



# Southern Regional Initiative on Child Care: Action Plan to Improve Access to Child Care Assistance for Low-Income Families in the South

## Survey Results on the Status of Implementation Efforts September 2002

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**Goal 1 - Federal, State, Local and Private Funds Should Be Sufficient to Meet 100% of Need for Direct Child Care Assistance, Based on Initial Eligibility Levels at 85% of the State Median Income. Redetermination Levels Should Allow Families to Retain Child Care Assistance Until They Reach 100% of State Median Income.**

***(Action Step 1.1) - Educate federal and state policymakers on the need for action.***

2002 Response:

Discussion with the DHS Director and agency staff continues regarding proposed improvements to the subsidy system.

2001 Response:

State policymakers attended two strategy sessions conducted by the Southern Institute on Children and Families on April 10 and 11, 2000 in Oklahoma City to review strengths and areas needing improvement in the Oklahoma child care subsidy system.

***(Action Step 1.2) - Educate the business community on the need for leadership in achieving state, federal and community resources to meet 100% of need.***

2002 Response:

Business leaders with Oklahomans for School Readiness are kept updated on the subsidy program.

2001 Response:

Business leaders were made aware of subsidy issues during the Southern Institute's strategy session and as members of the Governor's Task Force on Early Childhood Education.

***(Action Step 1.3) - Increase federal funding for the Child Care and Development Fund to fulfill current policy allowing federal matching funds for child care assistance up to 85% of the state median income.***

2002 Response:

2001 Response:

TANF funds were utilized to extend eligibility for the subsidy program to up to 82% of the state median income.

***(Action Step 1.4) - Increase state funding to provide child care subsidies to all eligible families who seek child care assistance.***

2002 Response:

We continue to serve all eligible families who seek child care assistance.

2001 Response:

While state funding has not increased, the state is currently serving all eligible families who seek child care assistance.

***(Action Step 1.5) - Mobilize federal, state and community resources in support of families who need child care assistance.***

2002 Response:

2001 Response:

Oklahoma is utilizing TANF-direct and TANF-transfer funds to support child care assistance.

Oklahoma is modeling the effectiveness of public-private partnerships through a network of thirteen communities that are linked through Oklahoma Success By 6®. Each of the thirteen pilot communities are working to establish local public-private partnerships. With staff support provided by Oklahoma Success By 6®, many partners, both from state agencies and the private sector, are providing technical assistance and training to the mobilizing communities.

**Goal 2: States and Communities Should Broaden Their Child Care Eligibility and Subsidy Policies to Meet the Economic, Work and Education Needs of Families**

***(Action Step 2.1) - Establish co-payments not to exceed 10% of gross family income.***

2002 Response:

2001 Response:

Families with one child in care pay a maximum co-payment of 9.8%; however, a family with 4 children in care could pay a family co-payment of up to 16%. A committee is meeting to review ways to reduce co-payments for larger families.

***(Action Step 2.2) - Provide child care assistance to students who qualify under the income guidelines.***

2002 Response:

2001 Response:

Child Care assistance has always been available for students for two to four years of college.

***(Action Step 2.3) - Explore broad use of income exemptions to address affordability of child care.***

2002 Response:

2001 Response:

There are 20 different sources of income that are exempt from income calculations.

***(Action Step 2.4) - Eliminate asset testing (e.g. automobile or savings account) from criteria for child care assistance.***

2002 Response:

2001 Response:

Oklahoma does not do asset testing as a criteria for assistance.

***(Action Step 2.5) - Index income eligibility levels for inflation.***

2002 Response:

2001 Response:

N/A

**Goal 3: Outreach Initiatives Should Be Designed and Aggressively Implemented to Assure That Families Have Accessible and Easy-To-Understand Information on Child Care Assistance and Are Provided Assistance in Applying.**

***(Action Step 3.1) - Provide information on child care subsidies through multiple sources, venues and the media.***

2002 Response:

2001 Response:

The application for child care assistance was added to information on child care services on the DHS website.

***(Action Step 3.2) - Ensure that information is accurate, family friendly, employer friendly, culturally sensitive and provided in multiple languages, as appropriate.***

2002 Response:

2001 Response:

N/A

***(Action Step 3.3) - Present information in a manner that would remove the stigma associated with receiving subsidies.***

2002 Response:

2001 Response:

A new outreach campaign will describe the child care assistance program as tuition scholarships.

***(Action Step 3.4) - Provide literature and assistance to help parents make informed provider choices.***

2002 Response:

Due to on-going outreach, between 8,000 and 10,000 people access the Child Care Locator each month.

2001 Response:

County assistance and licensing staff provide parents with a brochure and a video on choosing child care; the agency web page includes a Child Care Locator that lists all child care facilities by type and services provided; there is a statewide network of resources and referral agencies that assist parents; and there's a public awareness campaign to encourage good child care choices.

