

State Early Childhood Education Grant
Senate Bill 2151
Frequently Asked Questions
[Updated 3/24/2016]

The Early Childhood Education Grant Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document is developed for school districts and early learning programs to accompany the guidance put forth by the North Dakota Department of Commerce (Commerce). This is a collaborative process with Commerce, the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (NDDPI) and the North Dakota Department of Human Services (NDDHS).

Q: What is the Purpose of the Early Childhood Community Coalition?

A: Each Coalition is tasked to plan for the early learning community involvement and partnership together to meet the needs of families with pre-kindergarten aged children. The superintendent is required to call this first meeting of early learning providers. Some topics of this meeting include the development of the governing board, the allocation and utilization of funds, and the level of school board participation.

Q: Who is charged with organizing the first coalition meeting?

A: All North Dakota school superintendents are required to call the initial community meeting to create an Early Childhood Community Coalition. This meeting is recommended to take place this fall. The application and guidance have been published by Commerce at www.workforce.nd.gov/workforce/EarlyChildhoodEducationGrantProgram/.

Q: How to local school superintendents find all providers in their community?

A: Currently, Commerce, NDDPI, and NDDHS are working with Child Care Aware of North Dakota to provide you with access to contact information for the early childhood programs (licensed DHS programs) in your area. To acquire the most up-to-date listing, please visit www.ndchildcare.org/info/earlyedgrants.html or contact Verla Jung, Assistant Director, Child Care Aware of North Dakota by email at verla@ndchildcare.org or by phone at 701-476-6864 or 800-997-8515 ext. 6864. To access information for local Head Start programs, please contact Mark Schaefer, at the ND Head Start State Collaboration Office by email at marschaefer@nd.gov or by phone at 701-328-1711 or 800-472-2622.

Q: Does the school district verify which parents qualify for free and reduced lunches or is that done by each pre-kindergarten program?

A: The parent/guardian letter and the free and reduced application form is located at www.workforce.nd.gov/workforce/EarlyChildhoodEducationGrantProgram/ on the Commerce website. The letter may be formatted to fit your school or program logo and contact information. The free and reduced lunch verification will be completed by each family in the program to determine eligibility for the program funding. It is up to each program to collect and enroll the eligible children in the State Automated Reporting System (STARS) and mark either the free or reduced lunch box. Further STARS reporting information will be supplied to awarded programs.

Q: Are we obligated to provide meals (breakfast and lunch)?

A: In order to determine funding eligibility, families will need to complete the free and reduced lunch form and submit to the school district or early learning program. This does not mean the program will be required to serve meals. This process is only used to determine funding eligibility. It is up to each early learning program to decide whether to provide meals within their program.

Q: Where is the grant application, guidance, and requirements located?

A: The application, guidance and requirements will be posted on the Commerce website at www.workforce.nd.gov/workforce/EarlyChildhoodEducationGrantProgram/. The NDDPI will have a link on the Early Childhood website www.nd.gov/dpi/Administrators/FTP/Programs_Initiatives/ECE/ that will also directly take users to the Commerce early childhood grant site.

Q: How will the school district or early learning program receive payments?

A: The program or school district will receive quarterly payments based off of monthly enrollment data collected in the STARS. Each program awarded will receive STARS login information along with directions to enter the child enrollment information. Commerce will make the payments, to the entity awarded, based off of the number of eligible children enrolled in the program each quarter. Funded programs will request reimbursement to Commerce using the Quarterly Reimbursement Request Form, located on the Commerce website at www.workforce.nd.gov/workforce/EarlyChildhoodEducationGrantProgram/.

Q: Are communities required to apply for this grant?

A: No, it is a local decision whether school districts or community pre-kindergarten programs apply for the funds. Some programs, even though they are coalition members, may choose to not apply for the funds. At no time under this law are programs required to apply for the grant funds.

Q: How does a child care become approved through NDDPI?

A: Child care providers, along with any other early learning program offering pre-kindergarten will apply to the NDDPI at www.nd.gov/dpi/SchoolStaff/FTP/ECE/ to start the approval process. The Pre-kindergarten Approval form is located at www.nd.gov/dpi/uploads/documents/430/sfn60869.pdf on the department's website. This required information may be sent to Angie Thomas at afthomas@nd.gov.

Q: What if a school district doesn't call a meeting of all early learning providers? How will districts be made aware of this requirement and will DPI monitor to make sure that all districts do have the initial meeting?

A: All school districts will be made aware of this requirements through various methods such as newsletters, email correspondence, and during professional development opportunities. The law requires each school superintendent to call this first early childhood meeting. During the program approval process, the applicant will need to provide an assurance the meeting was called. It is anticipated that a list of school districts that did and did not call this meeting will be generated to provide the 65th Legislative Assembly. It will be up to that Assembly to determine the level of monitoring or repercussions for those school districts that didn't meet the requirement.

Q: How many school board members are required to be on the community coalition?

A: The law does not indicate the composition of the coalition or state how many school board members are required to participate on the coalition. It does however state that the board of the school district in which the coalition of service providers is located shall provide advice and guidance to the coalition in all matters pertaining to the law. Therefore, this is a local community decision as to how many school board members must participate.

Q: What types of reports are due?

A: There are reporting requirements involved in a program's participation. All reporting requirements are explained in the early childhood grant application guidance document.

