coalition; and the parent/guardian has been advised of other care options available prior to entering in to an agreement with the provider.
- c. The Coalition will ensure that, to the maximum extent possible, quality School Readiness options are available for all clients. The Coalition will further ensure that School Readiness providers do not charge School Readiness clients rates that exceed their published private rate.
- d. The only fees that can be required of a parent who participates in the School Readiness program with a School Readiness provider or directly operated center or home, with the exception of transportation, registration/supply fees, or late pick-up fees, are those listed in the Coalition’s Parent Fee Schedule.

B. Reimbursement Determination

1. Maximum rates payable to providers are not to exceed the providers private pay rates or those listed on the Coalition’s approved School Readiness Program Provider Rate Schedule.
2. Reimbursements for full- and part-time care increments are made according to the reported number of child “days participated” for the payment period. If a child is authorized for 6 hours or more hours per day (Monday through Friday), the child may attend School Readiness services full-time. School Readiness services will be reimbursed at the full-time rate. If a parent works weekends or if the work week exceeds forty (40) hours and includes weekends, the weekend School Readiness services would be paid at the daily/part-time rate. Providers will also be reimbursed for approved holidays and absences, if monthly child attendance requirements are met.
3. Reimbursement will be made for full- or part-time School Readiness services and will reasonably relate to the hours of a parent’s qualifying activity (e.g., employment, community service, training, educational activities, etc.), and reasonable travel time. Appropriate documentation for clients classified as two parents one parent working must meet at risk guidelines referred to in the Eligibility and Enrollment section of this policy.
4. When a client’s request for hours of School Readiness services appears excessive under the circumstances (e.g., beyond full time care for a regular full-time job), the Coalition will explore the appropriateness of the request with the parent or the authorizing caseworker and keep a written justification for any additional authorized hours in the client eligibility file. Permission will be sought from the Department of Children and Families, or the contracted provider, for a family with an open case to participate in School Readiness services overnight/weekends instead of normal working hours.

5. Up to twelve (12) holidays will not be counted as an absence for purposes of reimbursement. The Coalition will authorize reimbursements to providers of full- and part-time care for up to twelve (12) holidays per year.
6. The provider will enter "H" on the daily attendance and enrollment roster for only those children who were actually enrolled in the program prior to the holiday. A child enrolled at a facility must attend at least one (1) day during the month for the provider to claim absences.
7. For children enrolled part-time and scheduled to attend on a holiday, the provider will be reimbursed at the part-time rate. For children enrolled full-time and scheduled to attend on a holiday, the provider will be reimbursed at the full-time rate. If the child does not attend the provider may receive reimbursement for an excused absence in accordance with this policy. For children not scheduled (not authorized) to attend on a holiday, no reimbursement will be made to the provider.
8. Reimbursement will be authorized for no more than a total of three (3) absences per calendar month per child except in the event of extraordinary circumstances in which case Coalition staff will provide written approval for payment based on written documentation provided by the parent justifying the excessive absence for up to an additional seven (7) days. (See example B, below.) Coalition staff will refer the case to their Client Services Manager for an approval/denial decision, if applicable.
 - a. Examples of extraordinary circumstances include the following:
 - (A) Hospitalization of the child or parent with appropriate documentation;
 - (B) Illness requiring home-stay as documented by the parent or legal guardian for a maximum of three (3) days per month. The remaining allowable four (4) days must be documented by a medical professional.
 - (C) Death in the immediate family with appropriate documentation (e.g. obituary, death certificate);
 - (D) Court ordered visitation with appropriate documentation (e.g. court order); or
 - (E) Unforeseen documented military deployment or exercise of the parent (s).
 - b. Total monthly reimbursed absences will not exceed ten (10) calendar days.
 - c. In the event a child is absent for five (5) consecutive days with no contact from the parent, the provider will notify the Coalition and the Coalition will determine the need for continued School Readiness services. If a termination from financially assisted School Readiness services notice is filed, the notice will be provided to the referring entity.
 - d. When an at-risk child has any unexcused absence or seven (7) consecutive days of excused absences from a School Readiness program, the School Readiness provider will immediately notify the Department of Children and Families assigned Family Services Counselor or supervisor by telephone or fax of the absence. The Rilya Wilson Act establishes these reporting requirements for children 3 to 5 years old. Reporting responsibilities apply to children aged three (3) to five (5) years of age named on an At-Risk referral, and to all At Risk children of any age in a School Readiness program in accordance with 60BB-4.500 F.A.C.
 - e. Should a provider independently decide to "hold" a slot for a child beyond the allowable number of absences, due to a prolonged illness or other family circumstances, such days will not be reimbursable.

- f. Payment for a child shall be suspended if the child does not attend at least one (1) instructional day during the calendar month.
9. The School Readiness provider's insurance certification and license must be current in order to receive reimbursement. The provider's Gold Seal Accreditation documentation must be current, active, and not in suspended status in order to receive reimbursement at the negotiated Gold Seal rate.
10. The Coalition will maintain a Continuation of Operations Plan to be used in the event of emergency closings due to catastrophic events. A government-declared state of emergency prompts and allows the Coalition to activate its Continuation of Operations Plan (COOP). In the event the Coalition's COOP plan is activated providers will be reimbursed at the rate normally received during non-emergency hours.
 - a. Providers may receive up to ten (10) days payment for child absence per child per month. Provider documentation for absences must include damage sustained in emergency causing closure. Additional reimbursements must be approved by the executive director of the Coalition.
 - b. A provider will not be paid for a child during a temporary closure if the child attends another provider's program on that day. The Coalition may only pay one provider for the same child.
 - c. The Coalition will use the local school district's or local government's closure schedule as a general determination of the number of eligible days for closure reimbursement at the discretion of the Coalition's Executive Director. If a provider is temporarily closed beyond the closure period for the school district or local government (for example, due to extensive damage or extended localized power outages) the Coalition may consider reimbursing additional days based on written documentation from the provider.
 - d. A School Readiness provider will be reimbursed at the same daily rate and unit of care received during non-emergency days. Under no circumstances may a Coalition reimburse in excess of the pre-existing approved hours for an individual child during the temporary closure.
11. Documentation of the circumstances causing a temporary closure is not required if a School Readiness provider's program site is in an area where government offices normally open to the public are closed by the county, state, or federal government or public schools are closed by the school district, because a state of emergency is declared to exist in the county by the county government, the Governor of the State of Florida, or the President of the United States.
12. A School Readiness provider may close its facility or program for emergencies at any time, however, in order to be eligible to receive payment, written documentation must be submitted to the Coalition which demonstrates that the closure is temporary and caused by circumstances beyond the provider's control. Payment will be approved at the discretion of the Executive Director.
13. Parents receiving Child Care Resource and Referral services are informed of the availability of a variety of child care settings and of their right of parental choice in the selection of child care. (The exception to this rule is children who are under protective services and must be served at a licensed facility, unless a waiver is issued by the referring agency.)
14. Children may be placed in a child care facility that is owned or directed by the parent. The parent may not provide the child(ren)'s direct care. School Readiness services are not reimbursable if a child's parent is a child care center teacher and the child is placed in the parent's care. In the case of family child care homes, children of the owner/director would not be eligible to receive payment for care from the parent in the child's home. A family child care home operator may provide care to a child who is by marriage, blood relationship, or court decree their grandchild, great-grandchild, sibling, niece, or nephew. If a child is a sibling of the family child care home provider, the provider and child must live in separate residences. An employee or substitute

could not choose a family child care home in which they are employed for their child to receive School Readiness funds. Relative children must be included in the provider's ratio.

15. Under the terms of the School Readiness provider agreement, providers select up to twelve (12) holidays per fiscal year which are not counted as absences for the purpose of reimbursement. In order for a child to attend an alternative provider during an individual provider holiday, or a holiday extending over a number of days, a complete provider transfer must be processed. Two providers cannot be reimbursed for the same child within the same time frame.

C. Unit of Care Standard Codes

1. To ensure that state and federal reporting requirements are met the Agency for Workforce Innovation/Office of Early Learning maintains standard codes within the statewide reporting system on specific fields for the School Readiness program. The number of codes and fields are amended and revised based on reporting needs.
2. The Coalition requests the Agency for Workforce Innovation/Office of Early Learning to provide ~~them~~ a list of the standard codes and in addition any amendments and/or revisions to the codes.
3. The Coalition is required to utilize the standard codes in order to ensure accurate state and federal reporting.
4. Enrollment and attendance codes.

The following codes will be used on attendance rosters:

- a. X= day a child is present
 - b. A= authorized absence beyond three days which has been approved by the Executive Director or by Coalition staff/staff at management level
 - c. E=excused absence
 - d. H= reimbursable holiday
 - e. T= day a child is terminated from financially assisted School Readiness services
 - f. N= enrolled not reimbursable
5. A copy of the attendance roster will be maintained at the premises of the School Readiness provider. Proof of attendance signed by parents will also be maintained by the School Readiness provider.
 6. Should the Coalition determine that a provider has fraudulently misrepresented a child's attendance as reflected by the reimbursement request; the Coalition will follow procedures to reclaim those funds as stated in the Suspected Fraud policy described in this policy.

D. Timing of Reimbursements

1. The Coalition will establish and manage an accounts receivable/accounts payable system for school readiness services with written policies and procedures.
2. The Coalition will process requests for payments from School Readiness providers according to State and Federal policies and procedures.

3. Payment to School Readiness providers may be processed on a schedule adopted by the Coalition. Such payments will be monthly at a minimum but may be as frequent as daily. The Coalition will develop procedures that will: 1) process payments in the most expeditious manner possible, not to exceed seven (7) working days from receipt of an accurately prepared and timely submitted attendance rosters (pending available funds) and 2) maintain efficient workflow patterns for Coalition staff. The reimbursement for School Readiness services provided in June of each year may be paid later, due to the transition to the new fiscal year.
4. An early learning provider that receives reimbursement for School Readiness services may be obligated to repay the funds in full or in part for various reasons, including but not limited to:
 - a. Overpayment
 - b. Improper payment
 - c. Disallowed payment as a result of an audit
5. When an early learning provider's account with the Coalition becomes delinquent the Coalition must exercise and document due diligence in securing full payment by substantially performing the following collection efforts:
 - a. Request for Payment: The Finance Manager must request the early learning provider in writing to repay the funds, specifying the amount the early learning provider owes, the reason the early learning provider is obligated to repay the funds, and the date by which the early learning provider is requested to repay the funds.
 - b. First Demand Letter for Payment: The Finance Manager, within ten (10) calendar days after the date the early learning provider's account becomes delinquent, issues the early learning provider a demand letter by certified mail, return receipt requested. A first demand letter includes the following:
 - i. Full amount that the early learning provider owes
 - ii. Reason the early learning provider's account is delinquent
 - iii. Demand for immediate repayment of the full amount by a date within 30 calendar days after issuance of the demand letter
 - iv. The early learning provider's right to dispute the delinquent account by submitting a written dispute to the Coalition before the date that the letter specifies; and
 - v. A description of the collection efforts that the Finance Manager may use if the early learning provider fails to repay the delinquent account.
 - c. A Second Demand Letter for Repayment: The Finance Manager, within ten (10) calendar days after the early learning provider fails to repay a delinquent account in full by the date required in the first demand letter, issues the early learning provider a second and final demand letter by certified mail, return receipt requested. A second demand letter includes the following:
 - (A) Full amount that the early learning provider owes
 - (B) Reason that the early learning provider's account is delinquent
 - (C) Demand for immediate repayment of the full amount by a date within 10 calendar days after issuance of the second demand letter

- (D) The early learning provider's right to dispute the delinquent account by submitting a written dispute to the Coalition before the date specified in the first demand letter, if the date is not expired
 - (E) Notice that the early learning provider may not receive further state or federal funds from the Coalition until the early learning provider repays the delinquent account in full; and
 - (F) Notice that the Coalition may report a delinquent account for Collection by the Agency for Workforce Innovation if the early learning provider fails to repay the account in full by the date required in the second demand letter
- d. Repayment Schedule: The Finance Manager may negotiate a repayment schedule that allows the early learning provider to submit partial repayments. The Finance Manger must require the early learning provider to repay the entire amount within six (6) months of the date specified in the request for payment.
 - e. Offsetting Payment: The Finance Manager may offset, in full or in part, an amount that the early learning providers owes for one early learning program with state or federal funds due from the Coalition to the early learning provider for another early learning program. The Finance Manager must accurately enter the offsetting state or federal funds across programs. The transaction in the Coalition's accounting records must clearly identify the repayment from the early learning provider to the program that the early learning provider owes and payment to the early learning provider from funds due to the early learning provider for the other program. The Finance Manager may offset an amount that an early learning provider owes the Coalition from funds for one fiscal year with funds due from the Coalition to the early learning provider for a subsequent fiscal year. The Coalition must accurately enter the offsetting funds across fiscal years. The transaction in the Coalition's accounting records must clearly identify the repayment from the early learning provider for the fiscal year that the early learning provider owes and payment to the early learning provider for the subsequent fiscal year from which payment is due from the Coalition to the early learning provider. The Coalition may continue to offset state or federal funds across early learning programs or fiscal years to secure full payment of the debt after the debt becomes a delinquent account.
- 6. The Finance Manager may report a delinquent account to the Agency for Workforce Innovation (AWI) if:
 - a. The Finance Manager's efforts to collect the delinquent account do not result in repayment in full; and
 - b. The early learning provider does not have a continuing contractual relationship with the Coalition which is anticipated to result in funds available for offset (described earlier)
 - 7. To report a delinquent account for collection by AWI, the Finance Manager must submit its request in writing.
 - 8. AWI may deny the Finance Manager's request to report a delinquent account for collection by AWI if the Coalition does not submit documentation of due diligence in securing the full payment by substantially performing the collection efforts described earlier. AWI may also deny a request if the request does not contain the following information:
 - a. The early learning provider's name, address, and federal employer identification number or social security number, as applicable;
 - b. The full amount that the early learning provider owes;

- c. If the early learning provider repays part of the debt, the amounts collected and uncollected;
 - d. The underlying agreement between the Coalition and the early learning provider;
 - e. The date that the early learning provider's account becomes delinquent;
 - f. The Finance Manager's efforts to collect the delinquent account and the dates of the collection efforts;
 - g. Copies of the demand letters that the Finance Manager issued to the early learning provider; and
 - h. If the early learning provider disputed the delinquent account, the documentation of the dispute-resolution process and result of the dispute.
9. If the Finance Manager's report of a delinquent account for collection by AWI does not include the required information, AWI may return the request to the Coalition. If the Finance Manager does not resubmit the request with the required information within 45 calendar days after AWI returns the request, AWI may deny the request. If AWI denies the Finance Manager's report of a delinquent account for collection by AWI, AWI may return the delinquent account to the Coalition and deduct the amount that the early learning provider owes from state or federal funds due to the Coalition ~~to AWI~~.

E. Forms Required for Reimbursement

1. An attendance roster for each student will be completed by each School Readiness provider, to receive reimbursement and to document that School Readiness services were provided.
2. The Coalition will not process attendance rolls that are submitted beyond sixty (60) days of a reimbursement period. School Readiness providers submitting attendance rolls on the sixty-first (61st) day and beyond agree to forfeit reimbursement for that period of time.

F. Payment Disputes

1. In the event an early learning provider wishes to dispute the payment received, the provider must document the dispute on the ELCNC-248: Improper Payment Dispute, attach all supporting documentation, and submit it to the Client Services Counselor.
2. The Client Services Counselor must investigate the dispute, ~~and~~ indicate action taken on the ELCNC-248: Improper Payment Dispute, and forward it to the Client Services Manager for final approval.
3. Awarded disputes that involve payment due to the early learning provider must be immediately copied to the Finance Manager for payment disbursement within forty-eight (48) hours. The Finance Manager must maintain the adjustment disbursement in a pending file and ensure duplicate payment is not disbursed during the following cycle. The Client Services Counselor must indicate "copied to the Finance Department" on the original and maintain the original in a pending file for re-submission to the Finance Department during the following reimbursement cycle.
4. Awarded disputes that involve payment due to the Coalition must be addressed during the next reimbursement period.

G. Notification of Improper Payment Adjustment

1. In the event an improper payment is discovered after disbursement has been completed, the Client Services Counselor must complete the ELCNC-234 Prior Period Adjustment Worksheet, enter the adjustment into the Enhanced Field System (EFS), and print a Trial Reimbursement Report. Notification of the improper

payment must be documented on the ELCNC-249 Notification of Improper Payment Adjustment Form and immediately submitted to the early learning provider.

2. Improper payments that involve payment due to the early learning provider must be immediately copied to the Finance Manager for payment disbursement within forty-eight (48) hours. The Finance Manager must maintain the adjustment disbursement in a pending file and ensure duplicate payment is not disbursed during the following cycle. The Client Services Counselor must indicate "copied to the Finance Department" on the original and maintain the original in a pending file for re-submission to the Finance Department during the following reimbursement cycle.
3. Improper payments that involve payment due to the Coalition must be addressed during the next reimbursement period.

