



Item:

Funding for “Pandemic Learning Pods”

Requested Action:

The Trust is asked to authorize the Executive Director to negotiate and execute the following agreements: 1) \$186,750 with the Early Learning Coalition of Alachua County, Inc. for 200 children and 2) \$29,880 with Kids Count in Alachua County, Inc. for 32 children.

Background

At the August 3, 2020 Trust Meeting, the Trust directed the Executive Director to explore and develop a proposal for pandemic learning pods. According to a letter submitted to the Trust from Addison Staples, Dr. Deidre Houchen, Dr. David Kaplan, and Dr. Sarah Rockwell, pandemic learning pods are “intentional, small cohorts of children and responsible adults organized to support distance learning, socialization, and play. Pods provide an opportunity to minimize the risk for families who must return to work and thus require supervised environments for their children.”

The original concept proposed to the Trust was as follows:

- Allow community-based churches and community centers to host learning pods as a way to assist families with minimizing transportation needs while maximizing bonds of trust and relationships.
- Allow learning pods to vary in size without penalty or reduction in funding. This will allow the opportunity to have best practices of contact tracing and safety to be implemented.
- Consider removing the requirement for DCF certification for sites. With proper oversight, safe practices, and background screenings we can ensure locations are safe and monitored for this short-term responsive solution.
- Ensure that the cost per child or cost per learning pod will be derived from the Equitable Learning Pod Model as noted above.

While the idea of small communities of learning pods dispersed throughout the County at small, community-based sites is a desirable situation, the issue of DCF licensure is a barrier to that model. The determination of whether an organized child setting needs to be licensed falls under the jurisdiction of DCF, not the Trust. Specifically, sites that provide “child care” require a DCF license. According to DCF, “Child care” means the care, protection, and supervision of a child, for a period of less than 24 hours a day on a regular basis, which

supplements parental care, enrichment, and health supervision for the child, in accordance with his or her individual needs, and **for which a payment, fee, or grant is made for care**.(s. 402.302.(1), F.S.). In other words, the fact that a site receives funding from the Trust is one of the factors that creates the need for a license.

As a result, the proposed contracts utilize existing, licensed child care providers to provide out-of-school, distance learning opportunities during the school day for working parents. This proposal targets children ages 5-13 who are at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level.

On August 11, 2020, the Office of Early Learning notified Early Learning Coalitions throughout the state that they would pay for full-day services for school age children already receiving school readiness dollars, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose of the Trust funding is to provide an avenue for children not currently receiving school readiness funding or who are ineligible for school readiness funding to have the opportunity to participate in center-based distance learning opportunities if they so choose.

Kids Count in Alachua County Inc. is currently the only Trust-funded after school provider that is licensed but not contracted with the Early Learning Coalition for school readiness. The Trust funding will allow 32 of these children, who meet the criteria, to receive services throughout the school day.

The Early Learning Coalition of Alachua County intends to make full-day services for school age children available to those already enrolled in the school readiness program. The Trust funding will allow children who either 1) are ineligible for school readiness funding, or 2) currently on the school readiness wait list to receive full-day distance learning services. Note: Children from the school readiness wait list who receive trust funding would not necessarily continue to receive services at the end of the Trust's funding period, they will remain on the wait list for school readiness unless the funding from the Trust is extended.

Attachments

Scope of Work – Early Learning Coalition of Alachua County, Inc.

Scope of Work – Kids Count of Alachua County, Inc.

Childcare Determination Process Diagram

Memo from the Office of Early Learning

Programmatic Impact:

Establishes funding for “Pandemic Learning Pods” for the first 9 weeks of school

Fiscal Impact:

\$216,630 in funding from FY20

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Recommendation:

Staff recommends approval