***(Action Step 3.5) - Coordinate ongoing and strategic outreach activities among common organizations and providers.***

2002 Response:

2001 Response:

A new application packet was distributed for display at a variety of locations, i.e., child care settings, libraries, business.

***(Action Step 3.6) - Offer cross-training and information to providers, community organizations, faith organizations, and state agencies to inform them about child care assistance programs and how to assist families in filing applications.***

2002 Response:

2001 Response:

Providers receive training when signing an agreement to accept subsidy children; success By Six community organizations are provided with information on the child care assistance program; and a workshop on child care service was provided at two faith-based conferences.

**Goal 4: The Child Care Application and Redetermination Processes Should Be Uncomplicated and Family Friendly.**

***(Action Step 4.1) - Simplify applications for child care assistance.***

2002 Response:

2001 Response:

Oklahoma simplified their application several years ago into two pages for families only applying for child care assistance.

***(Action Step 4.2) - Allow filing by mail, phone, fax or internet.***

2002 Response:

2001 Response:

Applications are accepted by mail or phone.

***(Action Step 4.3) - Minimize requests for documentation at initial application and utilize documents already on file.***

2002 Response:

2001 Response:

The only documentation required is proof of income and employment or education schedule.

***(Action Step 4.4) - Provide applications at multiple sites.***

2002 Response:

2001 Response:

A new application packet was distributed for display at a variety of locations, i.e., child care settings, libraries, businesses.

***(Action Step 4.5) - Offer non-conventional hours of operation for eligibility offices and provide toll-free phone lines to include evening and weekend hours.***

2002 Response:

2001 Response:

A recent agency initiative on customer service requires county offices to evaluate their hours of operation and ensure that all families have access to services.

***(Action Step 4.6) - Explore presumptive eligibility or otherwise provide immediate eligibility contingent upon final approval.***

2002 Response:

The policy of approving child care assistance applications within two days of submission is now in place in a majority of the state's counties.

2001 Response:

If necessary for maintaining employment or starting a new job, child care can be approved for 30 days without required income or need verification. A new policy is being piloted in six counties in which complete applications for child care assistance will be approved within two days of submission.

***(Action Step 4.7) - Eliminate requirements for a face-to-face interview both for initial application and for redetermination.***

2002 Response:

2001 Response:

A face to face interview is not required for initial application or redetermination.

***(Action Step 4.8) - Provide consultation on making appropriate choices when excessive requests for provider changes are filed.***

2002 Response:

2001 Response:

N/A

***(Action Step 4.9) - Establish a 12-month redetermination period where there are no changes in income or job status.***

2002 Response:

2001 Response:

There is a 12 month redetermination period.

***(Action Step 4.10) - Continue eligibility for full subsidy for 12 weeks if family loses employment but can document that a job search is underway.***

2002 Response:

2001 Response:

Effective January 2002, families receiving child care assistance who complete their education or training or lose their employment can continue to receive assistance for up to 30 days while seeking employment.



**Goal 5: Establish a Coordinated, Seamless Eligibility System So That Funding Sources Are Invisible to Families and Support Continuity of Child Care.**

***(Action Step 5.1) - Eliminate the need for families to reapply when eligibility categories change by automatically searching to exhaust all eligibility categories before closing cases.***

2002 Response:

2001 Response:

Oklahoma has always had a seamless system where eligible parents can move from one funding source to another without reapplying or a break in eligibility.

***(Action Step 5.2) - Explore the potential for policy and procedural changes to achieve linkages with or combined applications for child care assistance, Head Start, Pre-K and Title I.***

2002 Response:

2001 Response:

N/A

***(Action Step 5.3) - Continue eligibility in programs with multiple funding sources to assure continuity of care in the event that eligibility has expired or terminated in one program.***

2002 Response:

2001 Response:

Oklahoma has always had a seamless system where eligible parents can move from one funding source to another without reapplying or a break in eligibility.

***(Action Step 5.4) - Work collaboratively with all public and private programs and funding sources to assure that children receive stable and consistent early child care services.***

2002 Response:

2001 Response:

One agency administers all the federal child care funds but they also collaborate with Head Start, the state pre-kindergarten program and the state health care agencies.

**Goal 6: Establish Customer Service Outcome Goals and Set Standards to Ensure that All Families are Treated With Dignity and Respect and Are Served in an Efficient Manner.**

***(Action Step 6.1) - Provide professional and well-trained eligibility staff who are culturally and linguistically sensitive.***

2002 Response:

2001 Response:

Eligibility staff are trained through satellite broadcasts and receive frequent updates and technical assistance.

***(Action Step 6.2) - Facilitate quick eligibility determination through reasonable caseloads and/or administrative structure.***

2002 Response: See 4.6

2001 Response:

See 4.6.

***(Action Step 6.3) - Conduct periodic, independent and thorough consumer satisfaction assessments, assuring the confidentiality of information collected.***

2002 Response:

2001 Response:

On-going surveys of random samples of clients ask questions regarding customer service and unmet child care needs. Input from child care providers is obtained through surveys and on-going hearing around the state.

