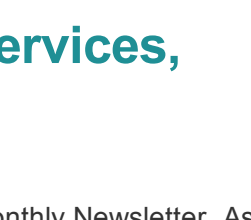
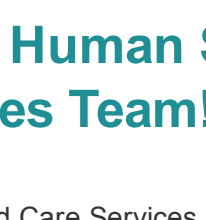
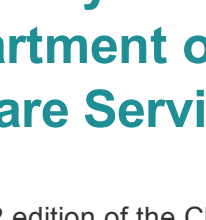
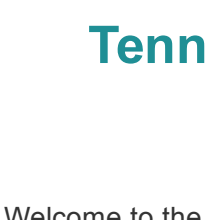


Child Care

NEWS BRIEF



Child Care Services Newsletter February/March 2022

Greetings from your partners at the Tennessee Department of Human Services, Child Care Services Team!

Welcome to the February/March 2022 edition of the Child Care Services Monthly Newsletter. As we continue with our system modernization efforts, there have been a number of communications released. Therefore, we have combined the February and March edition to aid in reducing your email inbox.

This is a wonderful time of year as we welcome Spring, a time of beginning anew, which aligns with all of the transformation activities that signify letting go of outdated processes and procedures and starting with fresh approaches that elevate children, families, and our child care provider partners. This edition will focus on the roll-out of the new QRIS, systems modernization activities, an opportunity for Loan Forgiveness for ECE staff, ARPA Stabilization Grant updates, and a return to routine monitoring schedules. As a reminder, Our Child Care Newsletters are now posted on our website for your reference: <https://www.tn.gov/humanservices/families/child-care-services/child-care-resources-for-providers/monthly-child-care-newsletters.html>

American Rescue Plan Act Stabilization Grants Update

Update on Payment Processing for ARPA Grants

In order to ensure state compliance with issuance of payments through the Edison system there are several steps that must be completed. These steps are very thorough for accountability of funds distribution. We ask for your patience during this process to allow for careful review and vetting. Payments are in process and distribution began in January.

As of March 14, 2022, there have been 607 grants distributed. These are primarily from Cohorts 1 and 2. We are continuing to process the remaining payments from these Cohorts and are moving forward with the remaining cohorts as quickly as possible.

Reporting and Accountability Post Receipt of Grant Funds

The Department of Human Services is administering these funds in collaboration with its consultant HORNE who has a team dedicated to supporting recipients of Tennessee's Child Care Stabilization Grants. HORNE will facilitate the reporting and accountability elements of the grant process. As listed on the application and the grant contract, agencies that are awarded funds are required to report how those funds were used and status of meeting the certifications. HORNE is supporting these requirements by communicating to agencies after funds have been distributed and helping agencies submit the necessary reports and expense verifications.

You will receive an email from the HORNE TN Child Care Stabilization Grant Support Team shortly after receiving your funds. That email will include a copy of the Expense Tracking Workbook. Detailed instructions on how to complete the workbook will be included in the file provided. You should add expenses to this workbook as they are incurred, and expenses should only be added to this workbook if you have documents supporting the expenses in your records.

To help you recognize communications from HORNE, the subject line of all email communications from HORNE will begin with the heading CC Stabilization Communication. When you see an email with this heading in the subject line, please review the message and take action in order to meet your grant reporting requirements.

As a reminder, award dollars must be spent on one or more of the below purposes:

- Personnel costs, benefits, premium pay, recruitment, and retention.
- Rent or mortgage payments, utilities, facilities maintenance and improvements, or insurance.
- Personal protective equipment, cleaning and sanitation supplies and services, or training and professional development related to health and safety practices.
- Purchases of, or updates to, equipment and supplies to respond to COVID-19.
- Goods and services necessary to maintain or resume child care services.
- Mental health support for children and employees.

Technical assistance is available to you should you have any questions. If you have any questions, please contact UT SWORPS at TDHS_CCP@utk.edu or call the toll-free number at 1-888-883-5514.