3.3 Parent and Child Services

A. Children's Assessments

1. The Education Specialists shall visit providers throughout the year, so that children, teachers, and directors become comfortable with Coalition staff. This positive working relationship will facilitate the assessment and follow up processes, and will assist children in feeling comfortable with the administration of the assessments. The Coalition will strive to build positive relationships with teachers, so that they are viewed as a resource to the teacher as he/she plans activities to meet the needs of the children in care.
2. To ensure the validity of the child assessment program, Education Specialists will be trained by certified LAP trainers to utilize the assessment instrument correctly, and monitored by the Coalition to ensure that the tools are being utilized according to guidelines. It is critical to the success of the assessment program that the assessments be administered consistently by all staff, utilizing the guidelines set forth by the developers of the assessment instruments. Each assessment must be completed individually with each child. The LAP assessment system has been extensively researched, and is updated and re-normed as needed to ensure the validity of the assessment.
3. The Education Specialists will conduct pre-assessments within forty-five (45) days of a child's entry into the School Readiness program. Children who have an assessment on file will be considered to be pre-assessed. Reports generated through the Enhanced Field System (EFS) will be utilized to identify children that require a pre-assessment.
4. It is noted that there may be children listed on the statewide early learning data system enrollment reports that are not actively attending a School Readiness program. There may be some children for whom assessment is not possible for other reasons, such as:
 - a. Child leaves the program unexpectedly
 - b. Child refuses to cooperate with assessment
 - c. Child has a physical or language barrier that prevents completion of the assessment
 - d. Child is absent due to illness or family emergency
 - e. Child enrolls in the program with a three-day (or other short-term) referral from the Department of Children and Families
 - f. Child attends the program for less than two (2) consecutive hours each day
 - g. Other circumstances that would prevent a complete and accurate assessment

5. The Education Specialists shall keep written documentation on all children that are not able to be pre-assessed within forty-five (45) days of entry into the program, including the reasons why assessment was not conducted. Education Specialists will document the reasons for non-attendance, if known. Education Specialists will maintain contact with the provider to complete a pre-assessment as soon as possible.
6. The Education Specialists will work with providers to develop an assessment schedule for any child that may attend the program during non-traditional hours. This may include, but is not limited to, children that attend care in the evenings and children who participate in VPK or Head Start programs in addition to School Readiness. The Education Specialists will adjust their typical work hours to accommodate the needs of any such children, starting earlier or later than the traditional work day.
7. All assessment data will be entered into the web-based tracking system. The Education Specialists will generate reports for each child's parent/caregiver from the tracking system. Parent reports will be returned to the child's teacher within two (2) weeks of the completion of the assessment. Early learning providers are expected to assist by ensuring that the reports go home with each child immediately.
8. If a provider has specific concerns about a private pay child that they wish Coalition staff to assess in any county, they are directed to make that request in writing.
9. The Education Specialists will conduct program-wide post-assessments at the close of each school year, according to the general guidelines outlined for the pre-assessment. The post-assessment period is April 1 – May 31 of each year. Post-assessments will be completed on kindergarten-bound four and five year old children enrolled, to the greatest extent possible.
10. Enrollment reports will be generated from the statewide early learning data system five (5) business days prior to the post-assessment period start date and again in four (4) weeks to determine the children that are to be assessed. Any child that enrolls on or after May 1 will not be assessed during the program-wide post-assessment period. This will ensure that all children assessed during the post-assessment period have the opportunity to become comfortable with their classroom environment prior to assessment. *NOTE:* Children that entered the program on or after April 1 will only receive a post-assessment.
11. The Education Specialists shall keep written documentation on all children that are not able to be assessed, including the reasons why assessment was not conducted. Attempts to assess will be documented on the ELCNC-32 Provider Contact Form. Three documented attempts will be made to assess each enrolled child. Education Specialists will document the reasons for non-attendance, if known.
12. The protocol for the E-LAP indicates that children that score more than 25% below their chronological age in two or more domains of the E-LAP assessment may indicate a developmental concern. The chart below will be used to evaluate the children's scores. It will be necessary to compare the child's chronological age to the child's developmental age in each domain of the assessment. If the child's score is BELOW the number in the chart in two or more domains, the follow up process will be initiated. The scoring information can be gathered from the Redelearner classroom report titled "Approximate Developmental Ages by Domain".

Child's Chronological Age (in months)	Developmental age indicating concern (25% below the child's actual chronological age)
1	0
2	0
3	0
4	3
5	3
6	4
7	5

Child's Chronological Age (in months)	Developmental age indicating concern (25% below the child's actual chronological age)
8	6
9	6
10	7
11	8
12	9
13	10
14	10
15	11
16	12
17	12
18	13
19	14
20	15
21	15
22	16
23	17
24	18
25	18
26	19
27	20
28	21
29	21
30	22
31	23
32	24
33	24
34	25
35	26
36	27

13. The protocol for the LAP-D 3rd Edition indicates that children who score 1.5 or more standard deviations below the mean in two or more subscales of the LAP-D assessment may indicate the need for further screening and/or assessment. This information can be gathered from the Redelearner classroom report titled "Z-Score Rank by Subscale". The quantity "Z" represents the number of standard deviations between the raw score and the mean; it is negative when the raw score is below the mean, positive when above. The far right column on that report indicates the number of subscales in which the child scored below the cutoff. If the child scores below the cutoff in two or more subscales, the referral process will be initiated.
14. The following steps must be taken when a child's assessment results indicate two or more areas of concern. This educational support process is to be completed within forty-five (45) days of the development of the LAP reports, to allow the classroom teacher as much time as possible to implement the Individual Learning Plan. NOTE: The Coalition shall complete the educational support process as quickly as possible, not waiting until the end of the forty-five (45) day period.
15. It is important that Education Specialists maintain open communication with early learning providers. If a teacher or parent is not comfortable with the results of a child's assessment, the provider may request a re-evaluation of the child in writing to the Education Specialist. The Education Specialist shall re-assess the child in the domains that have indicated a concern. The Education Specialist shall maintain the request in the child's assessment file.
16. Teacher Conferences and the Individual Learning Plan Process:

- a. The Education Specialist will conduct a conference with each child's teacher to develop an ELCNC-35 Individual Learning Plan (ILP) based on the areas of concern noted in the assessment. Teachers will assist in the development of the ILP, based on the specific needs of the child. Activity ideas may be obtained from the Redelearner system, the LAP planning cards, and other sources. A copy of the ILP will be furnished to the parent/caregiver. If the student has been identified by a school system and has a current Individualized Education Plan, the Education Specialist is exempt from the provisions of this section.
- b. The Education Specialist will communicate as needed with child's teacher to provide additional activity ideas and to discuss the child's progress in each noted area, conducting site visits as appropriate.

17. Parent Conferences and the Referral Process:

- a. When a pre-assessment is completed, the Education Specialist will evaluate the scores of the child with the purpose of determining if the child appears to be developing appropriately. If possible concerns are noted, the Education Specialist will contact the parent/caregiver and teacher, notifying them of the possible concern and briefly outlining the referral process.
- b. The Education Specialist will communicate the assessment report outcomes to the teacher. Teachers are invited to participate in the parent conferences as available. If the teacher is unable to attend, the Education Specialist shall follow the teacher conference as outlined below.
- c. If a teacher or parent feels that the assessment may be inaccurate they may request a new assessment in the domain that the child has exhibited non-mastery, as stated above. If an additional assessment is conducted at the parent or teachers request, an Education Specialist will administer the assessment. If the assessment results validate the original indication of a referral, the referral will be generated. A parent may refuse to utilize the referral; however, the Education Specialist will proceed with recommended activities that support the learning environment for the child(ren) who have not mastered the skills as evidenced in the child assessment results.
- d. The Education Specialist will attempt to contact each parent/caregiver by telephone to set up a conference. Appointments will be set to meet the need of the parent, such as before or after the parent's work hours. If a working telephone number is not available, early learning provider staff will be asked to assist in the appointment-setting process.
- e. Once the appointment is set, the Education Specialist will send the parent/caregiver a letter to confirm the appointment. The letter should be mailed directly to the parent's home address. A copy of the letter is to be kept in the child's file.
- f. The Education Specialist will conduct a conference with child's parent/caregiver to review the child's assessment scores and complete the appropriate agency referral. The Education Specialists will provide the parent/caregiver with appropriate activity suggestions to assist him/her in working with the child in the noted areas of concern. These activity suggestions are to be printed from the web-based assessment tracking system, to correspond with the child's noted areas of concern. If applicable, the parent/caregiver will be provided with additional resource information.
- g. Appropriate reports from the tracking system will be provided to the community agency, to assist the agency in evaluating the indicated areas of delay.
- h. If parent is unable to attend a conference or cannot be reached by telephone or mail, three (3) documented attempts to inform the parent must be recorded.

18. A case file will be maintained by the Education Specialists for each child identified with possible concerns. Files MUST contain the following information:
- a. Case management log, to be utilized to document all activities completed
 - b. LAP-D/E-LAP report, as appropriate
 - c. Three documented attempts to contact parent/caregiver (if the parent/caregiver is unable to attend the initial conference)
 - d. Signed consent to refer the child for further evaluation
 - e. Copy of the completed Individual Learning Plan (ILP)
 - f. Copies of all written communication sent to the parent, including any items that might be returned as undeliverable

B. Family Needs Assessments and Support Services

1. The Coalition will conduct a family needs assessment during the Child Care Resource & Referral process. The Coalition will develop a Family Needs Assessment Form designed to identify family needs in addition to child care. Families applying for the wait list will also be provided with an opportunity to fill out a Needs Assessment Form.
2. The Coalition will partner with community agencies to refer families demonstrating a need. The Coalition will offer additional support services upon request by the parent.

C. Documentation of Health Records Collection

1. The Coalition will ensure that non-licensed providers collect health records (immunization records and physical forms) for children not yet kindergarten age within thirty (30) days of enrollment. Non-licensed providers will be required to complete the ELCNC-48 Certification of Receipt of Health Records when new children are enrolled in their programs. Completed forms will be collected by the Education Department in each Coalition office. On-site verification will be completed as part of the Health and Safety Inspections conducted by the Coalition.
2. Licensed providers will be monitored for collection of health records by the Department of Children and Families.

D. Parent Involvement and Education

1. The Coalition will periodically distribute family tip sheets to School Readiness families, both in the Coalition's office and through the School Readiness providers.
2. The Coalition will periodically notify parents of workshops/trainings that target family support and early education and care.

E. Inclusion Program

1. The Coalition will conduct activities designed to increase community awareness of the Coalition's availability as a resource for information and services to assist families with special needs children. The Coalition will distribute information at community events, as well as having information available at the Coalition offices.

The materials distributed will include information regarding the American's with Disabilities Act, and the manner in which inclusive education strives to meet and exceed these laws.

2. The Coalition's community awareness program will include information regarding equal access to early learning opportunities for all children, regardless of special needs. The program will focus on the need to provide support for the inclusion of children with special needs in child care settings with typically-developing children.
3. Coalition staff will continue active participation in the interagency councils throughout the Coalition's service area. Members of these councils will continue to provide information regarding the availability of services to individuals identified with special needs in the community. Partnerships with local, county, and state agencies will be maintained to ensure that accurate information is available to the community.
4. Coalition staff will provide technical assistance to community members contacting the Coalition. If Coalition staff cannot provide the requested information or assistance, contact information for appropriate service agencies will be provided.
5. The Coalition will offer and/or facilitate education and training activities on various inclusion topics on an on-going basis. Training opportunities will be offered quarterly to early learning teachers and staff, on topics designed to meet the needs of the community. These educational opportunities will be presented in such a manner that they directly reflect the abilities and skills of the audience. The Coalition will ensure that the dates, times, and locations are selected to meet the needs of the early learning community.
6. Coalition staff will provide technical assistance to early learning providers and staff developing inclusive environments through appropriate program design, as well as accommodations, adaptations, and enhancements of existing programs.
7. Coalition staff will provide technical assistance to parents of individuals with special needs to assist them in developing a repertoire of inclusion strategies that may be utilized outside of the child care setting.
8. Coalition staff will be responsible for the oversight and reporting of all Warm Line activities as outlined in the Child Care Resource and Referral Standard Levels of Service.
9. Coalition staff will participate in professional development activities that will include attending at least one professional conference annually that supports inclusion and disability topics in addition to the required statewide inclusion trainings.
10. Coalition staff will track all activities performed in conjunction with the inclusion program. These records will be used to fulfill reporting requirements of the Standard Levels of Service, as amended.
11. Early learning providers may be eligible to participate in the Coalition's Inclusion Mini Grant Program if they serve a child with an active Individual Education Plan (IEP) developed by the local school system or with documentation of a special need provided by a licensed physician/therapist. Program guidelines are available on the Coalition's website.

3.4 Resource and Referral Requirements

- i. The Coalition is responsible for the coordination and provision of CCR&R services in Citrus, Dixie, Gilchrist, Levy, and Sumter Counties in accordance with the CCR&R Program Requirements.
- ii. To ensure that CCR&R services are accessible to all individuals within the Nature Coast service area, Client Services staff shall implement the following:

1. Applicants and clients with limited access to telephone services, internet services or transportation requiring CCR&R services will be offered services via US mail.
2. If US Mail is not available to the parent (e.g. no mail box at the residence, no PO Box), services may be provided via proxy, e.g. a friend or relative may pass information between the parent and the Client Services Counselor. This may be achieved by the proxy visiting the Coalition office on behalf of the parent, or allowing the parent the use of their mailing address. If the proxy visits the Coalition office in person, the parent must outline their request to the counselor in writing, to maintain confidentiality. Requests for additional information, in order to serve the parent, must also be communicated by the Client Services Counselor in writing.
3. If a parent without telephone, internet and/or transportation services requires CCR&R services and is able to meet with a Client Services Counselor at their School Readiness provider site, or in a public location (e.g. library, shopping mall), every effort should be made to accommodate the request. Under no circumstances will a Client Services Counselor meet with a parent at the parent's residence.
4. Resource and Referral contact will be encouraged at local community events; Coalition staff attending fairs, festivals and community agency events (e.g. Homeless Coalition, Week of the Young Child Festival) will carry Resource and Referral requests back to their home office and pass on to Client Services Department staff. The requestor will be provided with CCR&R services in accordance with their chosen service delivery method (options are outlined in this policy) if communication is limited.
5. Resource and Referral contact will be encouraged during out-posting and Voluntary Prekindergarten registration events; Coalition staff attending the event will carry Resource and Referral requests back to their home office and pass on to Client Services Department staff. The requestor will be provided with CCR&R services in accordance with chosen method of service delivery (options are outlined in this policy) if communication is limited.
6. If Child Care Resource and Referral services are unavailable at a Coalition office, during normal working hours, due to events such as local emergency, power outage, etc., parents requiring CCR&R services must be directed to contact an alternative Coalition office within the Nature Coast service area. CCR&R services will not be provided during emergency situations in which the Coalition is unable to operate as a result of a state of emergency as declared by local, state or federal officials.

3.5 Eligibility and Enrollment Requirements

- A. The Coalition will maintain a unified waiting list (UWL) and simplified point of entry for clients applying for the School Readiness Program. The Coalition will coordinate early education and care learning programs in the community to include their family/child data in the UWL. Programs include but are not limited to Head Start, Teen Parent Program, and Even Start.
- B. The Coalition will have access to equipment necessary to conduct business including sufficient computer hardware and software to adequately track client eligibility, to provide accurate invoices, to produce accurate financial information and to generate timely reports as required. Equipment must be compatible with the Florida Agency of Workforce Innovation/Office of Early Learning Information Technology Resources as defined in Section 282.3031, F.S.
- C. The Coalition will provide sufficient space to conduct business and promote privacy when meeting with clients and offer services in an area convenient to clients.

- D. The Coalition will provide child care consumer information in the family's primary language to the greatest extent possible, be culturally sensitive to all families, and offer services via telephone and at walk in locations.
- E. The Coalition will provide timely, convenient, quality, eligibility/re-determination services to families in all geographic areas of the Coalition's service delivery area, in their primary language when possible, and based on the Coalition's established eligibility priorities.
- F. The Coalition will maintain and utilize a written procedure to resolve client complaints and work with the Coalition to resolve any issues of eligibility, reduction, or termination of financially assisted services as requested by individual clients or applicants for services.
- G. The Coalition will notify applicants or clients of the right to a review in cases of a determination of ineligibility for services or termination, suspension, or reduction in services.
- H. The Coalition must provide a notice to parents when a change in eligibility status, parent fees, authorized dates, or any other eligibility activity occurs. To the greatest extent possible, the parent must be provided at least ten (10) days notice of the change. The notice of change must include the name and address of the parent/guardian, list of eligible children for funding, beginning and end dates for funding, parent fee for each eligible child, the effective date of the parent fee, funding restrictions such as licensed care for protective service children and the re-determination date. Parents should be informed of their right to appeal any decision and the process by which to appeal.
- I. Coalition personnel performing duties relating to parent/child application intake and eligibility determination and approval must not perform duties relating to accounting.
- J. School Readiness services provided to a family related to or associated with an ELCNC staff member will be certified by the Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) Coordinator. Client files in this category will be maintained by the CCR&R Coordinator. In addition, all family files in this category will be audited by the Compliance Department immediately following eligibility determination/redetermination.
- K. Federal guidelines stipulate case confidentiality. Client Services staff will ensure that case confidentiality is maintained by speaking only to a household member with an established relationship to a child on matters relating to a School Readiness case. This policy includes face to face interview, contact by telephone, fax, mail, and email. Records of children in the School Readiness program will, in addition, be released to other entities in accordance with s.411.011 F.S.
- L. Client Services staff will enter a detailed case history into EFS for each School Readiness application and School Readiness file. Case history notes will be entered by the Client Services Counselor when determining eligibility or denying eligibility for School Readiness services. Case history will, in addition, be utilized to explain eligibility decisions not readily apparent from file review alone, to report case activity, to serve as a reminder of discussion at interview, and for any other purpose judged to be appropriate by the counselor or Client Services Manager.

3.6 Eligibility Process

- A. The Coalition shall provide School Readiness slots in accordance with the number of clients to be served as determined by the Coalition Board, subject to available funding. These slots can be shifted among types of School Readiness funding and School Readiness providers in order to meet the changing needs of the Coalition's clients.
- B. Application
 - 1. All sections on the ELCNC-216 Eligibility and Enrollment Form for School Readiness Services and the ELCNC-215 School Readiness Services Terms and Conditions shall be completed by the parent/guardian in accordance with instructions attached to the form and additional instructions as follows. If assistance completing the application is needed, the Coalition must assist the parent/guardian during the eligibility process. The parent/guardian must initial and date any changes or additions. The eligibility clerk must explain

in the case notes why assistance was needed. For at-risk children who receive expedited services, the child's case worker can complete the application on behalf of the parent/guardian. The parent/guardian must sign and submit the terms and conditions and supporting application documents within ten (10) days. If the parent/guardian does not submit the terms and conditions and supporting application documents the Coalition must request assistance from the child's case worker and document all attempts to complete the eligibility file in the case notes.

