

Children's Issues Series: Subsidized Child Care

Who oversees child care in Massachusetts?

The Mass. Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) licenses and regulates child care providers and administers the system for child care subsidies for parents. EEC has contracts with regional agencies called Child Care and Referral Agencies (CCR&R) that work with families seeking child care and provides child care vouchers.

To find the Child Care Resource and Referral Agency for a particular town see:
<http://www.eec.state.ma.us/ChildCareSearch/CCRRA.aspx>

The EEC policy guide can be found at:
http://www.eec.state.ma.us/docs1/regs_policies/201107011_policy_guide.pdf

Subsidized child care regulations can be found at:
<http://www.mass.gov/edu/docs/eec/regs-policies/sub-cc-regs.pdf>

How does a parent qualify for subsidized child care?

Generally, a family's income must be at or below 50% of the State Median Income and the parent must have a service need. Families in which the parent or child has a documented disability may qualify with incomes up to 85% of the State Median Income. To check financial eligibility, see:
http://www.childcarechoicesofboston.org/parents/files/slidingfee_scale_2007.pdf

A service need is a reason EEC recognizes that a parent needs care for their child. In a two parent family, both parents must have a service need. A service need includes: working, doing a training or education program, looking for a job (for up to 8 weeks); and in some circumstances, maternity leave. EEC requires 20 hours of service need for part-time care (of up to 30 hours per week) and 30 hours of service need for full-time care (of up to 50 hours per week). However, service need for college courses is based on the number of credits instead of the scheduled hours of class. Once parents have established a part-time service need, they can get an additional 5 hours per week of coverage to allow for travel time between the child care center and their job/activity site.

In addition, child care may be available if a child or parent has a documented disability or the family is verified as homeless by the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD). EEC periodically sets out other special priorities for child care depending on funding, so check the EEC policy guide for updates.

An additional form of child care, called "Supportive Care" is available to families with open DCF cases when there is an open case for abuse or neglect and the service plan provides for child care. Eligibility for this kind of care is determined by DCF.

What's the difference between a voucher and a contract slot?

A voucher is a subsidy that a parent can take with them to any licensed provider. Some providers have subsidies attached to slots in their particular programs, called "contract

slots.” To be eligible for either a voucher or a contract slot, a family must apply to the centralized waitlist

What kind of child care does a voucher cover?

In general, the childcare must be licensed. It could be in a school or group center or could be in a setting where a provider cares for a few children in her home.

However, a parent may also choose informal care provided either by a close relative or by a friend if the friend passes a criminal background check and provides care in the child’s home. The informal caregiver must attend an orientation provided by the CCR&R. The rates paid to informal caregivers is much lower than for licensed providers.

How does the waitlist work? How and when should a parent get on it?

There is a centralized waitlist for subsidized child care (referred to generally as income eligible child care). The waitlist is very long, roughly 26,000 families, and can literally take years to move up. For that reason, it is a good idea to apply for the waitlist long before a family has an actual need. EEC will review eligibility at the time a family’s name comes to the top of the waitlist.

There is one centralized waitlist for the whole state, maintained by EEC. Families apply through their CCR&R or the regional EEC office. They must renew their spot on the waitlist every year by responding to a letter from the CCR&R.

BUT:

Families who are eligible for child care through the TAFDC program have NO waitlist and can get child care immediately. (See below.)

How much can a parent expect to have to pay?

Families receiving TAFDC have no co-pays, but other families have to pay a sliding amount based on their income and family size. EEC has published a chart:
http://www.childcarechoicesofboston.org/parents/files/slidingfee_scale_2007.pdf

What is DTA child care? How does that work?

Families receiving TAFDC who are working, going to a school or training program, participating in approved job search activities, or doing community service are eligible for free subsidized child care right away through the TAFDC Employment Services Program. This is called “ESP Child Care.” DTA determines eligibility. There is NO waitlist for this child care.

To get ESP child care, a parent must bring proof that they are enrolled in an activity, and the dates and hours to DTA. DTA then writes a “referral” which essentially tells EEC that DTA is paying for this child care. A parent must bring this referral to the CCR&R, which then writes the voucher for the provider the parent chooses.

What happens when a parent stops receiving TAFDC? Can they keep the child care?

Once TAFDC stops, a parent can continue to receive child care for up to 6 months if it is for an education and training program that DTA approved while the parent was still getting TAFDC. (If the program finishes sooner, the child care ends.)

In addition, if a parent is employed, then DTA will continue to provide a referral for child care for up to 12 months from the date the TAFDC case closed without the parent going on a waitlist. This is called “Transitional Child Care.” The parent will have a co-pay based on income, but will not have to go on a waitlist. This is true if the parent works at any time in the 12 months right after the TAFDC case closes. (If a parent gets TCC because of employment, additional hours can be added for school or training. But training or school alone do not qualify the parent for TCC.) If the parent is still working at the end of the 12 months, the parent rolls over into regular (“Income Eligible”) subsidized child care without ever going on a waitlist.

Advocacy Tip: Especially since the waitlist for subsidized child care is so long, it may be worth it to a family to get TAFDC even if they are eligible for very little money, if it means getting a child care subsidy right away.

Advocacy Tip: DTA can provide a referral for child care for up to 2 weeks before an activity starts. This lead time is important to making sure the parent can select the provider, deal with the process required by the CCR&R (including an appointment), and to transition the child to the provider before starting their own work or school activity.

Advocacy Tip: For parents on TAFDC who are in education or training programs, DTA should authorize 2 hours of TAFDC child care for each hour of class time. This added time is to allow parents to do homework and study.

Are there any other options?

While not substitutes for child care, keep in mind HeadStart and Early Intervention.

What if a parent needs transportation for their child to and from the child care provider?

Transportation can be added to the voucher in certain circumstances. The policy is set forth in the EEC Policy Guide. Currently, the policy is in **Appendix Q** at:

http://www.eec.state.ma.us/docs1/regs_policies/201107011_policy_guide.pdf

***This information is general in nature and not intended as legal advice.
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