

Child Care Worksheet Pilot

Over the past several years, the development of a child care plan for a school age child has become a very time consuming and error prone process for EES workers. In the interest of trying to make sure the parents received adequate child care benefits to cover care needed for days out of school for breaks, holidays, etc., staff in most regions have gone to some sort of a system that uses the school calendars from the different school districts and counts scheduled days in and out of school, aligning with the need based on the parent(s) work schedule(s). Often with this process, a worker ends up with a different number of hours authorized for each month of the school year. The process is slightly different in each region, and often there are multiple variations of this process being used in a region. A worker may spend two or more hours working on the development of a child care plan and processing an application for child care subsidy benefits. This has also resulted in difficulties for case reviewers because workers tend to spend so much time working on the development of the plan, then rush through the documentation of what they did. Often there is not adequate documentation for a reviewer to determine the accuracy of the plan on which the worker has spent so much time.

Over the past year, a workgroup has been meeting to work on developing a process that will simplify things for staff and bring some measure of uniformity around the state, while continuing to ensure that families receive the benefits they need to provide care for their children. A standardized electronic worksheet has been developed to provide a way to calculate the hours of child care needed and document that calculation at the same time. The worksheet developed provides space and a method of calculating hours for both school age and non-school age children. It has a formula built in to add time to account for holidays and other days out of school. The worker would calculate the monthly hours using this worksheet, and would allow those hours for the months of September through May, without making further adjustments for holidays, breaks, etc. because that is already built in to the worksheet. The months of June, July and August would be treated as summer months with full benefits. It is recognized that children often start school in mid-August, but they also are often out of school for the summer in mid-May, so it is proposed that August be considered as a summer month and May as a school month to balance that out. Adjustments would still need to be made if a parent's work schedule changed. We are proposing that the worksheet be mandatory for all child care plans, and that a printed copy of the completed worksheet be placed in the case file for documentation. At first glance, the electronic worksheet could be somewhat intimidating, but with explanation and use, the members of the workgroup believe that staff will find it to be user friendly and very helpful in managing their caseloads.

Preliminary testing of this electronic worksheet on a number of scenarios (done by a workgroup member using actual case situations, calculating plan hours using both the worksheet and the method that has been in use in their office) indicates that there will be little or no cost associated with its use. In fact, it is estimated that use of the worksheet could provide some cost savings when compared with the methods staff are currently using to determine plan hours. It will also take significantly less time for staff to develop a child care plan, and will provide the

documentation that has been lacking and is needed to determine the accuracy of the work. A time savings should also be realized for case reviewers due to the uniformity with all staff in all regions using the same worksheet and method of documentation. This will also simplify the process for parents, as they won't have to remember to contact their workers the month before any anticipated school breaks to ask their worker about additional child care hours for those days out of school. Providers would also be relieved of their concerns about parents not remembering to do this and ending up without adequate benefits to pay for the hours of care they need for their children.

A pilot is proposed for the purpose of determining an accurate fiscal impact that the worksheet might have. For the pilot, it is proposed that this worksheet be used for the months included in the next school year, from September through May in the following areas:

1. Saline County in the Northeast Region, where as of March, 2008, there were approximately 558 total children receiving child care subsidy, with 157 school age children. There are currently 183 child care providers in Saline County with agreements with SRS.
2. The Colby EES unit in the West Region consisting of Thomas, Logan, Wallace, Sherman, Sheridan, Cheyenne, Rawlins, Graham, Norton and Decatur counties, where as of March, 2008, there were approximately 146 total children receiving child care subsidy, with 58 school age children. There are currently 89 child care providers in these counties with agreements with SRS.
3. The Iola unit in the SouthEast Region consisting of Anderson, Allen and Woodson counties, where as of March, 2008, there were approximately 201 total children receiving child care subsidy, with 63 school age children. There are currently 72 child care providers in these counties with agreements with SRS.

Of these areas, Saline County was selected for a semi-urban perspective, the Southeast unit to give more of the rural perspective, and the West unit as another rural area where staff have not been using school calendars for determining plan hours. The proposed pilot has been discussed with the EES PA's in each of these regions, and all have been supportive and are willing to participate.

It is anticipated that training on the use of the child care worksheet will be needed for staff in the regions selected for the pilot. Rita Cortez, the child care trainer, as well as some of the other members of the workgroup would provide this training either in late July or early in the month of August. All child care plans in the pilot areas would need to be converted during the month of August to begin using the new worksheet in order for the results of the pilot to be accurate. To ensure the best possible results for this pilot, face to face training is preferred, as this will be such a big change from the previous procedure. With training and conversion of these cases, the month of August would be extremely work intensive for staff.

Mass notification to parents and providers in these counties will also need to be done to explain the changes and how they will be affected by them.