2. The application shall be signed and dated by the parent/guardian upon initial intake. A new application shall be completed and signed and dated, at a minimum of biannually, for subsequent re-determination unless the Executive Director authorizes a waiver of this requirement. The Coalition must provide notice of re-determination to the parent at least ten (10) days prior to the current authorization end date. The re-determination notice must include the name and address of the parent/guardian, end dates for current funding, instructions for setting an appointment and documentation/instructions for the Coalition's mail in redetermination process.
3. The SR-100 School Readiness Income Worksheet for Eligibility and Parent Copayments shall be completed by every financially assisted School Readiness services applicant in order to determine eligibility and to establish the applicable fee, based on the sliding fee scale.
4. The application process will include ELCNC-224 Early Learning Services Appeal regarding the rights of parents/guardians to appeal any decision and the process by which to appeal. A copy of the signed ELCNC-224 Early Learning Services Appeal shall be provided to the parent/guardian and a copy placed in the client file.
5. All applications and supporting documentation must be recertified every six months at a minimum. The Coalition has developed and implemented a recertification by mail process to minimize the need for parents/guardians to take time off from employment/mandatory activities in order to establish continued eligibility for School Readiness services.
6. If services are authorized by referral, the application will include ELCNC-282 Child Care Application and Authorization Form. The document must include, at a minimum, the name of the agency/caseworker who is making the referral, person being referred, parent(s)/guardian(s) with address (physical and mailing address, if applicable) and demographics for child(ren), date of birth for child(ren), Social Security Number, type of referral (in home, out of home, foster care), authorized referral period, and number of hours authorized. The purpose of care must be clearly specified. The referral must bear the signature of the authorizing caseworker or it is not a valid authorization. A new referral must be obtained if any dates or required information are missing. The Coalition will exercise "due diligence" in attempts to obtain a corrected referral; two (2) attempts represents due diligence. TCC referrals must clearly indicate the Transitional Child Care period authorized. The Coalition must attempt to contact the parent/guardian to complete the child care application. Attempts must be documented and, when necessary, must include telephone and mail attempts. If the parent does not respond, the Coalition must notify the referring agency and the Office of Early Learning.

Eligibility determination for services authorized by referral should be timely. Child Care Authorizations expire ten(10) calendar days from receipt by the Coalition.

7. Child Care Certificate: (The Child Care Certificate is an EFS-generated form or ELCNC-237). The Child Care Certificate must bear a RILYA WILSON ALERT stamp if the case is subject to Rilya Wilson reporting requirements. The Child Care Certificate is signed by the applicant and the Client Services Counselor at certification and indicates the last date the document can be returned to the Coalition office. A copy of the Child Care Certificate is maintained in the client's file. The original is forwarded by hand, fax, or mail to the provider. The provider then signs the Child Care Certificate and returns it to the Coalition, signifying their acceptance of the child, within the specified time. The Coalition must receive a fully signed Child Care Certificate in order to consider a claim for reimbursement based upon the content of the certificate. If a claim for reimbursement is received in the absence of a fully signed Child Care Certificate, payment for the services

will be denied. The provider may appeal the decision within sixty (60) days through the Coalition's Provider Adjustment and Dispute process.

8. During the application overview process, the parent will be required to sign ELCNC-300 School Readiness Payment – An Overview for Parents. The parent's signature on the form must be notarized. By signing, the parent acknowledges that they understand their responsibility to certify their child's attendance in a School Readiness program appropriately.
9. When household income for a family receiving School Readiness services is determined at 185% - 200% of the Federal Poverty Guideline (FPG), Client Services Counselors will issue ELCNC-245 Notice of 185% - 200% of Federal Poverty Level. The document informs the School Readiness parents that their gross household income is approaching the level at which they are ineligible for School Readiness services.

C. Application Supporting Documentation

1. Parents must supply the Coalition with the following applicable information, prior to eligibility determination. All applicable documents must be kept current and must be maintained in the parent/child eligibility file:
 - a. Proof of Family Status: The applicant must complete and sign ELCNC-217 Verification of Family Status indicating who they are claiming as part of their household and what relationship they have to any child for whom they are requesting funding. The applicant also verifies and attests to their marital status and the amount and type of unearned income received by any of the named household members when completing the form. The form must be notarized.
 - b. Proof of Identity for the parent/guardian arranging School Readiness services: The applicant must include one of the following documents:

Photo ID may include: Driver's license or government issued picture identification card including but not limited to state ID, military ID, passport, alien registration card, refugee card, employment ID, or student ID. These could include documents issued by other governmental agencies including foreign countries. Photo employment ID and student photo ID are also acceptable.

When photo ID is not available then two forms of identification showing the applicant's name should be obtained, such as a Social Security card, pay stubs, employment record, an insurance card, or other documentation secured as proof of residency or earned/unearned income.

If a parent cannot provide any of the documentation listed in this policy, then a third party attestation could be obtained utilizing ELCNC-304 Affidavit of Identity by Two Credible Witnesses (in English) or ELCNC-312 Affidavit de Intentionalidad por Dos Testigos de Confianza (in Spanish). This document contains a fraud disclaimer A third party describes the individual in question (height, weight, age, hair color, etc.) and the relationship to the child and provides a brief explanation as to how the third parties know the information. The two third parties sign as witnesses to the identity of the subject. EFS case history notes must explain why alternative sources were not available and what efforts were made to obtain such documents. This option must be used as a temporary measure only.

- c. Proof of Citizenship/Immigration Status for the child must include one of the documents listed below:
 - (A) Original or certified copy of a birth certificate issued by a state, county, municipal authority or outlying possession of the United States bearing an official seal
 - (B) Certification of birth abroad issued by the Department of State (Form FS-545 or Form DS-1350)
 - (C) Current U.S. Passport

- (D) Documentary Evidence of Status as a "Non-Citizen National" or "Qualified Alien" eligible for federal public benefits. If a qualified alien, the child must have been in the U.S. for at least 5 YEARS after designation as a qualified alien to be eligible for School Readiness services.
 - (E) A written declaration, made under penalty of perjury and possibly subject to later verification of status, by one or more third parties, indicating a reasonable basis for personal knowledge that the child is a U.S. citizen, non-citizen national, or qualified alien.
 - (F) The applicant's written declaration, made under penalty of perjury and possibly subject to later verification of status that the child is a U.S. citizen, non-citizen national, or qualified alien.
 - (G) Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA) program participant: If a child is eligible for School Readiness services because of a referral from the Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA) program, citizenship should already have been verified by the referring agency, and the referral may be accepted as proof.
- d. Proof of Child's Age: The Coalition shall keep a record of at least one (1) of the following supporting documents that shows the name and date of birth of the child applying for/receiving services:
- (A) An original or certified copy of the child's birth record filed according to law with the appropriate public officer
 - (B) An original or certified copy of the child's certificate of baptism or other religious record of the child's birth, accompanied by an affidavit stating that the certificate is true and correct, sworn to or affirmed by the child's parent
 - (C) An insurance policy on the child's life that has been in force for at least two(2) years
 - (D) A passport or certificate of arrival in the United States
 - (E) An immunization record indicating the child's name and date of birth, signed by a public health officer or by a licensed practicing physician
 - (F) A Florida SHOTS certificate
 - (G) A valid military dependent identification card

If a child's parent is unable to submit any of the supporting documentation listed above, the Coalition shall document the child's age based on an affidavit sworn to or affirmed by the child's parent. The affidavit must be accompanied by a certificate of age, signed by a public health officer or by a licensed practicing physician which states that the physician has examined the child and believes that the age shown on the affidavit is true and correct.

When the Coalition receives referrals from the Department of Children and Families or a referral from a Workforce Agency, additional procedures may be necessary to satisfy proof of age requirements. These may include:

- (A) Requesting a copy of the age verification document to be submitted with the referral; documentation must be one of the sources listed above.
 - (B) If the referring agency cannot provide one of the approved sources described above, then verification of age must be obtained directly from the client. In order that services are not delayed, protective services and foster care clients shall be given a period of ten (10) working days to provide the verification of age. Documentation of the attempts to obtain the appropriate verification must be kept in the file until at least one of the valid sources listed above is obtained. For example, a letter to the referring agency or applicant, requesting the documentation to be provided within ten (10) days or an application for obtaining a copy from the appropriate agency that maintains the birth record may be filed.
- e. Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ): An age-appropriate Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) must be completed approximately every six months for each child not yet kindergarten age. ASQs

will be provided to the parent at eligibility determination and/or redetermination, and/or by the Coalition's Education Department, as applicable. Forms must be completed in their entirety.

- f. Verification of Current Residence in the State of Florida and Residency Within the County Service Area: One of the following must be provided:
- (A) Utility bill in the parent/caregiver's name with residential address
 - (B) Employment pay stub in the parent/caregiver's name with residential address
 - (C) Government-issued document (e.g. Florida driver's license, Florida identification card, current property tax assessment showing a homestead exemption, property tax bill)
 - (D) Military order showing that the child's parent is a service member in the United States Armed Forces and is assigned to duty in Florida when the child attends School Readiness services
 - (E) An affidavit sworn to or affirmed by the child's parent accompanied by a letter from a landlord or property owner which confirms that the child resides at the address shown on the affidavit.
 - (F) Rent receipt or lease agreement
 - (G) Valid Child Care Authorization and Application (Referral). "Valid child care referral" is interpreted as a referral that is active; a referral may only be used as proof of status as a parent within the referral's child care authorized period. An expired or unused referral is not acceptable proof of residency.
 - (H) Documentation from a homeless shelter, domestic violence shelter, or authorized emergency management location

To be eligible for School Readiness services, a child must reside in Florida while attending the program. If the applicant is a participant in the "State of Florida Address Confidentiality Program", he/she is not required to disclose their physical address. The parent should provide official documentation of the fictitious address that was provided at the time they began participating in the program. This fictitious address received from the Attorney General's Office serves as proof of residential requirements for the School Readiness program.

- g. Proof of Status as a Parent (primary applicant only)

The definition of a parent includes a parent by blood, marriage, or adoption. In addition, it includes a person standing in loco parentis, e.g. acting in place of a parent, assuming care and custody of a child by a formal or informal agreement. The individual acting in loco parentis can be a relative or non-relative. One of the following must be collected:

- (A) A copy of the child's birth certificate, if their relationship to the parent applying for services is clearly defined in the document. If the mother's maiden name on the child's birth certificate is different than her name on the parent application, a marriage license or other legal documentation may be collected to provide a link.
- (B) A court order indicating legal custody of the child.
- (C) Other legal documentation that substantiates the adult's relationship to the child (e.g. adoption paperwork).
- (D) A valid child care referral. The term "valid child care referral" is interpreted as a referral that is active; a referral may only be used as proof of status as a parent within the referral's child care authorization period. An expired or unused referral is not acceptable proof of status as a parent. A current Letter of Eligibility for Relative Caregiver or Caretaker Relative payments is also acceptable in the absence of an open protective services case.
- (E) If none of the documents listed in this policy can be made available, a third party attestation can be used to establish parental relationship. This must be accompanied by an attestation from the applicant for School Readiness services, stating their relationship to the child.

- h. Proof of Marital Status: Proof of marital status will be collected if it is determined that documentation is necessary to establish household size and relationships for gross income calculation purposes. Evidence includes a copy of divorce papers or an attestation from the parent stating their marital status, under penalty of perjury, which is a first degree misdemeanor, punishable by a definite term of imprisonment, not exceeding one year and/or a fine not exceeding \$1,000 pursuant to ss.837.012 or ss.775.082, or ss.775.083 Florida Statutes.
- i. Documentation of guardian's employment: Eligibility for children at risk or abuse and/or neglect is not dependent on family income or work requirement. However, if the purpose of care is employment in an out of home At-Risk case, the Coalition will verify employment with one current paystub or employment verification documentation. If the appointed guardian is unable to provide income documentation, services are still to be provided.
- j. Documentation of Household Income: Proof of all family income as described below.

(A) Earned Income:

Six (6) weekly, three (3) biweekly, four (4) twice monthly, or two (2) monthly current and consecutive pay stubs or an ELCNC-225 Verification of Income/Employment Form. When paystubs are not available, when the employee has not been employed long enough to provide the required current and consecutive paystubs, or when the employee paystubs do not reflect current pay status of the employee then an ELCNC-255 Verification of Income/Employment should be given to the applicant to be completed by the employer. Hours Worked x Rate of Pay will be used to calculate future earnings in the absence of sufficient pay history. An employer may be contacted for verification of employment and hours worked at the discretion of the Client Services Counselor; case history notes will be maintained in the eligibility file and follow up documentation requested from the parent.

The applicant may provide a signed statement by the employer. This should be on company letterhead. The statement should be signed and dated and include the name and signature of the person writing the statement, their title, telephone number, and business address. It should also include the projected hours of employment, rate of pay, number of days per week, date the applicant started, and the first date of pay. The statement should also indicate if the employee is required to work Saturdays and/or Sundays or has a regularly scheduled day off.

The applicant may provide a signed contract for employment if it was recently issued, however, if the contract has been in effect for more than six (6) weeks prior to the application the Client Services Counselor should request proof of current income from employment as listed above.

If the applicant receives income from self-employment, the Client Services Counselor will refer to the Coalition's policy on calculation of self-employment income contained in the ELCNC Early Learning Eligibility Policy and Procedure Manual, as amended.

Bonuses: If bonus payments are noted in paystubs, the Client Services Counselor must determine the frequency of the bonus by contacting the employer. If it is determined that the bonus is received less frequently than monthly (e.g. every quarter, every two months, annually), the bonus should be deducted from the pay amount, the income annualized, and the bonus added back into the calculation based on the frequency received. If the bonus is received monthly or more frequently than monthly (e.g. every week, every two weeks, twice monthly) it should NOT be deducted from the pay amount but annualized as part of regular pay.

Overtime: If overtime amounts are identified in two-thirds or more of a household member's countable income from employment (e.g. two of three bi-weekly paystubs, four of six weekly

paystubs), the overtime contained in the proof of income will be included in the annual income projection. When overtime pay is received in less than two-thirds of the income received from employment, the overtime pay should be disregarded when projecting the annual income.

Tips: If the applicant receives tips as a part of their earnings that are not declared in the employee's paystubs, the Client Services Counselor will refer to the Coalition's policy on calculation of tip income contained in the ELCNC Early Learning Eligibility Policy and Procedure Manual, as amended.

Casual Labor: For individuals that are considered to be self-employed who may perform casual labor, such as lawn work or side jobs, the Client Services Counselor will refer to the Coalition's policy on calculation of casual labor/self-employment income contained in the ELCNC Early Learning Eligibility Policy and Procedure Manual, as amended.

(B) Unearned Income: All unearned income shall be current and verified. Evidence of (six (6) weekly, three (3) biweekly, or two (2) monthly) amounts, if applicable. Types of unearned income include:

- i. TANF: Cash Assistance:
 - a. Referral letter with income amount included by referring caseworker
 - b. Award letter
 - c. Access screen print initialed by the client (TANF recipients can obtain a benefits letter from ACCESS: <http://www.myflorida.com/accessflorida/>. This website along with the recipient's SSN will permit the recipient to review and access verification of TANF.
- ii. Child support payments:

Verification of current child support payments includes documentation obtained from child support enforcement or clerk of the court website showing gross amount paid to the household on behalf of the child and the period over which it is paid.

If child support enforcement information is not available an attestation from the absent parent indicating what the absent parent paid over the last six weeks including the dates the payments were made is acceptable. Copies of checks check stub, and/or canceled checks may accompany the written statements, or be submitted in lieu of the written statements.

A court order can be used to determine the child support payments if it was established within the past six (6) weeks and reflects current payments. All support must be verified (e.g. if a child lives with their grandparent support from each parent must be verified).

If for any reason other source alternatives are not available, an attestation from the parent stating the child support received or not received under the penalty of perjury, which is a first degree misdemeanor, punishable by a definite term of imprisonment, not exceeding one year and/or a fine not exceeding \$1,000 pursuant to ss.837.012, or 775.082, or 775.083 Florida Statutes is acceptable. The case narration must contain narration explaining why the first two alternatives were not available. The date, phone number, and description of what occurred when an attempt to contact an absent parent who is paying court-ordered or non-court-ordered child support must be entered in the case narrative. The Client Services Counselor should discuss with the custodial parent what recordkeeping should be set up and used to establish child support payments in the future. For example, the absent mother sends a check two to three times per month. Copies of two months of checks should be requested. If the absent parent is paying in cash, then a calendar should be maintained by the custodial parent showing dates and

amounts of payments, preferably with the absent parent's initials next to the payment amount.

When support payment amounts are inconsistent, sporadic, or ordered child support is unpaid, the Client Services Counselor will refer to the Coalition's suggested methodology for calculation of irregular child support, contained in the ELCNC Early Learning Policy and Procedure Manual.

If an event is reported by the parent/caregiver applying for or receiving School Readiness services indicating that child support will not continue or not be received in the foreseeable future, child support will be removed from the household income projection effective from the appropriate date. Examples of events include but are not limited to the death of the absent parent or incarceration of the absent parent. Documentary evidence must be provided for the family file. If the event is temporary in nature, the parent must be reminded of their responsibility to report changes in their income within ten (10) days of the change.

- iii. Alimony: Court order showing amount ordered and an attestation from the payee that the ordered amount is being received. Copies of payments for the previous six (6) weeks must be provided, if the court order is more than six (6) weeks old.

When the recipient indicates alimony is not being received as ordered, then proof of the last six weeks of payment (two months if paid monthly) must be obtained from the source. This can include copies of pay stubs or payment receipts for the last six weeks. If not paid weekly, then former spouse/partner will submit a written, signed, dated statement explaining what payments were made and when. The statement should include the address and phone number of this person in case there are additional questions. The statement must be signed by the former spouse. When alimony payments are inconsistent, sporadic, or unpaid, the Client Services Counselor will refer to the Coalition's suggested methodology for calculation of irregular alimony payments, contained in the ELCNC Early Learning Policy and Procedure Manual.

- iv. SSA Payments (formerly OASDI – Old Age Survivors Disability Insurance: Verification of social security income must include a current award letter from the Social Security Administration. (Award letters are updated each year in December; therefore if eligibility is approved, the approval must authorize services for a maximum of six months or until the following December, whichever is less). The gross benefit amount must be clearly indicated on the documentation for income calculation purposes.

Written letter from the Social Security Administration showing current year of monthly gross benefits before deductions, if any.