An FAQ document has been created to address questions related to the process and may be found at this link: <https://tnchildcarehelpdesk.sworpswebapp.sworps.utk.edu/ccfd-stabilization-grant/>. The most current version is available, including updated questions and answers from the Cohort rounds.

Later this month, we will issue a "clean-up" round of application notices to DHS licensed child care agencies who may not have been applied in earlier rounds, who have had a change in capacity, or who are newly licensed. More information will be provided as we finalize plans for these application notices.

We are completing review of applications submitted by eligible DOE regulated agencies in February. Once we have finalized that review, we will issue Award Notices/Grant Contracts to approved agencies.

We are excited these dollars have been made available to support the very critical work you provide in caring for the children of Tennessee. These funds are to build a stable and sustainable early care and education system for our existing providers, so children will continue to have access to safe, healthy and educationally rich spaces.

Child Care Task Force

The Department remains committed to building strategies to address opportunities for increasing child care capacity based on individual community needs as well as building an early care and education system that is safe, healthy and educationally rich. Our goals within the division of Child Care Services are to increase access, improve quality and strengthen business efficiencies. This commitment and visioning aligns with legislation that was passed in the summer of 2021 that amends Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49, Chapter 1, Part 11 to create a Child Care Task Force. The task force is tied administratively to the Department of Human Services and is comprised of task force members including the Commissioner of DHS, Commissioners or their designees of several other state agencies including the Department of Labor and Workforce Development, the Department of Economic and Community Development, the Department of Education, the Department of Health as well as a member of the State Senate and House of Representatives, four representatives from the business community and four experienced child care providers.

The purpose of the task force is to recommend a strategic plan that addresses the challenges of quality, affordability and accessibility of child care in our state and how we can maximize all available resources to address these challenges including funding streams and collaborative partnerships. The task force meets monthly in an open meeting to engage in deliberations toward building a recommendation. Consistent with the legislation, the task force has engaged Public Consulting Group, to conduct research including best practices of other states, conduct surveys and focus groups, peer state reviews and literature reviews in order to provide findings to the task force as they develop their strategic plan for recommendation to address these challenges. Updates on the Child Care Task Force, including meeting dates and links to watch meetings online, can be found at <https://www.tn.gov/humanservices/families/child-care-services/tennessee-child-care-task-force.html>.

Systems Modernization Update

The Tennessee Department of Human Services is launching a series of modernized systems to aid Child Care Providers in working with our agency. These new systems facilitate making it easier to complete critical tasks with our agency. We have released several newsletters and direct email notifications to provide you with additional clarification and helpful tips related to these systems. Our team is here to support you throughout these process changes.

These systems changes, as well as many of our transformation activities are reflective of embracing change and what change may look like for each user. As a reminder, progress through phases of change is going to happen at a different pace for everyone. Some may experience the ZIG ZAG effect- a few steps forward and then a few steps back. This is to be expected and is a natural part of the change process. Progressing through adoption of change can be messy. You can feel lost, experience setbacks; even question the reason for the change. We are supporting you through this process by providing guidance, staying communicative and engaging whenever possible.

To date, we have launched the Attendance Tracking module for providers participating in the Child Care Certificate Program and this may be accessed through your Provider Portal account. This method of managing your EAV's replaces the old EAV/Pay system. We are automating to allow for weekly submissions of your EAV's and weekly payments.

Please note: We have also released the Mobile Apps for Customers to sign in/out their children. This application is optional, however it does offer a method to eliminate manual processes. If you choose to adopt the mobile apps for *all* children in your care (private pay as well as those approved through the Child Care Certificate Program), you may eliminate the manual sign in/out sheets. If you are already using an attendance tracking system that allows for the parent or their authorized individual to sign in/out their child, and you use that system for all children in your care (private pay as well as those approved through the Child Care Certificate Program), you may eliminate the manual sign in/out sheets. If the system you are using does not allow for parents or their designated authorized individual to sign in/out their child, you must continue to use manual sign in/out sheets.

