

TO: Early Childhood Funding Commission
FROM: Maricela Garcia, CEO Gads Hill Center
DATE: July 14, 2020
RE: Perspective and Recommendations to Build an Adequately Funded ECE Field

Since 1898, Gads Hill Center (GHC) has created opportunities for low-income families to build strong lives through education, access to resources and community engagement. We serve more than 3,000 children and their families annually. GHC follows the social work ecological systems Theory and Model, which focuses on supporting and strengthening the family system to support the healthy cognitive, physical, and social emotional development of children. To this end, we provide wrap around services for the entire families including mental health, adult education classes, and parent engagement and leadership development. During the COVID-19 pandemic, GHC was the source of support that the families we serve counted on for their emergency needs such as food, baby formula, rent and mortgage assistance after many lose their jobs, health insurance, and income.

Funding Structure and Sources

Like most child development organization, the funding structure in place to support the programs at GHC is based on various funding sources. This approach is what makes it possible to pay the cost of providing long hours (10 hours/day) and year around programs, as well as offering case management and wrap around services.

The current funding sources are:

For children 0-3

- Early Head Start
- Prevention Initiative
- CCAP

Children 3-5

- Head Start
- PFA
- CCAP

Challenges and Recommendations

- The funding cycles are different for HS/EHS and the state Early Education Block Grants. HS/EHS cycle runs December 1 to November 30, whereas PFA and PI runs from September 1- June 30. In addition, these grants require different applications, budgets, and reporting timelines.
- PFA only pays for 10 months, but we provide 12 months programming to support working families. It is fear that the PFA grant start cover the entire year to recognize the work of the providers.
- Before COVID-19, CCAP only allowed 30 days for parents to find a job before their children were no longer eligible for childcare. This changed to 90 days after COVID, which should become permanent to give families flexibility and recognize that it takes longer to find a job.
- Immigrant families tend to be self employed or work in construction and other industries where they pay cash. Their employers often refuse to provide verification of employment and wages; therefore, their children do not qualify. We must find ways to make this more flexible because these children are some of the most vulnerable in our communities.

1. Eliminate the birthday cut off for PFA so that children can move to the program after September 1. It does not help to hold the child back in such critical developmental stage.
2. Providers are expected to comply with 83% attendance; otherwise, we are penalized with reduction in funding. However, CPS is only expected to show enrollment. The same policy should also apply to CBOs.
3. There is a significant difference between PI funding for center based vs. home visiting by \$6,000. GHC's programs are NAEYC Accelerate Gold accredited. As such we adhere to the highest quality standards, which are costly to implement. We provide the same holistic services to all families to uphold quality across the organization. The discrepancy in Home Visiting funding makes it very hard financially to run the programs at high quality. This is the program that produces the most deficit for GHC. We raise funds from special events and private sources to close the deficit. recognition of the cost of providing quality programs in the funding structure and leveling the funding for HV and center based is an important step.
4. Flexibility for agencies to be Site Administrators to cut that additional cost incurred with having a third organization in the middle administering this part of the grant. These funds should be allocated directly to the provider, if they are ready and have the capacity to play this role.

To conclude:

- It is urgent that the State funding to support ECE becomes more flexible to serve more economically disadvantaged children by eliminating the obstacles I mention above. It needs to demonstrate a higher commitment to providing the funding and policies that allow providers to offer high quality programs to vulnerable children. Higher income eligibility for families is a key component. Social justice includes beginning to recognize the inequalities in the ECE field. The field is populated with committed individuals and organizations, but it is non-sustainable to maintain the inadequate level of funding and expect high quality programs that ensure children are truly building the skills that they need to enter school ready to learn.