- v. SSI Payments - Supplemental Security Income:

Copy of the award letter from Social Security Administration. (Award letters are updated each year in December; therefore if eligibility is approved, the approval must authorize services for a maximum of six (6) months or until the following December, whichever is less.) This must be accompanied by a physician's Verification of Disability if disability is the individual's purpose for care.

Notification from the Social Security Administration showing current year of monthly gross benefits before deductions, if any. Proof of SSI payment must be accompanied by a physician's Verification of Disability if disability is the individual's purpose for care and a note from a physician confirming disability and the need for child care assistance.

- vi. Unemployment/Worker's compensation: Recent award letter showing gross amount of benefits received.

A written statement from the employer paying the Worker's Compensation signed by authorized personnel including the gross amount of benefits being received and the start date of the benefit. The applicant is eligible for School Readiness services for a 30 day period from the start date of the benefit.

- vii. Veteran's benefits: Most recent award letter or most recent six (6) weeks of statements, showing the gross amount and frequency of the payments.
- viii. Retirement benefits: Most recent award letter or most recent six (6) weeks of statements, showing the gross amount and frequency of payments.
- ix. Other income: Other income earned or unearned that is received on a regular basis must be verified through documents that include the gross amount of income and the frequency of the income.

Documentation shall be obtained from the source such as award letters, written statements from the absent parent or household member. If the amount varies, then a minimum of six weekly, three biweekly or two monthly income amounts shall be verified. The documents used for verification shall be current and consecutive.

- k. Documentation that may be required to verify the purpose of care:

- (A) Proof of Incapacitation: For the purpose of establishing disability, the ELCNC-218 Verification of Disability may be ~~is~~ used as it meets all required criteria. Verification of disability, if temporary, must be submitted in accordance with scheduled doctor visits or before sixty (60) days have elapsed, whichever is sooner. Alternatively, a letter from the physician containing all elements contained in the ELCNC-218 Verification of Disability is acceptable.

- (B) Proof of Disability Due to Age: Proof of age must be documented with government-issued document, such as a birth certificate or driver's license. Proof of inability to work due to age may be documented on the ELCNC-218 Verification of Disability. Alternatively, a letter from the physician containing all elements contained in the ELCNC-218 Verification of Disability is acceptable.

- (C) Proof of Educational Activities: For the purpose of establishing educational activity, the ELCNC-267 Verification of Education is used as it meets all required criteria. The document must be completed by an official of the school or institution showing the number of classroom hours and any lab hours, the date the semester/training period starts, and the date it ends. This should bear the school stamp or contain an official seal. On-line courses are an allowable form of education or training as long as appropriate documentation has been submitted. Alternatively, a letter from the educational institution containing all elements contained in the ELDNC-267 Verification of Education is acceptable.

- (D) Proof of Therapeutic Plan (At-Risk Protective Service categories only): Letter from psychiatrist, psychologist, or medical professional indicating that the child should be in care for developmental reasons (e.g. socialization, etc.).

- (E) Proof of Emancipated Teen: In the event a teen applies for School Readiness services for their child, they are not in secondary education, and they identify themselves as head of household on their household statement, their status as head of household must be established. A

certified copy of the court order declaring the teen to be emancipated must be submitted. (An emancipated teen is determined by the courts in accordance with section 743.015 Florida Statutes. There is no definition of "emancipated" in OEL Rule. A certified copy of the court order is proof of the court's decision for all matters in all courts.)

- (F) Proof of Federally Recognized Indian Tribal Membership: Membership card issued by a federally recognized Indian tribe or other official documentation of the child's membership in a federally recognized Indian tribe.
- I. Proof of At-Risk of Future School Failure: This category of care is applicable for TWO PARENT FAMILIES. One parent must be in employment and/or training and/or education and the family meet one or more "At Risk" criteria. "At Risk" is defined as "At Risk of Future School Failure". The parent who satisfies the "At Risk" criteria may also be the parent who meets the employment and/or training and/or education requirement.

Documentary evidence of one or more of the following "At Risk" factors must be obtained:

- (A) Inadequate home environment as documented on the revised HOME instrument
- (B) Age of parent at child's birth (18 years or younger)
- (C) Parent has an educational history of participating in Special Education
- (D) Educational level (highest grade completed) of either parent is low (less than high school)/ low literacy level
- (E) Three (3) children under 5 years old in the family
- (F) Child/sibling or parent has been in foster care
- (G) Children are multiples
- (H) Suspect developmental delay in any area
- (I) Child lives with grandparent or has lived with multiple caregivers
- (J) Child was born prematurely or was in a Neonatal Intensive Care Unit
- (K) Child has a documented developmental delay or handicapping condition
- (L) A sibling has a handicap or delay, is in special education or has behavioral concerns
- (M) A parent or caregiver has handicap or developmental delay
- (N) There is a history of emotional /physical/sexual abuse of a child, sibling, or parent
- (O) One parent has been or is currently incarcerated
- (P) Child was/is a drug exposed newborn
- (Q) Parent minimally meeting child's basic needs
- (R) Family is currently or previously homeless

(S) Mental health illness within family

(T) Child, parent, or sibling has chronic medical problem or condition

(U) Child or sibling was diagnosed as failure to thrive

2. If the application is submitted and is incomplete the Coalition shall submit to the parent an ELCNC-223 Notice of Required Documents. If documentation is not submitted by the due date entered on the ELCNC-223 Notice of Required Documents, School Readiness services will be terminated. Termination does not apply to At-Risk cases. This policy does not apply in cases of At Risk of Abuse, Neglect, Abandonment, or Exploitation. For this category, services will not be discontinued due to lack of documentation.

C. Determining Eligibility

1. Priorities and Determining Purpose of School Readiness Services:

- A. Eligibility categories are divided into levels of priority. The following sections divide the eligibility categories by priority beginning with priorities one and two (mandated placements).
- B. For mandated placements, families are not required to be placed on the waitlist. Applicants for School Readiness services for whom care is based on a Child Care Authorization and Application (referral) will not be placed on a waitlist, subject to available funding.
- C. In addition to meeting categorical eligibility criteria, there shall be an authorized need or purpose for School Readiness services. Purposes for School Readiness services include protection of the child, employment of the parent or other authorized caretaker, participation in approved education activities, crisis intervention, therapeutic plan for the child, Welfare Transition participation or work activities, seeking employment, and other at-risk factors as described in the Enrollment and Eligibility section of this policy.
- D. In the case of families in receipt of temporary cash assistance (TCA), families participating in the Welfare Transition program (TCC) or with children at risk of abuse, neglect, or abandonment, initial contact attempts with parents will be made within three (3) calendar days of receipt of the referral by Coalition staff. Families must be offered services within ten (10) calendar days of receipt of the referral for TCA and At-Risk. If services cannot be provided for these categories within ten (10) calendar days from receipt of the referral by the Coalition, written notification shall be submitted to the referring caseworker and to the Office of Early Learning.
- E. Federal or state law changes to eligibility prioritization will automatically supersede those identified in this policy.
- F. Coalition prioritization is in accordance with Chapter 411 F.S.

2. Priority One

- A. Families in which there is an adult receiving temporary cash assistance (TCA) who is subject to federal work requirements.
- B. The purpose of School Readiness services shall be to allow the parent work registration, job search, job preparation, employment, or approved education activities that lead to employment and any other work activity authorized by the Department of Children and Families or contracted provider.

- C. The child shall be eligible for full or part time School Readiness services in accordance with the purpose for care as long as authorization for School Readiness services is received by the Coalition from staff authorized to execute a School Readiness authorization.
- D. Fees shall be assessed against the family's income for this category. Household income may not exceed 185% of the federal poverty guideline (FPG) to enter the program.
- E. Under special circumstances described in this policy, the assessed parent fee may be temporarily waived for households with income at or below 100% of the federal poverty guideline (FPG) with written approval from the Executive Director.
- F. In two parent families, both parents must meet the participation criteria. Participants include:
 - (A) Temporary Cash Assistance Recipients
 - A. Services provided to a TANF recipient who receives temporary cash assistance (TCA), is not working, and is involved in job preparation activities. A referral authorizes child care for periods of job search, education, and training plus reasonable travel time.
 - b. TCA Recipient – Working
 - (A) Services provided to a temporary cash assistance (TCA) recipient, based on a documented referral, who is employed and/or engaged in job preparation duties.
 - c. Refugee – Not Working
 - (A) Non-working eligible refugee, asylee, Cuban/Haitian entrant and parolee, Amerasian, Iraqi and Afghan special immigrant, USDHHS-certified victim of a severe form of human trafficking, or a resident alien who was admitted to the U.S. under one of the above categories, who is a TANF recipient receiving TCA, with a documented referral for child care by a refugee program-funded employment services (education and training) provider.
 - d. Refugee – Working
 - (A) Eligible refugee, asylee, Cuban/Haitian entrant and parolee, Amerasian, Iraqi and Afghan special immigrant, USDHHS-certified victim of a severe form of human trafficking, or a resident alien who was admitted to the U.S. under one of the above categories, who is a working TANF recipient receiving TCA, with a documented referral for child care by a refugee program-funded employment services (education and training) provider.

3. Priority Two

- a. Children At-Risk of Abuse and/or Neglect: Protective Service children who have not yet entered school, are determined to be at risk of abuse, neglect, or abandonment, and who are clients of the Department of Children and Families or its contracted providers.
- b. After priority is given to children in this group who have not yet entered school, subsequent priority will be given to children of school age, and children aged thirteen (13) to less than nineteen (19) years of age with special needs as defined in this policy, or under court supervision and which in addition meet these criteria.
- c. A documented referral must be provided by DCF or its contracted provider.
- d. The child is eligible for School Readiness services as long as an authorization form or reauthorization form is received by the Coalition at least every six (6) months. in the case of

Protective Investigation and At-Risk Diversion, child care will not be authorized in excess of sixty (60) days. A PI or At-Risk Diversion referral may be renewed/validated in sixty (60) day increments on a case by case basis, not to exceed six (6) months. For At-Risk Diversion, there will not be an open Protective Services case. The submitted referral form should indicate the primary purpose for care is protection. Secondary purpose of care may include emergency, employment, training, therapeutic plan, or TANF At-Risk. Income may not exceed 200% of the federal poverty guideline (FPG). School Readiness services are provided in accordance with the hours authorized on the referral.

e. Prior to dis-enrolling any child under protective services, the Coalition shall contact the referring agency to verify continued eligibility. In addition, the Coalition will report changes in child care status to the referring agency to include child placement, provider transfer, and non-payment of parent fees.

f. Participants include:

(A) In Home

- A. Services provided to a child of a family under investigation or under supervision because of an allegation of abuse, neglect, or exploitation.
- B. Families served under the At-Risk Diversion program may be referred under this category by authorized agencies in the absence of an open Protective Services case.
- C. Fees shall be assessed against the parent's income. If the parent cannot provide income documentation, services are still to be provided. Reasonable efforts shall be made and documented to collect the applicable parent fee from the parent. the parent fee may be temporarily reduced or waived with written approval from the Executive Director. When reasonable efforts to collect from the parent fail, the School Readiness provider shall receive 100% of the negotiated rate, with written approval from the Executive Director.
- D. In the event a referral is received by the Coalition and the parent's income exceeds 200% of the federal poverty guideline (FPG), the Coalition must enroll the child in the School Readiness program and assess the provider's maximum rate to the parent. the purpose of enrollment is to track attendance of the at-risk child.
- E. An exemption to participating in the licensed early education program five (5) days per week may be granted by the court.
- F. If the child is dually eligible in protective services/foster care and other eligibility categories, they may be served in the category where funds are available, however, provisions stated above remain with the child. If funds become unavailable in such other categories, the child shall be moved back to protective services/foster care funding.
- G. In no case shall the child be terminated from School Readiness services, as long as they remain protective services in home/out of home/foster care eligible, subject to available funding.

(B) Out of Home Placements/Substitute Care and Foster Care

- A. Services provided to a child who is in court-ordered relative/non-relative/foster care.
- B. Eligibility is not dependent on family income or work requirements.

- C. Fees shall be assessed against the child's income. Under special circumstances described in this policy, the fee may be reduced or waived.
- D. If the referral indicates the purpose of care is employment, the Coalition must verify employment with one (1) current pay stub or employment verification documentation. In the event the appointed guardian cannot provide income documentation, services are still to be provided.

(C) School Readiness At-Risk Diversion Protective Services

- A. Diversion services provided to children needing access to child care who are currently being served by the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and its contracted Community Based Care (CBC) programs within the Family Safety Program office.
- B. Eligibility is not dependent on family income or work requirements.
- C. A documented referral must be provided by DCF or its contractor. The submitted referral form should indicate that the primary purpose of care is protection and status as diversion.
- D. Request for child care is in sixty (60) day increments but may not exceed six (6) months.
- E. The Coalition may temporarily reduce or waive parent fees on a case by case basis with written approval from the Executive Director.

(D) School Readiness Respite Care – Protective Services

- A. Services provided to alleviate a qualifying family crisis to avoid out of home placement, while assuring the safety of the child is maintained.
- B. The family must be in an open protective services case to receive respite services. Eligibility shall be determined by the Department of Children and Families or contracted provider.
- C. Respite care is limited to no more than thirty (30) days per child in any fiscal year and may be provided for up to twenty-four (24) hours per day.
- D. Fees shall be assessed against the family's income. Under special circumstances described in this policy, the fee may be reduced or waived with written approval from the Executive Director.
- E. On a case by case basis, this category may also include services provided to a family affected by a natural disaster to ensure a child's safety and protection.

(E) Children in the Relative Caregiver Program

- A. This includes child care for a child who has been adjudicated dependent, has had an approved home study, and has been either placed by the court with the relative under protective supervision or the court has given the relative temporary custody.
- B. The child must be a recipient of the Relative Caregiver Program payment.
- C. Written documentation from DCF or its contracted agency is acceptable to establish and continue eligibility in lieu of the standard referral if there is not an open protective case. The letter shall be dated, list the caregiver's status as a recipient of the Relative Caregiver

payment, indicate the amount of the benefit payment, and bear the signature of the caseworker providing the document.

- D. If there is an open At-Risk case, a Child Care Application and Authorization (referral) is required. Rilya Wilson reporting responsibilities apply.
- E. Fees shall be assessed against the child's income only.
- F. Under special circumstances described in this policy, the fee may be reduced with written approval from the Executive Director.
- G. If the referral indicates that the purpose for care is employment of the relative caregiver, the Coalition must verify employment with one (1) current pay stub or employment verification documentation.
- H. Prior to dis-enrolling any child in this category under protective investigation or supervision, the Coalition shall contact the referring agency to verify termination.

4. Priority Three

- a. Subsequent priority will be given to children who have not yet entered school who meet one or more of the following criteria.
- b. After priority is given to children in this group who have not yet entered school, subsequent priority will be given to children of school age, and children thirteen (13) to less than nineteen (19) years of age with special needs as defined in this policy or under court supervision, and which in addition meet these criteria.
- c. Under special circumstances described in this policy, the assessed parent fee may be temporarily waived for households with income at or below 100% of the federal poverty guideline (FPG) with written approval of the Executive Director.

d. Participants include:

(A) TANF "Child Only" Program

- i. Services provided to a child placed with a relative permanently or on a short-term basis, who is receiving temporary cash assistance (TCA) as a TANF "child only" case.
- ii. Proof of eligibility shall be a Letter of Eligibility, provided by the Department of Children and Families or contracted provider. The Letter of Eligibility shall be dated, list the caregiver's status as a Caretaker Relative, indicate the benefit amount, and bear the signature of the caseworker providing the document.
- iii. Child care services are provided for placements meeting the definition of a working family. Eligibility is not dependent on family income. If employed, the Coalition must verify the employment with employment verification documentation.
- iv. Fees shall be assessed against the child's income only. Under special circumstances described in this policy the fee may be reduced with written approval from the Executive Director.

(B) School Readiness TANF Respite Child Care Program

- i. Care provided to alleviate a crisis (acute situation which places children at risk due to parental emergency need for respite, lack of resources, special needs of the child, or extenuating circumstances beyond the family's control that require short term assistance to increase family stability and decrease risk potential) or to provide child care services in a hospital-based mildly ill child care program.
- ii. The family must be a TANF recipient to receive the respite services under this category. Respite child care is allowed to alleviate a crisis in the family and avoid out of home placement, while assuring the safety of the child is maintained.
- iii. Respite child care shall not be provided for more than thirty (30) days per child in any fiscal year.
- iv. Each child shall be eligible to receive up to twenty-four (24) hours of services per day.

(C) TANF Applicants

- i. Referrals from the local workforce boards for temporary child care services to seek employment.
- ii. Child care should be provided for thirty (30) days from the date the referral is authorized. Care should not extend beyond the authorized period provided on the referral.

(D) Workforce Diversion Program

- i. Referrals from the local Workforce boards for temporary child care for a parent who has applied for cash assistance and temporary child care services to seek employment and has opted to receive diversion payment in lieu of on-going cash assistance.
- ii. Child care for the up-front diversion may be provided for up to thirty (30) days from the date the up-front diversion process officially started, with the appropriate authorization.

(E) Welfare Transition Program

- i. Services provided to a family with earned income who has lost their eligibility for temporary cash assistance (TCA) because of excess earned income, new or increased child support, loss of time limits (with earned income), or who "opts not to receive" temporary cash assistance (TCA).
- ii. Continued eligibility is for up to a total of twenty-four (24) consecutive months from the first month of transitional child care (TCC) eligibility as determined by Workforce Development, regardless of when temporary cash assistance (TCA) is cancelled.
- iii. A documented referral establishes the time frames for authorized child care.
- iv. The child shall be eligible for full or part time School Readiness services in accordance with the purpose for care as long as authorization for School Readiness services is received from the referring agency.
- v. The purpose of School Readiness services shall be employment, approved education activities that lead to employment, or a combination of these.
- vi. Income may not exceed 200% of the federal poverty guideline (FPG).

