School Readiness Sliding Fee Scale and Fee Waiver Policy and Procedure
EFFECTIVE DATE: November 8, 2018
REVISED DATE: December 15, 2022
NEXT REVIEW DATE: July 2023

References: Chapter 1002.84, F.S.
6M-4.400, F.A.C.

A. Policy Purpose
To establish and maintain standard procedures by the ELC of Northwest Florida for determining the Sliding Fee Scale and approving Parent Fee Waiver requests.

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B. Responsible Staff
The Operations Director and Family Support Manager share responsibilities directly related to the Coalition's School Readiness Sliding Fee Scale and Parent Fee Waivers.

Procedures:

A. HHS annually revises the FPL and publishes this information in the Federal register. The FPL specifies that "these guidelines go into effect on the day they are published unless an office administering a program using the guidelines specifies a different effective date for that particular program."
B. Each coalition will implement a sliding fee scale and co-payment policies for families receiving school readiness services. The sliding fee scale must provide economically disadvantaged families equal access to the care available to families whose income is high enough not to qualify for school readiness services.
C. The coalition will submit their proposed sliding fee scale to the Divison of Early Learning (DEL) for approval. DEL shall review the sliding fee scale to determine that the scale is reflective of the annually released income limits, has an effective date no later than July 1st of that year, and that parent co-payments do not exceed 10 percent of the family's income, regardless of the number of children in care, during the authorized 12-months of eligibility. The coalition's sliding fee scale will reflect parent fees for families with an income up to 85% of the SMI.
D. Each family that receives school readiness services shall be assessed a co-payment based on the family's income, hours of care needed, and family size, according to the sliding fee scale.
E. If a child is authorized part-time care, the parent will be assessed a part-time co-payment. If a child is authorized full time care, the parent will be assessed a full-time co-payment. The second and any subsequent children will receive a co-payment discount of 50% according to the approved sliding fee scale. When a discount is applied, the youngest child must be assessed a full co-payment based on the approved sliding fee scale and the hours of care needed.
F. When a child's normal schedule of care is based on the school year schedule and the child is authorized school readiness part time care during the school year and attends a full-time day at the school readiness program on a school holiday or school closure, the parent shall pay the part time co-payment. During the summer break, if said child attends full time, the parent/guardian shall pay the full-time co-payment.
G. A family may submit documentation at any time during the initial 12-month eligibility period to decrease the co-payment.
H. A co-payment must be less than the provider's private pay rate.

I. Graduated Phase-out

1. At the end of the initial 12-month eligibility period the coalition will re-evaluate the family's eligibility and income. Families, whose income is above 150% of the FPL, but at or below 85% of the SMI, will enter the graduated phase-out period.
2. The family shall be assessed a co-payment that is based on the approved sliding fee scale. As the family's income increases the co-payment shall gradually increase.
3. During graduated phase-out, school readiness childcare funding will be authorized for 12 months from the redetermination date. The family and provider will receive written notice of the required co-payment for the 12-month period to be paid by the parent to the provider.
4. During graduated phase-out, the family shall report any changes in the family size or income to the coalition within 10 calendar days. The coalition will adjust the family's co-payment based on the reported information and shall notify the family and provider of any changes within 10 calendar days. The parent co-payment shall be increased or decreased based on any reported changes that affect the parent co-payment.
5. During graduated phase-out, if the family's income exceeds 85% of the SMI, the family is no longer eligible for the program. The coalition will notify the family that the family is no longer eligible to receive school readiness services and school readiness services will be discontinued two weeks (14 calendar days) from the date of the notice, as long as the two-week period does not extend beyond the family's authorized eligibility period.
6. During graduated phase-out, if the family's income falls below 150% of the federal poverty level, the co-payment will be adjusted based on the approved sliding fee scale and the family will remain in the graduated phase out and continue to receive services for the remainder of the 12-month phase-out period.
7. At the end of the initial 12-month eligibility period at redetermination, if a family's income remains at or below 150% of the FPL, the family will remain eligible. The family's eligibility, co-payment, and reporting requirements are subject to the requirements of the initial eligibility period and will not be subject to the graduated phase out criteria.
8. At the end of the initial 12-month eligibility period at redetermination, if a family's income exceeds 85% of the SMI, or the family is no longer eligible, the coalition will notify the family that the family is no longer eligible to receive school readiness services, in which the services will be discontinued.

A. Co-payment collection. Co-payment amount for which the family is responsible shall be subtracted from the provider's reimbursement. It is the responsibility of the provider of school readiness services to collect the family's co-payment. The provider must give the parent a receipt for each co-payment made by the parent and retain receipt records for all child care co-payments. Parent co-payments will be subject to the provider's payment policy as acknowledged and agreed upon by the parent.

B. Co-payment waivers. The coalition may waive the co-payment on a case-by-case basis for "At Risk Children". Temporary waivers may also be granted on a case-by-case basis for families below 100% of the FPL, waivers must have a start and end date. The coalition must have a list of qualifying events for obtaining a waiver of a co-payment. The request for a co-payment waiver must be documented in the case file during the initial authorization for care and at each redetermination. Below is a list of qualifying events:

1. Child's parents/guardians are incarcerated
2. Child's parents/guardians are in residential treatment
3. Child's parents/guardians are incapacitated
4. Death of a child's parents/guardians

5. Child's parents/guardians experience a natural disaster
6. Child's parents/guardians experience an emergency situation such as fire or robbery
7. Child's parents/guardians are homeless or are in a homeless shelter
8. Child's parents/guardians are unemployed
9. Whereabouts of child's parents/guardians are unknown.
10. Unusual circumstance as approved by the Executive Director

C. A parent may not transfer any child to another school readiness provider until the parent has submitted documentation from the current school readiness provider to the coalition stating that all co-payments have been paid. Establishment of a repayment plan for the outstanding co-payment is acceptable with documentation. The coalition shall complete the transfer once the co-payment obligation has been satisfactorily fulfilled.

   1. If no documentation is available, the coalition will contact the provider to verify co-payments have been paid or a repayment plan has been established.

   2. If a parent of an at-risk child is not able to satisfactorily meet the co-payment obligation before the transfer, the provider shall attempt to arrange a repayment plan with the parent. If the provider is not successful arranging a repayment plan with the at-risk child's parent, the provider shall document the attempt and submit to the coalition.

D. A parent co-payment will not be increased within the initial 12-month eligibility period. The amount assessed will be in effect unless:

   1. The parent or a referring agency requests and is granted a waiver of the assessed co-payment.
   2. An error occurred which caused an incorrect co-payment to be assessed.
   3. An employment status, income or family size results in a lower co-payment.
   4. The authorized hours change.
   5. Co-payments during graduated phase out may be increased or decreased based on the family's income and size.

E. Co-payment errors and recovery. The coalition will not take action to recover an incorrect co-payment made due to an error of the coalition. Once the error is discovered, the coalition will correct the error and apply the corrected co-payment. The coalition will notify the parent within 10 calendar days of the changes to the co-payment. Notification will be documented. In cases when a reimbursement overpayment is caused by an incorrect co-payment assessment which resulted from the parent error or fraud, the coalition shall attempt to recover the overpayment and document attempts. The coalition shall notify DEL if the coalition is unsuccessful in recovery of the overpayment.