- If you are having difficulty creating a Provider Account for the Provider Portal or difficulty submitting your attendance information in the new system, assistance is available through Site Support.
- **Hours of Availability:** Monday - Friday, 8:00 AM - 5:00 PM Central Time
- **Modernization Project Site Support Team Contact Information:**
 - <https://deloitte.zoom.us/j/92094735246?pwd=RDNVVnNjQUVnSHpQR2ZMV3pZQ2lxUT09>
 - Phone: +1 (646) 518-9805 or +1 (720) 928-9299
 - Meeting Number: 920 9473 5246
 - Passcode: 863180
- For questions related to a submitted EAV, child enrollment, or remittance information, please contact the Customer Response team.
- **1-833-740-1440** or via email at CCPaymentAssist.DHS@tn.gov
- All Modernization Resources are located on our Child Care Services Webpage under Child Care Resources for Providers, [Modernization Project Resources \(tn.gov\)](#). These resources include:
 - Provider Town Hall Replays
 - Quick Reference Guides
 - Provider Portal User Guide
 - How-To Videos
 - Modernization Monthly Newsletters, and FAQ's

Tech Goes Home

With the roll-out of our new technology supports through our system modernization efforts, we encourage agencies who have technology support needs to apply for this new resource. TDHS deployed the "Tech Goes Home" model available to child care agencies that includes the provision of technology devices, coaching and technical assistance on the use of the equipment and how it strengthens business operations. This program is in collaboration with the Child Care Resource and Referral Network and will support child care agencies in modernizing their systems and equipment in order to lessen the administrative burden and allow providers to focus on family/child interactions and delivering quality care.



Tech Goes Home Tennessee provides free training and one-on-one coaching to reduce the digital divide and support a system of high-quality early care and education for children in Tennessee. The 15-hour training course is designed to teach foundational technical skills, such as email navigation and presentation building, and small business technology skills. One-on-one coaching includes training on software that includes word processing, spreadsheets, slideshows, calendar, and email. Upon completion of the training, licensed child care agencies may be eligible to receive technology incentives for use by their program staff.

As you know, we are engaging in several technology systems modernization projects. Tech Goes Home TN can be a resource for agencies that need technology equipment where parents can electronically sign in/out their children.

For more information and to apply, please visit the CCR&R website <https://techgoeshometn.org/> as applications for the program are now being accepted. Once on the website, scroll down to the three boxes and the application button is found in the first box on the left.

QRIS Status Update

Update: For the last 3 years, we have been planning for redesign of our child care Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS). We appreciate all the providers that have attended focus groups and participated in workgroups to inform this new design. Your perspective has been central to the redesign process. Those that attended focus groups last August heard some key elements of the redesign:

- Licensing and Quality Assessment Roles have been merged - completed through staff reorganization in spring 2021.
- Through the new role of Licensing Consultant focus is on monitoring, evaluation, support, and partnership to promote child care environments that are safe, healthy, and educationally rich.
- "Essential Quality Indicators" will serve as the basis for future monitoring including health and safety items, as well as teacher/child interactions.
- Quarterly monitoring visits will provide immediate feedback to providers about areas of strength and those needing improvement.
- The annual quality rating score will be based upon the average of scores across the 4 quarterly visits conducted that year. One single visit/observation will not determine an annual score.

The new edicensing system that supports QRIS redesign is set to launch in April for our Pilot counties of Davidson, Hawkins and Madison. The new QRIS tool for monitoring and quality observation is embedded in the new edicensing system. Our Licensing Consultants will begin using the new QRIS monitoring/observation tool when the system goes live. This is an opportunity for staff and providers to become fully acclimated to the new process. Each agency will have at a minimum one visit between April 11, 2022 and September 30, 2022 to gain knowledge and experience with the new process before scores are officially "counted". Statewide go-live for the new edicensing system will occur in May and all providers will have the opportunity to experience the new process before full implementation of the redesigned QRIS scheduled for October 1, 2022. In the meantime, training for staff and providers will occur for full awareness and understanding of the new process.