5. Priority Four

- a. Subsequent priority will be given to children who have not yet entered school who meet one or more of the following criteria.
- b. After priority is given to children in this group who have not yet entered school, subsequent priority will be given to children of school age, and children thirteen (13) to less than nineteen (19) years of age with special needs as defined in this policy or under court supervision, and which in addition meet these criteria.
- c. Under special circumstances described in this policy the assessed parent fee may be temporarily waived for households with income at or below 100% of the federal poverty guideline (FPG) with written approval from the Executive Director.
- d. Eligibility shall be determined by the Coalition.
- e. The family income shall not exceed 150% of the federal poverty guideline (FPG) to enter the program and shall not exceed 200% to continue to receive financial assistance.
- f. In two-parent families, each parent must individually meet the employment/eligible education activity criteria (unless exempt from work requirements due to age or disability as documented by a licensed physician). The exception to this rule is two (2) parent families with child(ren) determined to be at risk of future school failure. For families meeting this definition, one parent in the household may be working.
- g. The child shall be eligible for full or part time School Readiness services in accordance with the purpose of care.
- h. Eligibility shall continue as long as the client meets eligibility criteria as determined and re-determined by the Coalition at least every six (6) months.

(A) Low Income – Income Eligible

- i. Services provided to a family in which the parents with whom the child resides are each employed or engaged in eligible education activities a minimum of twenty (20) hours per week, unless exempt from work requirements due to age or disability as documented by a licensed physician.
- ii. This category includes cases in which the child has been placed with relatives by the parent(s) or legal guardian permanently or on a short-term basis, and is not receiving temporary cash assistance (TCA). Income eligibility will be based on the child's income and the guardian's income.

(B) Low Income – SSI, SSA, VA 100% Disability

- i. Services may be provided to a family in which parent(s)/guardian(s) receives SSI, SSA disability benefits (not survivor benefits), or 100% VA disability (not partial disability), the family is income eligible, and the parent(s)/guardian(s) in the home has/have established purpose(s) for care.
- ii. Alternatively, services may be provided to a family in which a child is in receipt of SSI, the family is income eligible and the parent(s)/guardian(s) in the home has/have established purpose(s) for care.
- iii. The child may be considered a head of household of one. If this creates an adverse impact on other children in the household, the child can remain as part of the full household under an applicable billing group.

- iv. If both parents are in the home, only one shall be required to be an SSI/SSA disability benefits/100% VA disability recipient; however, both parents must meet the purpose for care requirement. The purpose of the child care shall be to enable employment of the parent/relative, and/or to assist the parent in caring for the child because of the parent(s)/relative(s) disability as documented by a physician's statement.
- v. Although the child may be head of household, the parent/guardian with whom the child resides must be employed or engaged in eligible education activities a minimum of twenty (20) hours per week (unless exempt from work requirements due to age or disability as documented by a licensed physician).

(C) Low Income – School Readiness Adoption Subsidy

- i. Services provided to a child receiving adoption subsidy payments from the Federal Title IV_E program under the Social Security Act or a state program.
- ii. The child may be considered a head of household of one. If this creates an adverse impact on other children in the household, the child can remain as part of the full household under an applicable billing group.
- iii. If more than one child in the household receives the adoption subsidy, the household size is determined by the number of children in the household receiving the subsidy.
- iv. Although the child may be head of household, the parent/guardian with whom the child resides must be employed or engaged in eligible education activities a minimum of twenty (20) hours per week (unless exempt from work requirements due to age or disability as documented by a licensed physician).

(D) Low Income – Native American Families

- i. Services provided to a child whose parents are members of federally recognized Native American tribes and who need child care in order to obtain or maintain employment and/or eligible education activities a minimum of twenty (20) hours per week.

(E) Low Income – Families with Children At-Risk of Future School Failure

- i. Services provided to a two-parent/guardian family with who the child resides where only one parent is employed or engaged in eligible education activities a minimum of twenty (20) hours per week.
- ii. The child is determined to be at risk of future school failure in accordance with at-risk factors as referenced in this policy.

(F) Special Needs Teen

- i. Services provided to children thirteen (13) to less than nineteen (19) years of age who are physically or mentally incapable of self-care or under court supervision.
- ii. Family income may not exceed 200% of the federal poverty guideline (FPG).
- iii. Services are provided to a family in which the parents with whom the child resides are each employed or engaged in eligible education activities a minimum of twenty (20) hours per week.

- iv. Parents of children physically or mentally incapable of self-care must submit an Individual Education Plan (IEP) from the school system, DOE Matrix, or note from a physician.
- v. Eligibility shall continue as long as the child meets eligibility criteria as determined and re-determined by the Coalition at least every six (6) months.

(G) Teenage Parents

- i. Services provided to a child of a teenage (under eighteen (18) years of age) parent who is enrolled in school in grade twelve (12) or below.
- ii. Eligibility shall be determined by the Coalition.
- iii. Participants must be employed a minimum of twenty (20) hours per week or enrolled in a high school diploma or GED program and not involved in a Department of Education Drop Out Prevention program or a Workforce Development teen parent program. The teen parent may also be attending other job training.
- iv. A teenage parent is defined as a person who is pregnant, who is the legal or alleged father of an unborn child, or who is the parent of the child.
- v. Eligibility shall continue as long as the client meets eligibility criteria as determined and re-determined by the Coalition at least every six (6) months.
- vi. The child shall be eligible for full or part time School Readiness services in accordance with the purpose for care.
- vii. Income of the teenage parent may not exceed 200% of the federal poverty guideline (FPG).

(H) Migrant Farm Workers

- i. Services provided to a family in which the parents with whom the child resides are migrant farm workers.
- ii. A migrant farm worker is defined as a migratory agricultural worker or migratory fisher or an agricultural worker who is employed by more than one agricultural employer during the course of the year and whose income varies according to weather conditions and market stability.
- iii. Eligibility shall be determined by the Coalition.
- iv. The purpose of School Readiness services shall be employment.
- v. Participants must be employed a minimum of twenty (20) hours per week. The child shall be eligible for full or part time School Readiness services in accordance with the purpose for care.
- vi. The family income shall not exceed 150% of the federal poverty guideline (FPG) to enter the program and shall not exceed 200% to continue to receive financial assistance.
- vii. Eligibility shall continue as long as the client meets eligibility criteria as determined and re-determined by the Coalition at least every six (6) months.

6. Priority Five

- a. Subsequent priority will be given to children who have not yet entered school who meet one or more of the following criteria.
- b. Under special circumstances described in this policy, the assessed parent fee may be temporarily waived for households with income at or below 100% of the federal poverty guideline (FPG) with written approval from the Executive Director.
- c. Participants include:
 - (A) Three (3) or Four (4) Year Old Child with a Disability (not economically disadvantaged)
 - i. Services provided to a three (3) or four (4) year old child who may not be economically disadvantaged but has been served in a specific part time or combination of part time exceptional student education programs.
 - ii. This category requires a documented referral from the school district.
 - iii. The purpose of School Readiness services is at risk of future school failure.
 - iv. Eligibility shall continue as long as the child meets eligibility criteria as determined and re-determined by the Coalition at least every six (6) months.
 - v. All clients shall pay a parent fee based on family size and income.
 - (B) Children Birth – Four (4) Served Through a Home Visitor Program (economically disadvantaged)
 - i. Economically disadvantaged children, a child with a disability, or a child at risk of future school failure, from birth through four (4) years of age served at home through a home visitor program and an intensive parent education program.
 - ii. Eligibility shall be determined and documented by referral from the Local Education Agency.
 - iii. The purpose of School Readiness services is at risk of future school failure.
 - iv. Eligibility shall continue as long as the child meets eligibility criteria as determined and re-determined by the Coalition at least every six (6) months.
 - v. All clients shall pay a parent fee based on family size and income.
 - (C) Migrant Preschool Program Participants
 - i. Children who meet federal and state eligibility requirements for the migrant preschool program but are not economically disadvantaged.
 - ii. Eligibility shall be determined and documented by referral from the Local Education Agency, certifying that the parent(s) meet the federal definition of a migrant agricultural worker or migrant fisher.
 - iii. Eligibility is not dependant on family income or work requirements.
 - iv. The purpose of School Readiness services is at risk of future school failure.

- v. Eligibility shall continue to be determined and re-determined by the Coalition at least every six (6) months, as long as the child meets eligibility criteria and until the child reaches kindergarten age.

7. Additional Eligibility Criteria

- a. The following categories are contained in the Coalition's Early Learning Plan, are reflected in Chapter 411 F.S., or are required categories with unspecified priority in Florida Statute.
- b. Under special circumstances described in this policy, the assessed parent fee may be temporarily waived for households with income at or below 100% of the federal poverty guideline (FPG) with written approval from the Executive Director.

(A) Eligibility for Families Affected by a Natural Disaster

- a. During a natural disaster, the Coalition may waive eligibility, work requirements, and reduce parent fees for families on a documented case-by-case basis who need services to ensure a child's safety and protection. For example, a child who is deemed homeless would need shelter and supervision during the day to ensure protection of the child.
- b. When evacuees from other areas (including other states) that have been declared a natural disaster area seek refuge in the Nature Coast service area, the Coalition may serve those children (pending available funds) and waive income eligibility and work requirements for those families on a case-by-case basis not to exceed six (6) months.

(B) Non-Prioritized Child Care Purchasing Pool

- a. The Coalition may provide a funding pool that consists of public and private funding to promote and improve access to quality School Readiness services for children birth through twelve (12) years of age of working families who need School Readiness services. The population in this category shall include working families whose income is up to 200% of the federal poverty guideline (FPG). Families in this category are not required to be placed on the waitlist. Eligibility shall be determined by the Coalition at minimum every six (6) months. If both parents are in the home, each parent must individually meet the eligibility requirements. The client shall be required to provide adequate documentation of employment and income. All clients shall pay a parent fee based on family size and income.

8. Defining Special Needs

- a. Funds for Special Needs/Handicapped services for children should be available from the Department of Education's Handicapped Preschool Program and Exceptional Student Education Program. School Readiness funds may be used to supplement but not supplant services provided by DOE.
- b. Special Needs is defined as children or teens with a physical, mental, or health care condition that affects or prevents the child's ability to develop, achieve, and/or function in an early learning setting at a typical rate. Eligibility is based on one or more of the following factors.
 - i. Children birth to less than thirteen (13) years of age: Children with an Individual Education Plan (IEP), children in Exceptional Student Education (ESE), a child with a physical disability documented on a doctor's statement of disability noting that he/she needs assistance to perform developmentally appropriate tasks, any child receiving SSI benefits, or determined by a physician to be disabled.

- ii. This category also includes children with special needs enrolled in Protective Services who have been identified as having mild to moderate emotional problems as certified by a licensed psychiatrist, licensed psychologist, or licensed mental health professional and for whom child care is part of an overall treatment program.
 - iii. Children age thirteen (13) to less than nineteen (19) years of age: Eligibility ends once a child reaches the age of thirteen (13) unless he/she has a documented physical or mental disability making him/her incapable of self-care, or are under court supervision for protection purposes. If the child has been receiving child care services for protection since prior to 2005 then there must be a court order or DOE matrix with a score of 254 – 255 or a medical statement indicating an Individual Education Plan (IEP) or Family Service Plan (FSP), or a doctor's note indicating he/she is incapable of self-care is required, disability due to a developmental delay or established medical condition, mild or moderate emotional problems as certified by a licensed psychiatrist, licensed psychologist, or licensed mental health professional meets the criteria/definition of child for this category.
- c. Eligibility for Special Needs funding is dependent upon the submission of documentation specific to the criteria outlined in this section. Special Needs documentation will be reviewed at a minimum of twice per year to determine the need for additional/updated reporting. Funding for this category of care is contingent upon the provider adapting their curriculum and/or classroom structure to accommodate the child's disabilities.
 - d. Enrollment in and payment for child care/dependent School Readiness services for a child meeting identified special needs criteria is contingent upon availability of funding and in accordance with the Eligibility and Enrollment section of this policy. If funding is not available at the time of eligibility determination, the child should be placed on the waitlist based on the eligibility category and date of application.
 - e. Application for children meeting the Special Needs category shall be made by the parent/guardian. If the parent/guardian has received a School Readiness authorization from the Welfare Transition Program staff, Economic Self-Sufficiency staff, Protective Services staff, or contracted provider, the Coalition shall obtain documentation from the parent for the Special Needs eligibility.

1. Assessing Parent Fees

- a. The Coalition Board is responsible for adopting a parent fee schedule (School Readiness Program Parent Fee Schedule) to determine parent fees for each family that receives School Readiness services based on the family size and family's income.
- b. In determining fees, calculate the annualized countable gross earned and unearned income of all family unit (see definition) members not excluded by rule in accordance with the following:
 - (A) If a parent/guardian's employer has completed an employment verification form multiply the number of hours worked per week by the hourly wage received to determine the weekly gross income. Multiply the weekly gross income by 52 to determine the annual income.
 - (B) If the parent/guardian submitted pay stubs determine the frequency of pay.
 - i. WEEKLY (receives pay every week): Add all six (6) current and consecutive stubs (gross amounts) then divide the total amount by the number of stubs. Multiply by the number of weeks in a year (52) to obtain the annual income. FORMULA: $A+B+C+D+E+F=G/6 \times 52$ = Annual Income

- ii. BI-WEEKLY (receives pay every other week): Add all three (3) current and consecutive stubs (gross amounts) then divide by the number of stubs. Multiply by the number of pay periods in a year (26) to obtain the annual income. FORMULA: $A+B+C=D/3 \times 26 = \text{Annual Income}$
 - iii. SEMI-MONTHLY (receives pay two (2) times per month): Add all four (4) current and consecutive stubs (gross amounts) then divide by the number of stubs. Multiply by the number of pay periods in a year (24) to obtain the annual income. FORMULA: $A+B+C+D=E/4 \times 24 = \text{Annual Income}$
 - iv. MONTHLY (receives pay on a monthly basis): Add two (2) current and consecutive stubs (gross amounts) then divide by the number of stubs. Multiply by the number of pay periods in a year (12) to obtain the annual income. FORMULA: $A+B=C/2 \times 12 = \text{Annual Income}$
- (C) If parent/guardian is not employed for a twelve (12) month period the Client Services Counselor must annualize the income by determining the daily income and multiply it by the number of days anticipated to be worked in the year. The parent/guardian must provide documentation from their employer on the number of days worked annually.
- (D) If the applicant receives income from casual labor/self-employment, the Client Services Counselor will refer to the Coalition's policy on calculation of self-employment income contained in the ELCNC Early Learning Eligibility Policy and Procedure manual, as amended.
- (E) The Client Services Counselor must determine if there are any other types of income (unearned income) received. The Client Services Counselor must determine the annual unearned income amount utilizing the calculations listed above. The unearned income must be added to the earned income to determine the total annual household income, if the income is not excluded from the household income calculation by Rule.
- c. The following are excluded when determining countable income for fee assessment:
- (A) SSI payments received by the child(ren)
 - (B) Adoption subsidy from the federal Title IV-E program under the Social Security Act.
 - (C) Economic Stimulus Payment – one-time payment made by the United States government to taxpayers to stimulate the economy
 - (D) School Loans/Grants – Pell Grants and others that are primarily for school expenses
 - (E) Alimony (paid out of the home)
 - (F) One-time-only gifts – non-recurring monies received once as a gift, such as a birthday present, etc.
 - (G) Work Study – non-taxable income from a school
 - (H) Child Support (paid out of the home)
 - (I) Food Stamps
 - (J) Housing Payments – 60BB-4.100(8)(d) housing assistance payments from HUD issued directly to a landlord and associated utilities expense.

- (K) Foster parent monthly allotment
 - (L) Sale of personal assets, such as stocks, bonds, house, car, and insurance policies
 - (M) Earned income of a child under the age of nineteen (19) years old who is enrolled as a full time student in secondary school. Earned income of a household member aged eighteen (18) to twenty-two (22) who is enrolled as a full-time student in secondary school and in receipt of a John M. McKay scholarship is excluded income. Secondary school is defined as a high school or school of corresponding grade, ranking between a primary school and a college or university.
 - (N) Loans/Money borrowed with an established repayment plan – this would be income from the loan such as a check each semester from a student loan or a cash advance from a credit card.
 - (O) Capital gains as claimed on income tax
 - (P) VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) payments
 - (Q) Earned Income Tax Credits or dependant care credits
 - (R) Foster parents, shelter status, and court-ordered relative and non-relative caregivers are not considered a part of the child’s family unit, so their income is not considered for purposes of eligibility.
 - (S) Families in a natural disaster area are not required to include disaster relief or other forms of temporary assistance when calculating income thresholds for family eligibility purposes.
 - (T) Adoption benefits
 - (U) Independent Living Grants (paid to former foster children age 16-22)
 - (V) Military housing assistance and military allotments paid to the family
 - (W) Interest/dividends
 - (X) Lump-sum settlements
 - (Y) Relative Caregiver payments
- d. When more than one family unit lives within a single dwelling, that portion of the second family unit’s income that is paid to the applicant family as living expenses, e.g. rent, utilities, food, etc. shall be included in the income portion of the applicant family. Such information is generally based on a attestation from the second family unit, under the penalty of perjury, which is a first degree misdemeanor, punishable by a definite term of imprisonment, not exceeding one year and/or a fine not exceeding \$1,000 pursuant to ss.837.012, or 775.082, or 775.083, Florida Statutes is acceptable.
 - e. When more than one family unit rents a single dwelling and they share expenses or both families pay to a third party, then no countable income is created for the applicant family from the second family unit.
 - f. Fee Reduction and Fee Waiver Policy

