**Preschool Scholarship Program Policies**

Preschool Support Funding shall be used for early care, health, and education programs to assist low-income parents with tuition for preschool and other supportive services for children ages three, four, and five who are not attending kindergarten. ECIMC must not supplant state or federal funds. Examples of state or federal funds that need to be considered include:

• State-administered child care assistance for eligible families;

• State-funded preschool programs (Shared Visions, SWVPP for 4 year olds);

• Head Start for eligible children.

**PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS**

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

Thus, the ECIMC Board mandates that all participating preschool programs must implement evidence-based, quality practices and services with positive outcomes for families. Programs will be required to demonstrate proof of and be achieving high quality program standards that include one or more of the following:

* Accreditation by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
* Head Start Performance Standards
* Achieved a Level 3, 4, or 5 on Iowa’s Quality Rating System (QRS). If a program has achieved a Level 1 or 2 only, the program must must demonstrate proof that they are actively working to achieve the next level.
* Verified in Iowa’s Quality Preschool Program Standards (IQPPS).

• Utilization of Curriculum –Participating preschool programs must be utilizing a research or evidenced–based curriculum and will be required to identify the name of the curriculum on mid-year and annual reports.

• Utilization of an Assessment –Participating preschool programs are required to assess individual children using a research or evidenced-based measurement to determine if children are at age-appropriate levels. At the end of the service, programs are required to report the number of children that are at age-appropriate levels or exhibiting growth toward an age-appropriate level along with identifying the assessment tool used in determining this.

• Agreement – Programs will be required to sign an agreement acknowledging agreement to the terms and policies of the Preschool Scholarship Program.

**CHILD ELIGIBILITY**

• Boundaries of Preschool Scholarship Recipients – Eligible children shall be residents of Muscatine County. If a child lives outside of the boundaries of Muscatine County, the ECIMC Director shall first contact the ECI area that includes the county of residence of the applying child/family to determine if funding is available to support that child/family from that ECI area and to avoid duplication of payment. The ECIMC board will not fund children in programs that are living outside Muscatine County unless special circumstances exist and may be handled on a case to case basis with approval from the board.

• Age of Child – A child is eligible if they are three years old or older on September 15th of the current fiscal year. A child may become eligible if they turn three after September 15th during the current fiscal year at the Director’s discretion based on available funding and/or special circumstances existing on a case to case basis. Priority will be given to those children with birthdays on or prior to September 15th.

• Poverty Guidelines – Eligible children will have a combined family gross income of 200% or below of federal poverty levels. Current guidelines for the start of the ECI state fiscal year will be guidelines for the entire fiscal year unless otherwise directed through Board action.

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

• Proof of Income – A copy of two recent paystubs for each parent living in the home along with other supporting documentation for each source of income shall be included with the application. Examples include but are not limited to, tax returns, W-2 forms, a DHS Notice of Decision of Benefits for FIP, verification of Child Support, Social Security, or SSI.

• Application Submittal -- A child’s application for scholarship consideration will not be processed until a completed application and necessary support documentation has been received. In special circumstances scholarships can be made retro active 30 days from the day the application was received by the ECIMC Director.

• Follow-Up – The ECIMC Director shall contact the family/guardian of a child if an incomplete application is received via the contact information on the child’s application. If after contact is made and the ECIMC Director has not received return contact from the family/guardian within 7 days, a letter outlining the information needed will be sent to the family. If sufficient information is not received within 30 days, the scholarship application will be considered denied and no further follow-up will be made.

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

**PARTICIPATION PROCESSES**

• Release of Applications – Preschool scholarship applications will be released in May before the start of the upcoming preschool year. All eligible preschool programs will be emailed the application and asked to provide a copy to all incoming preschool children and their families. Applications can be submitted at any time. Notice of approval will be determined by funding processes from the Muscatine ECI Board. Parents are required to sign the application acknowledging terms of the Preschool Scholarship Program.

• Scholarship Reimbursement Rates – Reimbursement rates will be reviewed and determined annually in the spring prior to the start of the school year by the ECIMC Program Committee. Reimbursement will only be made up to the amount charged by the preschool to the child and their family and will be made directly to the preschool. A copayment may be required by the preschool and will be the responsibility of the parent/guardian paid directly to the preschool.

• Notification – The ECIMC Director will inform parents/guardians and the attending preschool of the scholarship award or denial.

• Program Attendance –Preschool attendance will be monitored by the preschool and submitted to the ECIMC Director monthly along with the claim voucher. At least 85% attendance will be required for participation in the scholarship program. If the child is sick and misses school, these days will not be included in the 85% attendance requirement if written notification from a health care provider is provided. If attendance falls below 85%, the preschool scholarship program manager will give one warning to parents. The second time attendance falls below 85%, the child may be terminated from the scholarship program. Full preschool tuition will then be the responsibility of the parent/guardian.

• Mid Month Exit to Programming – if a child exits the scholarship program mid-month, the Preschool program will be required to inform the ECIMC Director with the monthly billing and payment for the child pro-rated accordingly.

• Change of Status -- Participating preschools will be responsible for immediately notifying the ECIMC Director if a child is no longer eligible for ECI funding or becomes eligible for other preschool services or funding.

• Payment –Attendance forms and monthly claims must be received by the 10th of the month to the preschool scholarship manager/ECIMC Director. If attendance and invoices are not received by the 10th of the month, the preschool will have to wait until the next month for reimbursement.

Preschool programs will also need to report on the number of children that have been screened for developmental delays and of those children, the number of children that have been referred for additional services or treatment. Preschool programs will also have to report any other performance measures required by Early Childhood Iowa.

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

**EXCEPTIONS TO POLICY** –Exceptions to any of the current policies may be requested to the ECIMC Board/Director on an individual basis.

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