



Early Childhood Connector Call | January 2025

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About Early Childhood Connector Calls

On a quarterly basis, the state hosts Connector Calls with child care providers and early educators to answer questions related to legislation, licensing, programs, grants and more. The purpose of the call is to answer clarifying questions that providers may have. Calls are hosted online on WebEx, recorded and [available on the Early Childhood Connector webpage](#) for those that weren't able to attend. Translations to the questions answered during the call are also available online.

Educators of all types are invited to these calls. We welcome questions from school-based early childhood programs, licensed programs, certified centers, exempt programs, legally nonlicensed providers, Family, Friend and Neighbor caregivers, and individuals interested in starting a child care business.

Connector Call Questions

Great Start Compensation Support Payment Program

- Are there any changes to the Great Start Compensation Support Payment Program as we move into 2025?
 - Answer: In the Provider Hub, centers are asked to share baseline compensation information in their program's first application and then on a quarterly basis moving forward.

The \$375 per FTE amount is confirmed through June 2026. Information about award amounts by Compensation Support round can be found under the Payment Amounts section [of this website](#).

By accepting Great Start Compensation payments, providers agree to document and share how they used funds. The Use of Funds Report will collect information on how Great Start Compensation recipients are using the funds received and the impact of those funds. This report is required by the legislature and will be submitted once each year. Programs will have ninety (90) days to complete and submit their report.

- Sample Use of Funds Report: [State or Tribally Licensed Family Child Care Providers \(PDF\)](#)
- Sample Use of Funds Report: [State or Tribally Licensed Centers and State Certified Centers \(PDF\)](#)

Timeline for access to Use of Funds Reports:

- April 2025: Certified and licensed centers who first accepted Great Start Compensation funding in October 2023 will be given access to their Use of Funds Report in the Provider Hub.
- Beginning May 2025: Certified and licensed centers who first accepted Great Start Compensation funding after October 2023 will be given access on a monthly rolling basis to their Use of Funds Report in the Provider Hub.
- In the future: In late spring 2025, licensed family child care providers and providers licensed by a Tribal Nation will be given access to their Use of Funds Report through an e-mail based reporting process.

Child Care Access

- Are there state funds available for nonprofit organizations to help support families with subsidies or assistance in accessing child care?
 - Answer: The largest grant opportunity for nonprofits to support families with information and access to child care is our statewide child care resource and referral grant. The grant for statewide child care resource and referral services was recently awarded again to Child Care Aware of Minnesota. This grant funds parent information services and hosting and maintenance of parentaware.org.

Child Safety and Permanency, which is another division within the Department of Children, Youth, and Families, oversees a Community Resource Center (CRC) grant program. The program provides funding to nonprofit agencies throughout the state to support family stability and economic well-being, including accessing resources for child care. CRC navigators use MNbenefits to help families, and CCAP is included in the MNbenefits application.

The Family, Friend and Neighbor (FFN) grant program provides state and federal funding to community-based organizations, including nonprofit organizations, to support informal caregivers and the families they serve. One allowable grantee activity under [Sec. 142D.24 MN Statutes](#) is to provide FFN caregivers and children's families with information about high-quality, community-based early care and learning programs and financial assistance available to the families, including but not limited to child care assistance under this chapter and early learning scholarships. Currently 20 FFN grantees serve communities around Minnesota with some carrying out this activity. Future grant rounds will be funded through a Request for Proposal process.

COVID-19 Testing Supplies

- During the pandemic, the state provided free COVID-19 test kits to child care and schools. Are supplies still available?
 - Answer: This program sunset in 2023. All Minnesotans are encouraged to visit the [MDH test webpage](#) to learn more about COVID-19 testing. You can also order two free at-home kits from www.covidtests.gov if your household limit has not been reached. A hotline (1-833-431-2053) is available to assist people with using this order form, if needed.

Licensing

- A provider shared that the new child care immunization form is confusing. Can the old form still be used or how can providers make sure they are using the new form correctly?
 - Answer: Documentation of immunizations must be in a child's record. An immunization printout from a medical facility is a medical record and will meet the documentation requirement. It does not need a signature. This information can also be obtained through the Minnesota Immunization information Connection (MIIC) maintained by the Department of Health. The only required form for recording immunizations is for a medical or non-medical exemption. [This form](#)

[is available on MDH's website](#). It would be the responsibility of the parent to complete the form and provide it to the child care provider.