- (A) General information: In accordance with 60BB 4.400 F.A. C., each Coalition is responsible for defining a list of qualifying events and outlining procedure for assignment of a temporary parent fee reduction or waiver. It is the position of the ELCNC that fee reduction may be based upon receipt of a fee reduction request from the referring agency and qualifying events.
- (B) Parent fee for At-Risk categories of care may in addition be reduced or waived with written approval from the Executive Director. Executive Director appeal will be based on a Letter of Appeal, written by the custodial parent/guardian (or a letter of appeal written on behalf of the custodial parent/guardian and signed and dated by the custodial parent/guardian if assistance with this process is required).
- (C) If parent fee reduction/waiver is indicated, the duration of the reduction shall coincide with the duration of the special circumstances. The child's parent/guardian acknowledges that the fee reduction or waiver is granted based upon a "qualifying event"; in addition, they acknowledge that if the child becomes ineligible for services or the reduction/waiver is no longer necessary based upon the child's needs, the approval will expire.
- (D) While temporary fee reduction and fee waiver requests are processed for children under protection on a case-by-case basis, eligibility for a child at risk of abuse or neglect must be continued if the child's family is unable to pay the assessed parent fees. If a provider terminates an At-Risk child from their facility due to non-payment of fees, eligibility for School Readiness services must remain open in the EFS system; the Client Services Counselor will communicate the information to the referring agency caseworker immediately upon report to the Coalition by the provider. Every effort must be made to assist the parent in re-establishing child care via Resource and Referral.
- (E) Fee Reduction/Waiver for Protective Service In-Home At-Risk: For in-home protective service placements, the parent fee is based upon household income. Temporary parent fee reduction/waiver requests for this category will be considered by the Executive Director and may be granted contingent upon receipt of a Letter of Appeal from the parent(s), noting the circumstances prompting the application, in accordance with the procedure outlined below. Extreme family crisis/lack of resources may prompt the Executive Director's approval of a fee reduction/waiver.
- (F) Fee Reduction for Out of Home At-Risk Categories, Relative Caregiver, and Caretaker Relative: For protective service out of home placements (relative/non-relative/foster care placements) in which the child does not receive a TANF "Child Only" benefit, Relative Caregiver payment, or other income, the parent fee shall be assessed against the income of the parent or legal guardian who forfeited custody of the child, and shall be court ordered if necessary or may be temporarily reduced to the minimum fee on a case by case basis during an event that limits that parent's ability to pay, such as:
- i. Child's parents/guardians are in prison
 - ii. Child's parents/guardians are in residential treatment
 - iii. Child's parents/guardians become incapacitated
 - iv. Death of child's parents/guardians
 - v. Homeless shelter/living arrangements
 - vi. Child's parents/guardians experience a natural disaster (storm, earthquake, etc.)
 - vii. Child's parents/guardians experience an emergency situation such as a fire or robbery
 - viii. Child's parents/guardians become unemployed
 - ix. Per fee reduction request provided by the referring agency
- (G) For Protective Service Out of Home Placements (relative/on-relative/foster care placements) in which the child receives a TANF "Child Only" benefit in which the needs of the relative or legal

guardian are no included in the grant, or TANF At Risk (Relative Caregiver Program) participants, based on documentation identifying the child as TANF At Risk or as TANF "Child Only" benefit recipient, from the court system or the Department of Children and Families or its designee, the parent fee shall be assessed against the income of the parent or legal guardian who forfeited custody of the child, and shall be court ordered if necessary or the co-payment may be temporarily reduced to the minimum fee on a case by case basis during an event that limits that parent's ability to pay based on the events and processes listed above. In the absence of a fee reduction request from the referring agency, extreme family crisis/lack of resources may prompt Executive Director approval of a fee reduction for this category.

- (H) Fee Waiver for Out of Home At Risk Placements including Relative Caregiver (with open case): A co-payment may be temporarily waived on a case by case basis by the Executive Director for foster parents and relatives/non-relatives with custody of an At Risk child during an event that limits a parent's ability to pay, such as:
 - i. Child's parents/guardians are in prison
 - ii. Child's parents/guardians are in residential treatment
 - iii. Child's parents/guardians become incapacitated
 - iv. Death of child's parents/guardians
 - v. Homeless shelter/living arrangements
 - vi. Child's parents/guardians experience a natural disaster (storm, earthquake, etc.)
 - vii. Child's parents/guardians experience an emergency situation such as a fire or robbery
 - viii. Child's parents/guardians become unemployed

- (I) Extreme family crisis/lack of resources may, in addition, prompt Executive Director approval of a fee waiver for this category.

- (J) Parent fee waiver requests will be considered contingent upon receipt of a Letter of Appeal from the parent(s), noting the circumstances prompting application for a parent fee waiver.

- (K) Fee Waiver for Other At Risk Categories of Care:
 - i. A co-payment may be temporarily waived on a case by case basis for families participating in an at-risk program during an even that limits the parent's ability to pay.

 - ii. For the purposes of this policy "At Risk" is interpreted as families receiving School Readiness child care assistance with income at or below 100% of the federal poverty guideline (FPG) and at risk of welfare dependency. This category includes working poor clients, migrants, teen parents, those at risk of future school failure, and those in the welfare transition program.

 - iii. Events that limit a parent's ability to pay include:
 - (a) Child's parents/guardians are in prison
 - (b) Child's parents/guardians are in residential treatment
 - (c) Child's parents/guardians become incapacitated
 - (d) Death of child's parents/guardians
 - (e) Homeless shelter/living arrangements
 - (f) Child's parents/guardians experience a natural disaster (storm, earthquake, etc.)
 - (g) Child's parents/guardians experience an emergency situation such as a fire or robbery
 - (h) Child's parents/guardians become unemployed

- iv. Extreme family crisis/lack of resources may, in addition, prompt Executive Director approval of a fee waiver for this category.
 - v. Parent fee waiver requests will be considered by the Executive Director and may be granted contingent upon receipt of a Letter of Appeal from the parent(s), noting the circumstances prompting application for a parent fee waiver.
- (L) The Coalition may also reduce the parent fee when one or more of the parents/guardians or other adults in the home included in the original application are granted a medical interruption in services, such as maternity leave. If the parent provides proof that no income will be paid by their employer during the medical leave the Coalition shall re-calculate the household income, excluding the medical leave parent's income from employment. If the parent provides proof that the income will be reduced to leave or other cash benefits, the Coalition shall re-calculate the household income utilizing the documented leave or other cash benefit paid by the employer. The reduced fee must only be authorized for the duration of the medical interruption for a maximum of sixty (60) days.
- (M) The Coalition may also reduce the parent fee when one or more of the parents/guardians or other adults in the home included in the original application lose their employment. If the parent provides proof of loss of employment (the employer may complete ELCNC-225 Verification of Income/Employment), the Coalition shall re-calculate the household income, excluding the non-working parent's income from the lost employment. The reduced fee must only be authorized for the period the parent is not working for a maximum of thirty (30) days.
- i. The eligibility clerk must determine if the parent/guardian is eligible for full time or part time care. Full time care is authorized when the parent/guardian works more than thirty (30) hours a week including travel time. Part time care is authorized when the parent/guardian works less than thirty (30) hours a week including travel time but not less than twenty (20) work hours per week.
- c. Determine the family size: Family consists of a parent or parents living together, their minor children and any other minor 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. If a family and an unrelated individual(s) live in the same housing unit it shall constitute two family units. A teen parent who is emancipated will be considered a separate household. If the family lives with a relative or non-relative who is not supported by the family the relative is not counted in the family size. Applicant for School Readiness services must complete ELCNC-217 Verification of Family Status to certify household members.
- d. Once the family income and family size is determined the eligibility clerk must determine the parent fee. The fee is determined utilizing the Coalition's School Readiness Program Parent Fee Schedule. The Client Services Counselor must first find the family size across the top of the page of the parent fee schedule and follow the family size line down the page to the appropriate income range. The family fee associated with the income and family size can be found on the most left column titled daily family fee. The fee is applied to the youngest child in the family. If applicable, siblings are assessed 50% of the daily fee.
- e. The assessed parent fees begin with the first day of eligibility and reimbursable care. When the assessed fee changes and the amount of the parent/guardian fees are decreased the new fee should be effective immediately. When the fee is increased both the parent/guardian and provider must be notified immediately of the fee change. The notice must include the start date of the new fee and the right for the parent/guardian to file an appeal. To the greatest extent possible, a fee increase will be effective ten (10) days from the date the change is identified.

19. Enrollment:

1. The Coalition will ensure through written documentation that all parents are provided information regarding programs, services, and providers available for School Readiness programs. In addition, written information will be provided to parents detailing the length of care available through the provider chosen, and the cost covered by the subsidized child care program for that provider. The Coalition will only provide one full-time payment for one service per child, and parents who choose a program that does not cover the total amount of time needed for child care will be responsible for any additional costs for wrap-around care/after school care after the initial service has been provided. This policy excludes extended child care services, which are services in excess of 11 hours are needed for instances such as a parent who works nights and sleeps during the day. The actual number of extended hours shall be authorized by the Executive Director or Coalition staff at management level on a case-by-case basis and shall consider the needs of the child as well as the needs of the parent.
2. The costs such as field trips, arts and crafts fees, recreational activities, registration fees etc., whose costs are in addition to the cost of child care, will not be paid by the Coalition, but are the responsibility of the parent.
3. School Readiness services for children determined at risk of abuse or neglect shall be provided in centers or homes which are at minimum licensed. The Coalition may approve placement of children in non-licensed facilities based on a waiver request from the child's caseworker.
4. Clients in all other categories shall have a choice of School Readiness services upon determination and re-determination of eligibility. The Coalition must provide a list of eligible School Readiness providers to the parent upon request and require the parent to select their provider and sign a statement certifying their choice.
5. When a parent chooses an informal non-School Readiness provider, the Coalition will provide the parent a School Readiness agreement package. The agreement application will be processed in accordance with the following:
 - i. All forms must be completed and submitted to the Coalition. The clearance form must contain the names, dates of birth and social security numbers, if they exist, for all persons over the age of 12 years in the household of the non-School Readiness informal provider chosen by the parent.
 - ii. The Coalition is responsible to ensure that all information required in the forms is completed, which includes a clearance form and a signed agreement form. School Readiness services may begin at any time, after all other Coalition requirements have been met, but retroactive payments, if subsequently made, will only go back to the date when all properly completed required forms have been submitted to the Coalition.
 - iii. The Coalition shall forward the background screening form to the Department of Children and Families screening coordinator.
 - iv. The screening coordinator will forward to the Coalition the screening form and a form advising on whether or not the non-School Readiness informal provider may legally be paid to serve as an informal School Readiness provider.
 - v. The Coalition shall notify the parent and the non-School Readiness informal provider of the outcome of the abuse clearance.
 - (A) If the outcome is denial of legal caregiver, a letter of termination for service provision shall be forwarded to the parent and the non-School Readiness informal provider by the Coalition.

- (B) If the outcome is approval, the Coalition shall reimburse for School Readiness services rendered during the interim of completion of paperwork and the clearance process, as well as future payments.
 - (C) The abuse clearance process shall be completed in no more than thirty (30) days, once the screening coordinator is in receipt of the clearance form.
6. The Coalition shall enter child enrollment into the Statewide Data system assigning the appropriate billing groups in accordance with Other Cost Accumulator Definitions assigning the child to the provider chosen by the parent/guardian, and entering all other required information.
 7. Changes in Schedule: When a parent reports a change that affects the child's authorized schedule the Coalition must send an updated ELCNC237 Child Care Certificate (Manual) or EFS-generated Child Care Certificate to the School Readiness provider.
 8. Transfers: Parents may transfer their children from one School Readiness provider to any authorized provider in any county holding a School Readiness provider agreement with the ELCNC once the child's status has been determined eligible and enrolled. The Coalition must document the transfer in the statewide data system and the child/family file, and must maintain a current ELCNC-215 School Readiness Services Terms and Conditions Form. Prior to the transfer the parent must pay all parent fees due to the current provider and sign, if applicable, the Student Attendance Verification form. The provider must submit ELCNC-201 School Readiness Program Provider Transfer Form – Zero Balance to the Coalition, indicating that all parent fees have been paid before the transfer can be processed. The ELCNC-201 School Readiness Program Provider Transfer Form – Zero Balance may not be accepted by Client Service Counselors as documentation of eligibility for transfer if it is post-dated by the provider. The signature date on the document must be a current or, if applicable, prior date. An updated ELCNC-237 Child Care Certificate (Manual) or EFS-generated Child Care Certificate must be submitted to the new School Readiness provider. The parent must notify the Coalition of the new provider and enrollment start date prior to child attendance if School Readiness services are to be reimbursed.
 9. Interruptions in Employment
 - i. A family shall maintain eligibility for financially-assisted School Readiness services during a break in employment, provided employment is re-established within thirty (30) calendar days. During this time, School Readiness services will be reimbursed. If a parent/guardian's redetermination date occurs during a break in employment (thirty (30) days is the approved period of time for an interruption in employment, unless it is for medical reasons), the Client Service Counselor will request that the parent/guardian returns for eligibility determination purposes when employment is secured; School Readiness services must be suspended when the redetermination date is reached, and for the remainder of the thirty (30) day period, or until employment is established, whichever occurs earlier. If employment is not established within the allowable thirty (30) day time period, eligibility for School Readiness services will be terminated.
 - ii. During a temporary break in employment for up to sixty (60) calendar days for medical reasons, including maternity leave, if determined medically necessary and documented by a physician licensed under chapter 458 or 459 Florida Statutes. During this time School Readiness services will be reimbursed. If the eligibility period ends before a parent has reestablished a purpose for care they cannot be authorized for new funding without establishing that they meet a purpose for care.

- iii. Clients with an interruption in employment, with an option to return to that employment, shall be allowed a non-reimbursable break in service. The client is not placed on the waiting list but the financially assisted School Readiness services are considered suspended until employment resumes. Care may be re-established upon resumption of employment. Such circumstances may include seasonal employment, school system related employment or maternity leave.

10. Changes in Assessed Parent Fee

- i. The amount of the co-payment will be in effect for the family's predetermined eligibility period, unless:
 - (A) Re-determination is conducted more frequently;
 - (B) The caretaker/parent/legal guardian requests, and is granted, a reduction in co-payment amount due to special circumstances; or
 - (C) An incorrect co-payment was assessed by the eligibility determiner as a result of an error of the eligibility determiner, program participant error, or program participant fraud, resulting in corrective action to reduce or increase the family's co-payment; and
 - (D) If there is any change in marital status, employment status, income, or family size.
- ii. The Coalition will not take action to recover a reimbursement rate overpayment caused by an incorrect co-payment due to an error of the Coalition.
- iii. A reimbursement rate overpayment caused by an incorrect parent fee, which resulted from program participant error or program participant fraud, will be recovered pursuant to the laws of the State of Florida or applicable rule. All adjustments/paybacks must be entered into the EFS system and paid in accordance with invoicing requirements.
- iv. The Coalition shall notify the parent and provider of changes in the parent fee utilizing ELCNC-237 Child Care Certificate (Manual) or EFS-generated Child Care Certificate.

3.7 Waitlist

- A. All School Readiness clients applying for the waiting list must meet the certification of eligibility requirements stated in the Eligibility and Enrollment section of this operating policy.
- B. The Coalition shall place eligible children on the waiting list by the child's legal name, age, eligibility category and type of service care requested. The Coalition shall inform the parent of the wait list status with an ELCNC-262 Wait List Application Status and explain the six (6) month validation procedure outlined below.
- C. The Coalition shall prioritize the waiting list based on the Coalition's eligibility priorities.
- D. The Coalition shall validate each name on the waiting list every six (6) months by way of a response to ELCNC-275 Waitlist Update. Notification sent to those on the waiting list will give the parent/guardian a specific timeframe to contact the Coalition to provide necessary updated information to remain on the waiting list. Names will be removed from the waiting list for failure to contact the Coalition in the timeframe requested or if a purpose for School Readiness services or eligibility no longer exists. Names will also be removed from the waiting list once the child has been authorized for placement.
- E. An unborn child shall not be eligible for the waiting list.

- F. The Coalition shall provide the opportunity for Needs Assessments/Family Support as described in the Parent/Child services section of this policy to every parent applying to place their child on the waitlist.
- G. Clients will be notified of the availability of funding by Client Services Counselors by phone or by mail utilizing ELCNC-227 Waitlist Funding Notification. Actual certification of eligibility will be conducted in accordance with the Eligibility and Enrollment section of this operating procedure prior to authorization for placement, which will be based on available funding capacity.
- H. An applicant for School Readiness services may not be placed on the waitlist during a break in employment due to temporary disability.
- I. The parent has the right to appeal any and all decisions made by the Coalition with regard to their waitlist application.
- J. A family will not be placed on the waitlist if the Coalition receives notification of unpaid parent fees (up to thirty (30) days), and the balance remains unpaid.

3.8 Termination of Financially Assisted School Readiness Services

- A. Pursuant to s. 411.01, F.S., once determined eligible for School Readiness services a child shall remain eligible until he or she reaches kindergarten age. However, eligibility for financially- assisted School Readiness services may not continue if the child does not continue to meet the eligibility requirements.
- B. If at any time the Coalition, Department of Children and Families staff, local Welfare Transition Agency, contracted providers or any authorization entity determines that a client is ineligible for School Readiness services, a financially assisted School Readiness service termination notice shall be sent to the Coalition. The client shall be given a ten (10) day notice prior to termination of financially assisted School Readiness services unless services are being terminated immediately due to extended failure of the parent or authorized caretaker to report changes in job or income status which made him or her ineligible. If during the ten (10) day notice period, the parent contacts the referring agency, initiates an appeal, and provides acceptable documentation for the continuation of care, the termination notice may be voided with documented consent from the authorizing caseworker. All parties who received a copy of the notice of termination shall be notified that the termination has been voided. In the event a client has received services for which he or she was not eligible, recoupment or suspected fraud procedures shall be instituted by the Coalition, as applicable.
- C. When financially assisted School Readiness services are subject to termination, for a participant whose School Readiness services are based on a mandated category of care, the Coalition shall contact the referring agency to verify continued eligibility, utilizing ELCNC-240: Disposition of Child Care Referral Form
- D. School Readiness providers shall be notified immediately by the Coalition when a client is no longer eligible for financially assisted School Readiness services by telephone and fax or mail and must be afforded ten (10) days notice when possible.
- E. Failure to pay the applicable parent fee is grounds for termination of financially assisted School Readiness services. Non-payment of parent fees is reported to the Coalition by School Readiness providers, utilizing ELCNC-211 Child Attendance Notice. School Readiness services shall be reinstated or continued if the parent or other responsible party makes satisfactory arrangements with the provider to pay any past-due fees. In the event that past due fees are not paid within thirty (30) days of the reporting date of non-payment by the provider, eligibility for School Readiness services will be terminated.
- F. It shall be the responsibility of the School Readiness provider to notify the Coalition of non-payment of fees in a timely manner. In no cases shall a parent/guardian be responsible for more than thirty (30) days of past-due parent fees. Collection of past-due parent fees is the responsibility of the School Readiness provider.