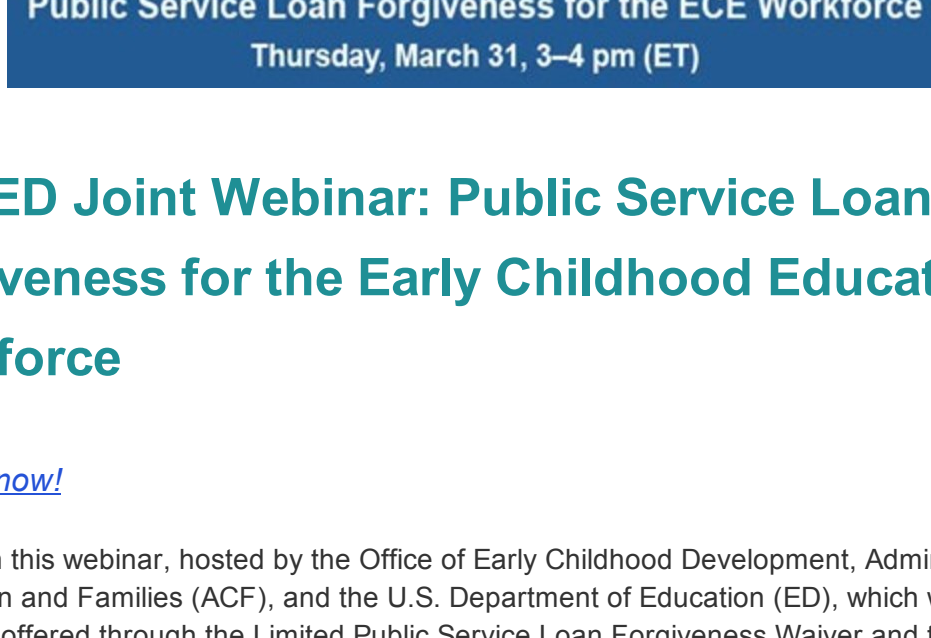
QRIS Redesign Roll-Out

- **Training (Training will be delivered by CCR&R to staff according to the schedule below)**
 - Training for DHS Licensing Consultants (LC's) is scheduled for Friday April 8th from 8:00 AM Central/9:00 AM Eastern until 12:00PM Central/1:00 PM Eastern for LC's with provider cases in Davidson, Hawkins and Madison Counties. Supervisors, Regional Managers, Leadership and Pre-Licensure will be in this group.
 - Child Care Providers in the Pilot counties will receive training the week of April 11th. A direct email communication will be sent with training dates and times through several opportunities.
 - Training is scheduled for Thursday, May 12th from 8:00AM Central/9:00AM Eastern until 12:00PM Central/1:00PM Eastern for LC's with provider cases in all other counties.
 - Child Care Providers located in the remaining counties will receive training the week of May 16th. A direct email communication will be sent with training dates and times. There will be multiple opportunities.
- March 31, 2022-Current QRIS Star Quality Scores will be frozen and there will no longer be ongoing "quality" assessments utilizing the Temporary Assessment Instrument.
- The current QRIS evaluation process will end effective March 31, 2022. Any license reviews for expired or expiring license dates before March 31, 2022 that have not been completed during the year will be assessed using the Temporary Assessment Instrument and will have a Report Card Issued based on all component areas.
- **Transition to Full Implementation**
 - April through September (Transition Period)- every agency will have the opportunity to receive one or two monitoring visits on the new Monitoring/Observation tool before the score "officially counts".
 - October 1, 2022 through September 30, 2023- Full implementation. All agencies will receive one visit per quarter utilizing the new Monitoring/Observation tool. At least one of those visits will be unannounced.
 - New Scorecard Posts October 1, 2023-all agencies will be on the same cycle. Annual Quality Rating (QRIS) Scores for all DHS-licensed agencies will be issued and posted at the same time on the same cycle.