- Despite the Minnesota weather, programs are on the move. One child care program takes a daily walking field trip to explore nearby nature. Sometimes a child enrolled in the program refuses to go on the walking field trip. When this happens, a teacher stays with this child in the licensed space and they engage with the classroom materials until the group returns from the field trip. Is this considered a separation and requires a report to be completed?
 - Answer: No, this would not be considered a separation from the group and would not need a separation report to be completed.
- Another provider is wondering: why do we have to have so much mulch in our play areas?
 - Answer: For child care centers and family child care programs, there are no current requirements in Rule or Statute about fall zones or the type of cushion material, such as mulch, that is required. We recommend that providers follow the manufacturer's instructions to playground equipment (which may say things like do not place on grass) and that the surface under and around equipment is adequate to protect children from injury should they fall. A good resource for information on this topic is the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission's [Public Playground Safety Handbook](#).
- If a child care program is unable to reach their licensor, who should they contact?
 - Answer: For licensed or certified child care centers, there is a licensor on call Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. who can help you when your licensor is unavailable. You can reach our on-call licensor by calling 651-431-6015 or by sending an email to dhs.ccc.licensing@state.mn.us.

For family child care, if a child care provider is unable to reach their county licensor, they should contact their county supervisor or other county contact. If they are still unable to reach their licensor, they can contact DHS.
- When and where will the required transportation training BEST be available?
 - Answer: The Minnesota Department of Public Safety (DPS) has changed the delivery of child passenger restraint training from CARS to BEST as of January 1, 2025. BEST has two training components – an online portion and an in-person portion with a DPS certified BEST facilitator. The online portion of the training is met through completion of [Car Seat Basics](#). A new website, [Buckle Up MN](#), shows where providers can find a BEST facilitator for the in-person portion of the training.
- If the proposed legislation for "not repeating training in a 5-year period" passes, does that mean family child care providers would not be able to take Supervising for Safety for Family Child Care repeatedly (every year) and have it count towards training hours?
 - Answer: This may be referencing the draft standards. DHS is currently working on a second public draft that incorporates feedback received and will be released to the public soon. There is currently no proposed legislation from DHS to implement "not repeating training in a 5-year

period.” DHS/DCYF will provide guidance on specific questions such as this when a final draft is passed by the legislature, expected during the 2026 legislative session.

- Will the current legislation around aides being able to be alone for 25% of the day be extended after June 2025?
 - Answer: This legislation was for centers only, and the current aide language will expire July 1, 2025, unless the legislature acts this year to change it. DHS is not bringing a legislative proposal on this topic.

Ombuds Services

- Family child care has an ombudsman to support them, do centers have someone like that as well?
 - Answer: The Ombudsperson for Family Child Care Providers is a position created by the legislature in 2021 based on a recommendation from the Family Child Care Task Force. At this time, there is not an ombudsperson for child care centers.

Early Learning Services

- Recently school-based pre-k eligibility changed. When statute indicates an eligibility can include "is defined as at-risk by the school district," what exactly does this mean? Is there a list or MDE guidance around "at-risk" definitions districts are supposed to use to determine eligibility?
 - Answer: This language was intended to give school districts flexibility in determining how to qualify children for VPK and school readiness funding. Information gathered from families and the district community can be used to determine what additional factors are impacting families and children who are otherwise eligible to attend their program. Examples of circumstances for this category might include:
 - Family hardship or extenuating circumstances that make paying for care or accessing other prekindergarten options difficult.
 - Community determined risk factors.
 - Limited access to other care options due to transportation, availability, or distance.
 - If the family qualifies for funding under PWII at the 85% State Median Income (SMI) eligibility level, particularly if there are other risk factors present.
- Since extensive and highly regarded brain research now highlights the significance of the first two years, what additional plans are being made to identify infants and toddlers before 18 months and provide early intervention?
 - Answer: We partner with other state agencies around specific conditions that are known to hinder development, many of which first show up in the first 18 months of life, if not at birth. The state also funds and supports the regional Interagency Early Intervention Committees that do outreach to primary referral sources, such as health clinics, county social services and ECE programs. There's also funding from our federal Part C grant that supports a public awareness campaign that includes materials, billboards, radio ads and social media that are both statewide and regionally specific to help get the word out about the importance of early intervention.