- G. Abuse of the enrollment or attendance requirements by a client will be considered grounds for termination from the financially assisted School Readiness services. In the case of Welfare Transition and at-risk clients, the case manager will be notified in order to determine whether School Readiness services continue to be necessary despite the client enrollment or attendance abuse.
- H. In the event FDLE finds evidence of fraud committed by a parent/guardian School Readiness services will be terminated until the re-couplement process is completed or the client has agreed to and complies with a repayment plan.

3.9 Dis-enrollment Process

- A. Eligibility for School Readiness programs is established in section 411.01 (6), Florida Statutes and federal regulations, 45 CFR 98 and CFR 260-265 and is described in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) State Plan and the Child Care and Development Fund State Plan (CCDF). The provision of child care services, through the Early Learning Coalition of the Nature Coast, Inc., is critical for addressing state policy goals in the areas of School Readiness, child welfare and economic self-sufficiency of low-income families. Significant financial penalties could apply to the state if childcare services are not provided for families receiving temporary cash assistance and subject to work requirements.
- B. Early Education and Care, while critical to achieving federal and state policy objectives, are not an entitlement or guaranteed. A Fair Disclosure statement on the eligibility and re-determination forms is given to parents notifying them that the provision of School Readiness services is subject to the availability of funding and placement priorities.
- C. It is the position of the Early Learning Coalition of the Nature Coast Board of Directors that dis-enrollment of children from the School Readiness program must be a last resort decision. It is the policy of the Early Learning Coalition of the Nature Coast, Inc., to utilize a wide range of budget management strategies to maintain fiscal integrity and balance, including the utilization of dis-enrollment of non-priority participants as an option of last resort to maintain fiscal integrity. The decision to activate the dis-enrollment policy stated below must be preceded by documentation that the following activities have been completed:
 - 1. Re-determination of eligibility of current mandatory enrollments (mandatory enrollments are families in receipt of Temporary Cash assistance and subject to Federal work requirements and protective services clients – see eligibility and enrollment section of this operating procedure):
 - a. The Coalition will re-determine eligibility of current enrollments with referring agencies.
 - 2. Re-determination of eligibility in current non-priority categories
 - a. The Coalition will re-determine eligibility of current non-priority enrollments.
 - 3. Coordination with other School Readiness Partners
 - a. The Coalition will communicate with other School Readiness partners to research other avenues of service. Guidelines regarding parental choice must be met when changing or moving children from one program to another.
 - 4. Re-evaluation of Coalition Budget.
 - a. The Coalition will direct the Administrative Committee to conduct a complete review of the Coalition's operating budget. In addition, the Administrative Committee will conduct a complete review of the Coalition's projected utilization of direct service dollars.
- D. If dis-enrollment is deemed necessary after exhausting all other options described above, the Coalition shall:

1. Immediately notify the Agency for Workforce Innovation/Office of Early Learning of the dis-enrollment decision (the notification must be received by the Agency for Workforce Innovation no more than three days after the dis-enrollment decision is made).
2. Determine the number of children that must be dis-enrolled to balance the direct service budget. Dis-enrollment may not cause the slot expenditures to drop below the slot allocation approved by the Coalition
3. The Coalition shall dis-enroll an established number of children enrolled in non-federally funded category as follows:
 - a. Dis-enrollment of school-age children (age 12 and 11)
 - b. Dis-enrollment of school-age children (age 10, 9, and 8)
 - c. Dis-enrollment of school-age children (age 7 and 6)
 - d. Dis-enrollment of children 0 - kindergarten entry beginning with the highest income families
4. The Coalition shall dis-enroll an established number of children enrolled in the Working Poor category.
 - a. Dis-enrollment of school-age children (age 12 and 11)
 - b. Dis-enrollment of school-age children (age 10, 9, and 8)
 - c. Dis-enrollment of school-age children (age 7 and 6)
 - d. Dis-enrollment of children 0 - kindergarten entry beginning with the highest income families
5. The Coalition shall place all dis-enrolled children on the waitlist by priority.
6. The Coalition shall follow all termination of financially assisted School Readiness services policies stated in this operating procedure.
7. The Coalition shall release a public announcement detailing the causes of the dis-enrollment.

3.10 Community Outreach

- A. The Coalition will participate in community-wide events promoting School Readiness and child care awareness, and engage in key community agencies or groups that have particular expertise and/or services designed to meet the School Readiness needs of specialty populations of families and children in culturally relevant ways.
- B. Coalition staff shall attend community events that raise awareness of quality education and care of young children.

3.11 Consumer Education

- A. The Coalition will engage in activities designed to provide comprehensive consumer education to parents and the public. Activities will include attending community fairs/events.

3.12 Provider Observations:

- A. The Coalition will complete observations of School Readiness providers, utilizing the Coalition's approved ELCNC-25 School Readiness Program Provider Observation Tool and the guidelines stated below:

1. The Coalition recognizes that on-going quality early education is crucial for the development of children. Young children need the stability and opportunities that quality care provides, in order to enter school ready to learn. The Program Management Observation Instrument and the Classroom Observation Instruments are designed to encompass all of the state, federal, and Coalition mandates related to sub-contracted School Readiness programs and to assist providers that hold an Agreement with the Coalition to maintain the quality of their programs in accordance with state, federal, and Coalition requirements.
2. In order for the Coalition to accurately document provider compliance with program regulations and program quality the Coalition must build a professional working relationship with each owner/director and teacher and become familiar with the day-to-day operations of the program. To accomplish this, the Coalition's Education Specialists will visit the facility on a regular basis throughout the contract year. These types of visits are referred to as informal visits and are intended to provide an opportunity for the provider to request formal technical assistance, to ask questions, and to orient the Education Specialist with the program. The Education Specialists shall document the outcomes of the informal visits on the ELCNC-32 Provider Contact Form. The documented outcomes of the informal visits may be used to assist the Education Specialist in completing the provider observation tools.
3. In addition to the informal visits, the Education Specialists will visit each program to complete formal observations at least once during the fiscal year.
 - a. The Education Specialists will visit each classroom in the facility, completing all Classroom Observation Instruments. Ratings will be assigned for each area in accordance with the following:
 - (A) Compliance: The Education Specialist will indicate if the criterion was observed in compliance or if supporting documentation such as the Provider Contact Forms and Technical Assistance Forms indicate on-going compliance.
 - (B) Non-Compliance: The Education Specialist will indicate if the criterion was observed in non-compliance or if supporting documentation such as the Provider Contact Forms and Technical Assistance Forms indicate on-going non-compliance.
 - (C) Not applicable: The Education Specialist will indicate if the criterion was not applicable to the age group being observed, such as references to diapering activity in a preschool-age classroom.
 - b. Overall comments for each section of the Observation Instrument may also be included in the comments section. The purpose of the comments is to capture the program strengths and weakness noted during the observation, informal visits, and the implementation of technical assistance. For example, if the teacher has a system in place that exceeds a particular requirement it is important for the Education Specialist to document the best practice. Likewise, if a practice is noted out of compliance it is important for the Education Specialist to note the non-compliance issue providing an explanation of the concern.
 - c. If the score indicates that corrective action is required, the Education Specialist and provider will develop a Corrective Action plan utilizing the ELCNC-34 Corrective Action Form. The plan will include a timeline (not to exceed thirty (30) days) for the activity established in the Corrective Action Plan and the approximate date for the Education Specialist to conduct a follow up assessment of the items listed on the Corrective Action Plan. If the program successfully implements all activities in the Corrective Action Plan as evidenced in the follow up assessment, the Corrective Action Plan shall be considered completed. If the program does not score appropriately following the implementation of the Corrective Action plan the Education Specialist will follow the School Readiness Termination/Suspension/Reinstatement policies described earlier.
4. Upon completion of the observation, the Education Specialist will meet with the owner/director or representative to discuss the ratings and any comments. The Education Specialist will document the

completion of the exit interview on the ELCNC-32 Provider Contact Form and provide a fully signed copy of the observation to the provider within ten (10) working days.

5. Special Provisions for Out-of-County School Readiness Providers
 - a. The Coalition recognizes that some School Readiness providers in other counties may wish to hold an Agreement with the Nature Coast Coalition to provide School Readiness services to children who reside in the Nature Coast Coalition's service area, but whose parents choose to place them in care outside of their home county. Exceptions may be made to the observation requirements, if all of the following conditions are met.
 - (A) The facility holds an Agreement with the Nature Coast Coalition as well as with their local Coalition
 - (B) The program serves five (5) or fewer children from the Nature Coast
 - (C) The "home" Coalition has a mechanism to document compliance with the items listed in the observation form, and the document is submitted by the "home" Coalition or the provider to the Nature Coast Coalition. Note: "home" coalition means the Early Learning Coalition located in the same county as the provider.
 - b. If an out of county provider does not have any Nature Coast School Readiness children enrolled, the provider observation and health and safety inspection requirements will be suspended and the contract placed in an "in-active" status. If at any time a parent wishes to enroll a Nature Coast School Readiness child at a facility that does not have an observation conducted within the last year and a health and safety inspection conducted within the last six (6) months on file, Coalition staff will conduct a provider observation (a copy of the most recent observation conducted by the home Coalition will suffice if the observation was conducted within the previous six (6) months) and health and safety inspection PRIOR TO the child attending the program. Note: a Department of Children and Families licensing inspection may be utilized to document completion of a health and safety inspection.
6. Special Provisions for In-County School Readiness Providers with No Enrolled School Readiness Children
 - a. The Coalition realizes that there may be times when a provider contracts for School Readiness services but does not have any School Readiness students enrolled in their program. If this occurs, that provider's School Readiness Agreement may be placed in an in-active status. During the in-active status, the Education Specialist will not complete the provider observations.
 - b. Prior to the enrolling of a child into the provider's School Readiness program a provider observation must be conducted, unless the last observation was conducted within the previous six (6) months. A minimum score of 85.00% must be achieved. In-county in-active providers may be moved to active status following the achievement of 85.00% on the observation. The Education Specialist conducting the observation must notify the Program Manager upon completion of the provider observation if the provider is eligible for re-activation. If the score is 95.00% or below, a corrective action plan will be developed. Contract status will be evaluated at the end of the thirty (30) day corrective action period, and will be assigned based on the score achieved. In addition, the health and safety inspection must be satisfactory and up-to-date prior to the enrollment of children.
 - c. Following the revision of contract status from in-active to active the Education Specialist must conduct provider observations for the remaining months of the fiscal year.

3.13 Health and Safety Assessments

- A. The Coalition recognizes that on-going health and safety assessments are crucial for the health and safety of children. The Health and Safety assessment instrument is designed to assess the general health and safety of subsidized child care arrangements and to help providers recognize unsafe conditions and if necessary to improve their child care environments.
- B. The Coalition will conduct health and safety pre-assessments of potential School Readiness providers, utilizing the appropriate ELCNC-24 Health and Safety Pre-Assessment/Assessment and the guidelines stated below:
 - 1. The Health and Safety Pre-Assessment is designed to review the health and safety standards of potential School Readiness providers that are interested in entering into an agreement to provide School Readiness services. Potential providers must successfully meet all of the requirements in the Health and Safety Assessment prior to execution of a School Readiness contract.
 - 2. When a potential School Readiness provider is identified, Coalition staff will set up a meeting with the site director and review the Health and Safety Assessment process. Coalition staff will provide technical assistance as needed to assist the provider in preparing for the assessment. When the potential provider feels ready for the assessment, the provider will notify the Coalition. After notification, Coalition staff must conduct the assessment within two weeks.
 - 3. The observer will state the purpose of the visit to the program representative and greet all staff.
 - 4. The observer will observe all classrooms that are interested in providing School Readiness services; however, no more than six (6) classrooms will be observed in one day.
 - 5. After all indicators are completed the observer will review the document with the program representative. If all indicators are met the program will be considered ready to enter into a School Readiness contract. The provider must have the opportunity to execute the contract within thirty (30) days.
 - 6. If all indicators are not met the observer and provider will develop a technical assistance plan. The plan will include a timeline (not to exceed thirty (30) days) for the activity established in the corrective action plan and the date for the observer to conduct an assessment of the completed corrective action plan. If the program successfully implements all activities in the corrective action plan the program will be considered ready to enter into a School Readiness contract. If the program does not meet all of the activity listed in the corrective action plan the observer will continue to work with the provider until all indicators are met.
 - 7. The observer will provide the owner/director with a copy of the completed assessment and if necessary the corrective action plan within seven (7) days of the visit.
 - 8. Licensed Family Child Care Homes and Licensed Centers who have been inspected by the local licensing department within the last six (6) months may be exempt from the Health and Safety Pre-Assessment process. The Coalition must collect a copy of the licensing department's inspection of the provider. If the provider met all of the indicators listed on the licensing department's inspection the provider will be considered ready to enter into a subsidized child care contract. If the provider did not meet all of the indicators the observer may conduct an additional assessment or develop a corrective action plan in compliance with the above.
- B. The Coalition must conduct unannounced on-going health and safety assessments on all School Readiness providers at a minimum of twice per year, or as often as deemed necessary by the Coalition. Inspections conducted by the local licensing authority within the last six (6) months may be utilized as an assessment to meet this requirement.

1. If a non-licensed provider fails to meet any indicator during on-going health and safety assessments the provider must be placed on a corrective action plan. The Coalition must follow the School Readiness Agreement Termination and Reinstatement policies described earlier.
2. If the local licensing authority fails to conduct an inspection on a licensed site within the six (6) month time frame, Coalition staff will visit the site to conduct the health and safety assessment inspection.
3. If an out of county provider does not have any Nature Coast School Readiness children enrolled, the Coalition health and safety assessment inspection requirement will be suspended. If at any time a parent wishes to enroll a Nature Coast School Readiness child in the facility, Coalition staff will conduct a health and safety assessment PRIOR to the child attending the program, unless the most recent inspection has been completed satisfactorily during the previous six (6) months.
4. If an in-county provider does not have any Nature Coast School Readiness children enrolled and the contract has been placed on in-active status, the Coalition health and safety assessment inspection requirement will be suspended. If at any time a parent wishes to enroll a School Readiness child at the facility, Coalition staff will conduct a health and safety inspection PRIOR to the child attending the program, unless the most recent inspection has been completed satisfactorily during the previous six (6) months.

3.14 Training and Technical Assistance:

- A. The Coalition will provide a minimum of forty-five (45) hours of training and workshops (fifteen (15) hours in Citrus, fifteen (15) hours in Sumter, and fifteen (15) combined hours in Dixie, Gilchrist and Levy Counties) that promote the enhancement of quality in the School Readiness setting and promote effective teaching strategies. Topics may include, but are not limited to, the following areas:
 1. Curriculum development: The Coalition will develop and implement training workshops to assist teachers in planning age-appropriate, developmentally appropriate, research-based programs for young children.
 2. Parent involvement and education programs: The Coalition will develop and implement training workshops designed to promote parent involvement in the education of children.
 3. Healthy and safe environments: The Coalition will develop and implement training workshops that assist teachers in maintaining healthy and safe environments for young children.
 4. Early literacy: The Coalition will develop and implement training workshops that assist teachers in planning appropriate early literacy activities.
- B. The Coalition will develop and implement a pre-and-post test for each training workshop. The purpose of the pre-and-post test is to evaluate the participants gain in knowledge in the subject area as a result of the training workshop.
- C. The Coalition will provide technical assistance which improves health and safety practices, relates to the program observation results, and assists School Readiness providers in offering high quality services as requested.
- D. The Coalition will research and collect early education and care training information provided by staff development programs in the community, such as the school system, and distribute the information to School Readiness programs throughout the county. Documentation of training information shared will be maintained by the Coalition.

3.15 Coalition Curricula Approval Process

- A. The Early Learning Coalition of the Nature Coast is responsible for ensuring that all School Readiness providers utilize an appropriate curriculum. To accomplish this, the Coalition requires School Readiness programs to utilize one

or more Coalition-approved curricula. Curricula approval evaluations shall be based on the Florida School Readiness Performance Standards, including learning activities designed to enhance children in the following areas:

1. Physical health
2. Approaches to learning
3. Social and emotional development
4. Language and communication
5. Cognitive development and general knowledge
6. Motor development
7. Character development

A. Indicators of an effective curriculum include the following:

1. Children are active and engaged
2. Goals are clear and shared by all
3. Curriculum is evidence-based
4. Valued content is learned through investigation, play, and focused , intentional teaching
5. Curriculum builds on prior learning and experiences
6. Curriculum is comprehensive
7. Professional standards validate the curriculum's subject-matter content
8. The curriculum is likely to benefit children

B. Curriculum Approval Process

1. The Coalition's Advisory Councils are responsible for reviewing curricula and recommending curricula for Coalition-approved to the Board of Directors.
2. Any individual requesting approval of a curriculum must submit the ELCNC-31 Request for Curriculum Approval Form to the Coalition.
3. A sample lesson plan and a sample of the curriculum materials, book, or other appropriate material must be attached to the ELCNC-31 Request for Curriculum Approval Form.
4. Coalition staff will conduct an initial review, utilizing the ELCNC-30 Checklist for Curriculum Evaluation.
5. The review shall presented through an action item that includes the Request for Curriculum Approval Application, supporting documentation and the completed Checklist for Curriculum Evaluation to the appropriate Advisory Council at the next regularly scheduled meeting.
6. The Advisory Council shall review the documents and either approve the application for recommendation to the Board of Directors or deny the application listing the reasons for the denial.

7. If the Advisory Council denies the Curriculum Approval Application Coalition staff shall inform the applicant of the denial including the reasons specified by the Advisory Council.
8. If the Board of Director's approves the curriculum approval action item Coalition staff shall inform the applicant of the approval in writing.
9. If the Board of Director's denies the curriculum approval action item Coalition staff shall inform the applicant of the denial in writing.