As a reminder, over the past 2 years, the TDHS Child Care Team has been working with you to make progress on our transformation journey. Our transformation journey is grounded in our "WHY Statement" - *Every family should have access to QUALITY care for children and adults.* This basic statement guides all our work and reinforces our three primary goals for Tennessee's child care system: **Improve Quality, Increase Access, and Strengthen Business Efficiency.**

A big part of our transformation is redesigning our Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS), which was launched 20 years ago. When launched in 2001, Tennessee's Star Quality Program was one of the first child care quality rating programs in the country. Over the years, this program has significantly helped to raise awareness about the importance of quality child care and has assisted many agencies in improving their programming. By redesigning the quality assessment and rating program, Tennessee will again be a pioneer in supporting quality early care and education. You have been a part of visioning this future state through focus group sessions and information captured through routine engagements.

We are so excited that our journey with you continues! We will continue to provide you with information through every step of this process through the newsletters and direct communication. We are so excited to go through this journey with you!



ACF/ED Joint Webinar: Public Service Loan Forgiveness for the Early Childhood Educator Workforce

[Register now!](#)

Please join this webinar, hosted by the Office of Early Childhood Development, Administration for Children and Families (ACF), and the U.S. Department of Education (ED), which will highlight flexibilities offered through the Limited Public Service Loan Forgiveness (Waiver) and the ways in which the early care and education (ECE) workforce can take advantage of this time-limited opportunity. More information about the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program can be found on [this Federal Student Aid webpage](#). Speakers will provide an overview of the Limited Public Service Loan Forgiveness Waiver and will discuss:

- Qualifying and applying for loan forgiveness
- Accessing the resources and technical assistance available
- Responding to frequently asked questions from the ECE field

This webinar will benefit anyone in the ECE workforce with Federal student loans and/or administrators who want to support their ECE staff, including those working in Head Start and Early Head Start programs and in other ECE settings.

The speakers will include:

- **Katie Hamm**, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Early Childhood Development, ACF, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
- **Katherine Neas**, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, ED
- **Ashley Harrington**, Senior Advisor, Office of Federal Student Aid, ED.

To obtain additional information and to register for the webinar, you can access [this Web Link](#).



Update on Licensing Monitoring Visits

The Tennessee Department of Human Services is committed to supporting child care agencies in providing programs that are safe, healthy and educationally rich. On November 15, 2021, we resumed in-person monitoring visits with licensed child care agencies. This was an opportunity for our Licensing Consultants to begin on-site visits to introduce themselves in-person to providers in their caseloads and to begin building strong partner relationships. Over the past several months there were some changes in caseload assignments due to the realignment of districts and the staff reorganization that occurred in the spring of 2021 as we combined the role of Program Evaluator and Assessment Program Evaluator into the new role of Licensing Consultant (LC), so this presented a perfect opportunity to meet your LC in person.

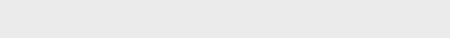
Since we had been conducting routine monitoring visits virtually prior to November, the Department incorporated the approach for resuming regularly scheduled visits in-person as announced visits so that you had an opportunity to know ahead of time what to expect. With the significantly lower rates of Coronavirus across our communities, we will resume our regular approach to routine monitoring that includes at least one unannounced annual visit.

With the new QRIS redesign, all agencies will receive four monitoring visits per year/one per quarter to be evaluated for compliance and quality using the new QRIS Monitoring/Observation Tool. One of those yearly visits will be unannounced. We will resume this regular monitoring schedule to include the unannounced visits effective April 1, 2022. Remember that only one of the four visits will be unannounced, so your next visit may be announced or unannounced depending on the Licensing Consultant's scheduling of monitoring activities.

TDHS is committed to promoting early childhood environments that are safe, healthy, and educationally rich. Thank you for offering Tennessee families learning opportunities and environments that will help their children thrive.

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