- Pre-kindergarten Approval by the NDDPI. www.nd.gov/dpi/Administrators/FTP/Programs_Initiatives/ECE/
- Identification of free or reduced lunch for each child enrolling in the program under the Richard B Russell National School Lunch program.
www.workforce.nd.gov/workforce/EarlyChildhoodEducationGrantProgram/
- Once each calendar quarter, any provider receiving the funds, must notify the parent the total amount of the grant that was awarded to the provider for that quarter. The Quarterly Reimbursement Request Form, along with supporting documentation according to the guidance should be submitted to Commerce. This form is located at www.workforce.nd.gov/workforce/EarlyChildhoodEducationGrantProgram/ on the Commerce website.
- Each eligible child must be enrolled monthly in the NDDPI STARS. Further STARS guidance may be accessed at <https://secure.apps.state.nd.us/dpi/stars/Login.aspx> to obtain user access.
- Report to NDDPI the pre and post assessment scores during the funded year. Further information as to where to report this and the due date will be forthcoming.

Q: Do you have to charge tuition to be eligible to apply for the grant?

A: It is a local decision whether or not to charge tuition. Some school districts and early learning programs historically have not charged tuition while others have. Each community coalition will need to assess their community needs to determine if charging tuition is in the best interest of the children and families they serve. There are multiple funding factors to take into consideration when making this decision. Whether or not a district uses federal funding may impact this decision.

Q: Can a public school district apply for the funding if they already provide pre-kindergarten? If so, do they need to increase the number of children they serve, or is the intention to stop charging tuition?

A: Yes, a public school district may apply for the funding if they are already providing pre-kindergarten. It is the community coalition's decision whether or not to increase the number of children served. It is further up to the coalition if the pre-kindergarten programs are going to stop charging tuition, or put the funds to a different programming need. It is anticipated this will be a different need for each North Dakota community coalition.

Q: Can the grant funds be used to add "slots" to a pre-existing program?

A: Yes, the funds may be used to add slots if the early childhood community coalition determines the pre-existing program or classroom has the capacity to increase enrollment. It is up to the local community if purchasing slots or creating a new program is in the best interest of the children and families.

Q: Is this the one and only opportunity we will get to apply for this grant?

A: The 64th Legislative Assembly has allocated funds from July 1, 2016 through June 30, 2017. In order to have additional funding, the 65th Legislative Assembly will have to make that decision through a new bill passage. At this time, the application due date outlined in the guidance is the only opportunity to apply for the grant funds.

Q: How much money will this bring into my district or program?

A: The Early Childhood Grant program is designed to have the funding follow the student. During the community's planning year, each community will need to take action to estimate the number of potential children to be served during the 2016-2017 school year. It is recommended to highly encourage families to complete the Free and Reduced Lunch form to ensure that programs can best estimate their budget. Awarded early learning programs and school districts that enroll four year old children that qualify for free lunch are eligible for \$2,000 and those that qualify for reduced lunch are eligible for \$1,000 during the 2016-2017 school year.

Q: Is it a conflict to do a blended program?

A: The Early Childhood Grant program funds may be used in conjunction with other state, local and federal dollars. It is common practice in North Dakota to utilize multiple funding sources to create a high quality pre-kindergarten program. Some examples include using Title I funds and tuition or special education, Title I, and local funds. Please keep in mind that programs using federal funds will have additional requirements that must be adhered to.

Q: Are we obligated to provide transportation if awarded?

A: No, school districts and programs awarded the early childhood funding are not required to provide transportation. It is up to each community coalition to determine the need for transportation and if the grant funds would adequately cover the cost. If a district or program is already providing transportation, the funds could possibly be used to offset some of the current cost to provide this service.

Q: Is there a pre and post assessment to determine child outcomes?

A: Although this is not a requirement in Senate Bill 2151, the NDDPI is required to study the impact of this new state funded program through Senate Bill 2031. Many early learning programs throughout North Dakota are currently using some form of an assessment to determine child outcomes. Once assessment(s) has been determined, further information will be released.

Q: Will there be technical assistance for districts who are new to the early childhood planning process?

A: Electronic guidance documents are being created in collaboration by Commerce and NDDPI. These will be posted on the Commerce website with links on the NDDPI early childhood website. Commerce, NDDPI, and NDDHS are knowledgeable in the program and will provide on-going technical assistance to programs as needed.

Q: What if a 5-year-old enrolls in my program, are they eligible for funding?

A: Enrolling a 5-year-old child is allowable and they can certainly participate in the program. However, programs that enroll children that turn 4 on or after August 1 during the 2016-2017 school year, that are deemed eligible for free and reduced lunch may apply and accept funding for them. If the child turns five during that school year, the child is still eligible to generate funding.

Q: What teaching qualifications are required?

A: North Dakota teachers must have one of the following to be considered highly qualified to teach pre-kindergarten under the North Dakota Education Standards and Practices Board (ESPB). For further information on highly qualified teaching credentials, please contact ESPB at 701-328-9641.

- B3 license
- Elementary education major and an early childhood endorsement
- Elementary education major and a minor in early childhood education
- Elementary education major and a kindergarten endorsement. A plan of study may be granted for the kindergarten endorsement which will allow a teacher two years to complete the required coursework for the endorsement.
- K-8 or K-6 licenses are no longer issued by ESPB. However, those who already have the K-8 or K-6 licenses may teach pre-kindergarten.

Q: Who do I call for questions?

A: Please contact Wayde Sick at the North Dakota Department of Commerce at wsick@nd.gov or (701) 328-5345. At the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction please contact Tara Bitz at tbitz@nd.gov or (701) 328-4646.