***(Action Step 6.4) - Provide adequate support for child care resource and referral services.***

2002 Response:

2001 Response:

A state level coordinator has been added to provide technical assistance to the nine regional resources and referral agencies.

**Goal 7: Design the Subsidy System So That Rate Structures Assure That Families Receiving Child Care Assistance Have Access to All Types of Child Care and Disallow Charges Above Established Co-Payments.**

***(Action Step 7.1) - States should cap reimbursement rates at no less than the 75th percentile based on a market rate survey conducted every two years that accurately reflects the price of all types of care in communities across the state.***

2002 Response:

2001 Response:

New child care rates became effective October 1, 2001 that bring rates in higher quality facilities to the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile across the state. Increases were based on recent findings from a market rate survey at a cost of \$5.7 million for the remainder of the fiscal year.

***(Action Step 7.2) - Establish and evaluate reimbursement policies that encourage provider participation and are responsive to family needs.***

2002 Response:

The EBT system is now operational in two-thirds of all counties.

2001 Response:

An electronic benefit transfer system is being piloted that will reimburse providers more quickly than under the current system and provide up-to-date information on a family eligibility status.

***(Action Step 7.3) - Prohibit providers from charging above the established co-payments.***

2002 Response:

2001 Response:

Providers have always been prohibited from charging above the established payments.

**Goal 8: Create Partnerships With Employers to Expand Child Care Assistance for Working Families.**

***(Action Step 8.1) - Educate employers about the bottom line benefits associated with public and private child care assistance.***

2002 Response:

The resource and referral agencies are currently contacting local business leaders to seek support.

2001 Response:

N/A

***(Action Step 8.2) - Enlist business leaders to champion the involvement of southern businesses and to serve as mentors to other businesses.***

2002 Response:

2001 Response:

N/A

***(Action Step 8.3) - Provide information to employers on all available tax benefits related to child care assistance, including deductions for donations to tax-exempt child care organizations, capital costs for constructing a child care center and establishing a pre-tax dependent care assistance plan.***

2002 Response:

Through a grant for the Better Baby Care Campaign, the Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy and the Oklahoma Child Care Resource and Referral Agency are working together to promote the child care tax incentive to businesses across the state.

2001 Response:

N/A

***(Action Step 8.4) - Facilitate collaborative initiatives that enable employers to share ideas as well as pool their resources to address child care needs.***

2002 Response:

Fourteen United Way Success by Six communities have planning and advisory boards that include employers. One of those communities in Oklahoma City has organized a cluster of child care centers and is linking them with business leaders to better access resources.

2001 Response:

N/A

***(Action Step 8.5) - Provide matching funds or other tax or financial incentives for employers to invest in child care.***

2002 Response:

Legislation expanding tax credits for businesses that provide financial support for child care was passed during the 2002 legislative session.

2001 Response:

N/A

***(Action Step 8.6) - Establish incentives for employers to create child care benefit programs for their employees or to contribute to child care purchasing pools in their state or community.***

2002 Response:

The tax credit legislation provides a credit of 20% with certain limitations for employers who contribute toward employee's child care costs.

2001 Response:

N/A

***(Action Step 8.7) - Reduce the administrative burden on employers participating in any joint public/private child care assistance program.***

2002 Response:

2001 Response:

N/A

**Goal 9: Provide Child Care Assistance to Working Families Through Federal and State Tax Laws.**

***(Action Step 9.1) - Make the federal child dependent care tax credit refundable.***

2002 Response:

2001 Response:

N/A

***(Action Step 9.2) - Establish refundable child and dependent care tax credits in states with income taxes.***

2002 Response:

2001 Response:

N/A

***(Action Step 9.3) - Raise federal and state child care tax credit expense limits to accurately reflect the price of quality care.***

2002 Response:

2001 Response:

N/A

***(Action Step 9.4) - Index for inflation the state and federal child and dependent care tax credit income eligibility and expense limits.***

2002 Response:

2001 Response:

N/A

***(Action Step 9.5) - Ensure that child and dependent care tax credits are clearly identified and easy to claim by filers using either the short or long form.***

2002 Response:

2001 Response:

N/A

***(Action Step 9.6) - Encourage the use of effective state tax strategies to provide financial support for child care.***

2002 Response:

2001 Response:

N/A

**Goal 10: States Should Have Effective, Coordinated Systems to Guide Child Care and Early Childhood Policy Decisions and Direct Use of Resources.**

***(Action Step 10.1) - Facilitate greater coordination in eligibility policies across child care and early childhood education programs at state and local levels.***

2002 Response:

2001 Response:

N/A

***(Action Step 10.2) - All southern states and the District of Columbia should participate in a collaborative effort to develop and collect common data elements across states.***

2002 Response:

2001 Response:

N/A

