

May 15, 2024

Anchorage Child Care and Early Education Fund Implementation Team  
632 West 6th Avenue  
Anchorage, AK 99501

Dear Anchorage Child Care and Early Education Fund Implementation Team,

We, Anchorage's school-age child care providers, are writing to offer our high-level recommendations for the distribution and allocation of funding from the Anchorage Child Care and Early Education (ACCEE) Fund. We represent over 30 licensed school-age child care centers in the Municipality of Anchorage. Drawing from our collective experience in the sector, we believe these recommendations will ensure the effective utilization of resources to support our community's children and families.

**Importance of School-Age Sector:**

The school-age child care sector plays a crucial role in the continuum of quality child care for families in Anchorage by supporting children 6 – 12 years of age. Approximately 45% of children enrolled in child care are school-age children. School-age child care programs provide positive youth development services before school, after school, and during times when school is not in session, including in-service days, and winter, spring, and summer breaks. In addition to their essential role of keeping children safe during out-of-school times, school-age child care programs inspire learning through hands-on enrichment, support healthy social-emotional development, provide access to child nutrition programs, and are a key support to Anchorage's workforce.

With upcoming changes to the Anchorage School District's school start times, the demand for school-age care is expected to rise significantly. Programs are already planning to extend their services into the afternoon to meet this increased need. Therefore, investing in the school age sector is not only vital for the well-being and development of children, but also essential for supporting working parents and caregivers in balancing their familial and professional responsibilities, further allowing them to stay in the workforce to support a stable economy.

**Funding Recommendations:**

Our highest recommendation is to ensure school-age child care programs are eligible to receive ACCEE funds. We recommend that funding should be distributed based on a monthly per child rate that is allocated directly to child care providers, similar to the model implemented in Juneau, AK. This approach empowers providers to strategically allocate funds according to their specific needs, be it workforce support, family scholarships, fee subsidies, or facility maintenance. This type of funding should be allocated based on program enrollment and not on program attendance. We suggest considering a monthly allocation of \$300 per child enrolled to address immediate gaps in funding. Moreover, prioritizing licensed child care programs and licensed exempt programs accredited through American Camp Association ensures adherence to quality standards and safeguards for child welfare.

Additionally, the ACCEE Fund could consider funding system-wide initiatives such as covering background check fees, fire inspections fees, reimbursing facility rental costs, or facilitating required professional development, such as CPR certification. These investments would have a broader impact across the sector, promoting professionalism and safety standards.

### **Funding Distribution:**

Funding should go directly to child care program providers so they can decide how to best invest the funding into their program, staff, and facilities, to ensure high-quality programming. During the pandemic, the United Way and thread set a commendable standard in funding distribution, characterized by clearly established systems, user-friendly processes, and responsive staff. We urge the ACCEE Fund Implementation Team to emulate these practices to ensure simplicity in both application and reporting procedures.

If the ACCEE Fund is focusing solely on the workforce and low wages, we feel strongly the funds must come through the employer to raise the hourly wage directly. If applied as a one-time bonus, it will not have a strategic impact on the sector to increase recruitment and retention of the workforce. While the yearly lump sum is helpful, childcare workers do not associate this with their employer's wages and it does not allow the sector to increase hourly rates to compete against other sectors.

We also advocate for sustained, predictable funding mechanisms that allow providers to make long-term strategic decisions and investments. Sustainability is paramount for the sector's growth and stability. Yearly or short-term grants create uncertainty and hinder our ability to budget and plan effectively. The Municipality of Anchorage's alcohol tax grant distribution method, in our view, has not aligned with this sustainability goal due to the unpredictability of funding cycles and delays in fund distribution.

Furthermore, we emphasize the importance of simplicity in both application and reporting processes. Complex applications and reporting procedures place undue stress on providers, particularly those with language barriers or limited resources. From an equity perspective, it is imperative that the application and reporting requirements are streamlined to ensure accessibility for all providers.

In conclusion, we urge the ACCEE Fund Implementation Team to ensure school-age programs are eligible to receive ACCEE funds, ensure direct distribution of funds to providers, and prioritize sustained and strategic investments in quality care. By aligning with best practices and addressing the sector's unique needs, we can collectively foster a nurturing environment for Anchorage's children and families.

Thank you for considering our recommendations.

Sincerely,

Melanie Hooper, President & CEO, Camp Fire Alaska  
Rick Farrell, Executive Director, Bear Valley Community Association  
Christina Eubanks-Ohana, Director, Hillcrest Youth Center  
David Koch, Child Care Director, YMCA of Alaska  
Susan Anderson, CEO, Boys & Girls Club of Southcentral Alaska