3.16 Quality Initiative Programs:

- A. The Board of Directors of the Early Learning Coalition of the Nature Coast has adopted several Quality Initiatives designed to enhance the quality of early learning programs.
- B. The Advisory Councils, (established by the Board of Directors) are responsible for recommending the implementation of quality initiatives on an annual basis based on the documented need in each county served by the Nature Coast Coalition. In addition, the Advisory Council's recommendations must include the associated budget for each recommended initiative. (The Advisory Councils may recommend the implementation of all or some of the adopted quality initiatives listed below.)
- C. The Advisory Councils are responsible for the implementation and oversight of all active quality initiatives.
- D. The Advisory Councils are responsible for the development and recommendation of additional quality initiatives designed to enhance the quality of early learning programs based on documented need in each county served by the Nature Coast.
- E. Quality Initiative programs that provide financial support to purchase materials, equipment and other non-consumable items require the provider to return all materials, and equipment if the provider does not fulfill the requirements of the program or the early learning contract/agreement is terminated within five years of the completion of the quality initiative.
- F. Early learning providers must adhere to the requirements as stated in the School Readiness Provider Agreement and/or the Statewide Provider Agreement (AWI-VPK-20), as applicable, as a condition of receiving School Readiness funds allocated to quality initiative programs. Each local Advisory Council establishes quality initiative programs and supporting budgets as a resource to providers to maintain quality early learning environments. The following establishes the criteria for participation in all quality initiative programs.
 1. Early learning provider must hold a School Readiness Provider Agreement and/or Statewide (VPK) Provider Agreement
 2. Early learning providers must maintain compliance with all areas of the School Readiness Agreement and/or the Statewide (VPK) Provider Agreement.
 3. The School Readiness Provider Agreement and/or Statewide (VPK) Agreement shall not be placed in a probation status.
- G. The following Coalition-funded quality initiative programs are subject to the Quality Initiative Terms and Conditions Agreement:
 1. Accreditation Mini Grants – Participants currently enrolled in the program must fund the remaining costs of accreditation.
 2. Quality Resource Purchases

3. TIP Program (Director or Owner only) - Teachers may continue participation
4. Professional Development Reimbursement Program (Director or Owner only) - Teachers may continue participation
5. Provider Recruitment/expansion -This applies to existing contracted providers who are participating in the program to expand existing services.
6. Any other quality initiative programs designed to support early learning programs (not individual teachers) approved by the Board

H. Adopted Quality Initiatives

1. Teacher Incentive Payment Program: The Teacher Incentive Payment Program is intended to promote longevity in the employment of early learning teachers and to promote teacher training.

The program is designed to provide stipends to eligible School Readiness teachers¹. The stipends are based on the length of time a teacher is employed by a School Readiness provider and the number of additional training hours², approved by the Coalition as eligible training hours³ completed by the teacher up to a maximum of eighteen (18) hours per fiscal year.

In order to participate in the program teachers must meet all of the following:

- a. Be employed for at least one continuous year at the same early learning provider
- b. Be employed by an early learning provider in Citrus, Dixie, Gilchrist, Levy, or Sumter County that holds an Agreement with the Early Learning Coalition of the Nature Coast to provide School Readiness services during the teacher's participation in the Teacher Incentive Payment Program and for at least one year prior to the teacher's enrollment in the TIP Program.

¹ Teacher is defined as any individual including the owner/director that works with children for more than 20 hours per week. This may include owners, directors, lead teachers, assistants, and cooks who work with children during meal times, etc.

² Additional Training Hours are defined as training hours achieved by a teacher that are in addition to the twelve (12) annual in-service training hours required by the Coalition.

³ Eligible Training Hours may be earned in a variety of ways such as participation in national, state, or local conferences relating to children, specialized workshops, or completion of additional modules from Part II of the courses offered by the Child Care Training Program, and are defined as training in any of the following areas:

- Health and safety, including universal precautions
- Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR)
- First Aid (this training may only be taken to meet the in-service requirement once every three years)
- Nutrition
- Child development – typical and atypical
- Behavior management
- Working with families
- Child abuse and neglect
- Child care for multilingual children
- Working with children with disabilities in child care
- Outdoor play safety
- Guidance and discipline
- Computer technology for educational settings
- Leadership development, program management, and staff supervision
- Age appropriate lesson planning
- Literacy
- Other course areas relating to child care, early education, or child care management

- c. Meet the minimum educational requirements to be considered "credentialed" as determined by the Department of Children and Families.

Participants must complete the following steps to receive a stipend:

- a. Complete and submit to the Coalition an ELCNC-45 TIP Program - Training Prior Approval Form and ELCNC-36 W-9 Form for each training at least two weeks prior to the training. Enclose a copy of the training flyer, agenda, or other documentation describing the training content. The Coalition will notify the applicant in writing if the training is approved.
- b. Attend the approved training.
- c. Complete and submit an ELCNC-46 TIP Program - Stipend Request Form attaching a copy of the training certificate or the ELCNC-47 TIP Program - Verification of Completed Training Form to the Coalition.

Payments will be made based on the following matrix and on the availability of funds.

Stipend Awarded Per Training Hour

	Employed for 1 Year	Employed for 2 Years	Employed for 3 Years	Employed for 4 Years	Employed for 5 Years	Employed for 6 Years	Employed for 7 Years	Employed for 8 Years	Employed for 9 Years	Employed for 10 or more Years
Stipend per Additional Training Hour	8.00	9.00	10.00	11.00	12.00	13.00	15.00	20.00	21.00	22.00
Maximum Stipend Amount	\$144	\$152	\$180	\$198	\$216	\$254	\$270	\$360	\$378	\$386

The program will run through April 30th of each fiscal year. This will allow the Coalition to process payments and close the program budget before the close of the fiscal year. All ELCNC-45 TIP Program - Training Prior Approval Forms must be received by April 30th and all ELCNC-46 TIP Program - Stipend Request Forms must be received by June 15th.

- 2. Professional Development/Certification Reimbursement Program: The Professional Development/Certification Reimbursement Program is designed to assist early learning educators that are employed by participating early learning providers with the costs associated with enhancing their knowledge in the field of early education.
 - a. Teachers employed by an early learning provider may submit an ELCNC-42 Professional Development/Certification Reimbursement Program - Preliminary Application and ELCNC-36 W-9 for reimbursement for one or more of the following types of training/coursework/certifications (applications are only accepted from July 1- June 1) (Preliminary Applications are utilized prior to the training for advance approval; however, teachers are responsible to pay all costs up-front):
 - (A) State-mandated training courses, such as the 10 hour and 30 hour courses required by the Department of Children and Families
 - (B) CPR/First Aid, if no classes are available that are free of charge
 - (C) Early childhood conference attendance including lodging (must meet Coalition-approved travel policy; mileage will not be reimbursed)
 - (D) Early childhood-related college courses needed for the Director Credential or a degree in Early Childhood Education/Child Development

- (E) Training and/or courses related to early childhood education
 - (F) CDA and/or FCCPC courses, including courses needed for renewal of certification
 - (G) Fees associated with obtaining a National CDA certification
 - (H) Director Credential course
 - (I) Level two background screenings and other certifications as required by the Department of Children and Families licensing or VPK legislation.
- b. Coalition staff shall review and approve or deny each application. The Coalition shall notify each applicant of the Coalition's decision. (The applicant is responsible for all registration activities and payment of associated fees.)
 - c. Upon completion of the course/conference/certifications, the applicant will submit a completed ELCNC-43 Professional Development/Certifications Reimbursement Program – Application for Reimbursement to the Coalition office for the applicant's county, including documentation of completion and/or attendance, certificate (if applicable), and receipts for all payments.
 - d. Coalition staff shall review and approve or deny the applications. All approved applications shall be processed by the Coalition in a timely manner.
2. Literacy Program: The Literacy Program is designed to help educate parents on the importance of reading to young children and to implement programs that enhance children's literacy skills.
 - a. Coalition staff shall attend community events throughout the year to hand out literacy bags to families with young children. The literacy bags shall be imprinted with the Coalition's logo and contract information and shall include one age-appropriate book, information about the Coalition, and the importance of reading to young children, and other educational materials as available.
 - b. Client Services Counselors will distribute an age-appropriate book to all children that enter the Coalition office.
 - c. The Coalition shall adopt literacy programs that enhance children's literacy skills.
 3. Quality Resources: The Advisory Councils are responsible for studying the effectiveness of the early learning programs operated by the Coalition. The Advisory Council members study a variety of reports provided by Coalition staff. The reports include information on all aspects of the early learning programs as well as reports outlining the progress of School Readiness children through the pre-and-post assessments. The Advisory Councils utilize the reports to target specific areas that may need further development and may direct staff to create a Quality Resources Grant allowing for the reimbursement to early learning providers for the purchase of specific educational materials including curricula addressing the area of development. If the specific material includes curricula, Coalition staff shall assist in the training of the classroom teachers, to ensure that new curricula and programs are implemented correctly to enhance the learning of children. Providers shall not receive a Quality Resources Grant disbursement until they have attended and completed the related training and submitted proof of purchase and proof of goods received to the Coalition's Finance Department.
 4. Accreditation Mini Grant Program: The Accreditation Mini-Grant Program is intended to offer funding to early learning providers to help facilitate and maintain accreditation.
 - a. The grant award may be used for application fees, verification fees, and membership fees if required for accreditation and/or to purchase equipment necessary to meet accreditation requirements. Funding is based on budget allocations determined by the local Advisory Council

and further approved by the Board. The amount awarded to each applicant may vary according to provider need and could vary depending on the numbers of approved applications.

- b. Distribution of grant funds will occur in two parts. The applicant must first apply for accreditation or accreditation renewal (including membership in accrediting agency, if required) before being permitted to apply for the second part of the grant. Prior to applying for the second part of the grant, the provider is expected to conduct a self-assessment to determine the needs of the program as they apply to the particular accreditation requirements. The second part of the grant can be utilized for needed equipment/materials and/or verification/validation fees (if the provider is ready for the verification/validation visit). The Coalition will provide technical assistance to providers as requested during the accrediting process.
- c. Providers may be reimbursed for accreditation fees that have already been paid (if payment was within the current fiscal year and receipts are provided). Grant funds will not be used to reimburse a provider for equipment or services purchased by the provider previous to the grant award.
- d. The provider is required to return, in full, any mini-grant awards received if the provider does not complete accreditation within two years after receiving the verification fee award and purchases or services.
- e. The provider must submit an ELCNC-39 Accreditation Mini Grant Application Part One to apply for the accreditation application fee and the membership fee to the accrediting agency if applicable, and/or the annual report fee for currently accredited providers. Applications must be submitted as directed on the application to the Coalition office by the deadlines on the application. The application must include a copy of the accrediting application as well as the receipt and a copy of the membership application and receipt.
- f. Coalition staff shall review all Accreditation Mini Grant Applications and approve or deny the application based on the guidelines stated above. The Coalition will not award funds more than once for the application fee, if the provider has allowed the application period to expire.
- g. If the application is not in compliance with the guidelines above, or an un-allowable cost was included in the application the Coalition will notify the applicant of the denial and the applicant's right to re-submit a revised application (if prior to the deadline date indicated on the application).
- h. If the Coalition approves the application, Coalition staff shall notify the provider. All approved applications shall be processed by the Coalition in a timely manner.
- i. The provider must submit an ELCNC-40 Accreditation Mini Grant Application Part Two for the verification/validation fee and/or equipment/materials needed to satisfy accreditation requirements. The amount awarded will be determined based on the accreditation mini-grant application and site observation conducted by the Coalition. Applications must be submitted as directed on the application and cannot be submitted until the provider has applied for accreditation and completed a self-study. The provider will receive an approved Accreditation Mini Grant disbursement after the provider submits proof of purchase and proof of goods received to the Coalition's Finance Department.
- j. The Coalition may fully or partially approve an application.
- k. After accreditation has been awarded and documentation of accreditation is received by the Coalition, the provider will be eligible to be reimbursed at Gold Seal rates, as long as this rate does not exceed the rate charged to private pay customers. The effective date of the Gold Seal reimbursement rate is the first complete month following the date that the Coalition was notified of the award and supplied with a copy of the certificate, pending the availability of funds.

- I. The Coalition may apply a funding formula to allocate funds to the applicants, if the requests exceed the amount of available program funding, as outlined in the program guidelines.
5. Provider Recruitment/Expansion Program: Recognizing population growths for children birth to five in each county serviced by the Early Learning Coalition of the Nature Coast, it is important to support initiatives to recruit new early care providers to increase the number of quality early care programs offered to children. The Provider Recruitment/Expansion Program also supports existing early learning providers seeking funds to increase capacity. In accordance with this operating procedure all providers have the opportunity to contract with the Coalition to provide quality, safe environments that promote social, emotional, and academic success. The Coalition is committed to providing the necessary resources to recruit child care facilities and those interested in opening a child care facility in order to offer more opportunities to parents/caregivers for parental choice. To further this commitment the Coalition, through this program, will assist established early learning providers to increase capacity to serve more children which continues to provide parents/caregivers many choices when choosing a quality early learning program. The program will be implemented in accordance with the following:
 - a. Coalition staff will actively contact established child care facilities including Family Child Care Homes to provide information on the benefits of serving as an early learning provider. In addition, staff will work collaboratively with the Department of Children & Families and Workforce Development Boards in targeting those interested in opening a child care facility.
 - b. Coalition staff will meet with the potential early learning provider to provide the following information:
 - (A) Provide an orientation presentation outlining the history of the Coalition and the Early Learning Program
 - (B) Review the School Readiness Provider Agreement and/or the Statewide Provider Agreement (AWI-VPK-20) Application (VPK) with the potential Early Learning Provider
 - (C) Review the Health & Safety Pre-Assessment
 - (D) Review Coalition-approved Provider Observation Tool
 - (E) Review student assessment process
 - (F) Review ELCNC-44 Early Learning Provider Recruitment/Expansion Program Application and assist the provider in completing the application, if applicable.
 - c. The Coalition will conduct the Coalition-approved Health & Safety Pre-Assessment. In addition the early learning provider must certify compliance with program agreement requirements.
 - d. The score earned on the Health & Safety Pre-Assessment, the application information, and staff observation will determine the needs of the provider. The Advisory Council will review recommendations from staff based on the information contained in the Health & Safety Pre-Assessment, or the Department of Children and Families licensing inspection, Provider Recruitment Application, and staff observation. Provider Recruitment/Expansion awards will be approved by the Advisory Council. All funds allocated under this program must be used to enhance the early care environment for children and maintain compliance with Coalition-approved policies & procedures.
 - e. If an early learning provider is currently contracted with the Coalition to provide early learning services the provider is eligible to apply for a provider recruitment/expansion award. To qualify for

this quality initiative program, the early learning provider must target expanding services to increase the capacity of children served. The following procedures will apply:

- i. Coalition staff will review current capacity of the early learning provider's program.
 - ii. Coalition staff will document the anticipated increase based on an interview with the facility director/owner.
 - iii. Coalition staff will conduct an observation visit and document the potential needs based on the area(s) targeted for expansion.
 - iv. Coalition staff will review the early learning provider's observation reports (if applicable) conducted by the Coalition to verify compliance.
- f. Allowable costs for this program include but are not limited to:
- (A) Furniture to support the new learning environment
 - (B) Resource material (e.g. books, dramatic play, crayons, paint, manipulative items, curriculum and other items necessary to support the new learning environment
 - (C) Fencing
 - (D) Outdoor play equipment used for the development of gross motor skills
 - (E) Literature (books and furniture to support literacy activities)
- g. All providers must comply with Coalition and legislative requirements as stated in the provider agreements. Failure to comply may result in the elimination of participation in Coalition funded quality initiative programs as stated in the Quality Initiative Funding Procedure and the Provider School Readiness Agreement Termination/Suspension/Reinstatement procedure described earlier)
- h. All awards allocated under this program must be utilized to enhance the early learning environment and maintain compliance with Coalition-approved policies and procedures and will only be disbursed to providers after the submission of proof of purchase and proof of goods received to the Coalition's Finance Department. Funding for quality programs does not include capital improvements or transportation and may require match funding by the early learning provider. Award amounts will be approved by the Advisory Council. Non-compliance with this program and/or termination of the School Readiness/VPK contract with the Coalition within 1 year of the contract period will result in repayment of funds.
- i. Approved applications shall be processed by the Coalition in a timely manner.
6. The Coalition shall house a Resource Lending Library at the Coalition's offices throughout the Nature Coast service area. Providers and parents shall have the opportunity to access many resource books, educational toys and games, and many children's books. In addition, providers shall have access to Ellison Die Cutting Machines and a wide variety of dies. This quality initiative is implemented annually. A budget recommendation is necessary only when items in the resource room need replenishing or replacing.
7. Provider Alerts: Coalition staff shall develop and distribute provider alerts when it is critical to disseminate time-sensitive information to early learning providers. Email is the preferred distribution method, although providers that do not have email will be mailed or faxed a copy of all alerts.

8. Inclusion Mini Grant Program: The Inclusion Mini Grant Program is intended to offer funding support to early learning providers serving children with a diagnosed special need identified with an active Individual Education Plan (IEP) developed by the local school system or a licensed physician/therapist. In some cases, it may be necessary to provide special materials or equipment for children with disabilities to assist them in functioning in an inclusive early childhood environment.
 - a. Awards for the Inclusion Mini-Grant Program are based on budget allocations determined by the local Advisory Council and further approved by the Board. The amount awarded to each applicant may vary according to the individual needs of each provider. Providers may be reimbursed for equipment or services previously purchased if payment was made during the current fiscal year. Requests will be presented to the local Advisory Council for approval at their next regularly scheduled meeting prior to disbursement of funds.
 - b. Awards may be requested as a need is identified, subject to availability of funds. There is no set deadline for application. Early Learning providers may submit the ELCNC-41 Inclusion Mini Grant Program Application.
 - c. Allowable costs for this program include but are not limited to:
 - (A) Special materials or equipment needed to supplement daily routine
 - (B) Special training to support requirements listed on child's IEP
 - (C) Resources to assist teachers with understanding how to respond to certain behaviors/situations
 - d. The applicant must be an early learning provider contracted to provide School Readiness or Voluntary Prekindergarten services. The applicant must be in full compliance with contract deliverables and serving a child with an active IEP developed by the local school system or documentation of a special need provided by a licensed physician/therapist.
 - e. Disbursement of approved awards will occur after the provider submits proof of purchase and proof of goods received to the Coalition's Finance Department.
9. Grandparent Program – to be written
10. Quality Initiative Surplus Plan – to be written