San Francisco Department of
Early Childhood

Early Learning for All

# Early Learning For All

# Program Operating Guidelines

Fiscal Year 2025 – 2026
(Revised February, 2026)

*Vision*
Every child in San Francisco has the best start in life, and our City is a great place to raise a family.

*Mission*
To weave together family, community, and system supports so that all children who grow up in San Francisco have a strong foundation of nurturing, health, and learning.

# Contents

# Introduction

Early Learning For All (ELFA) provides eligible San Francisco families with children under five years of age with financial assistance to access quality early care and education. There are over 500 Early Care and Education Centers and Family Child Care Programs across San Francisco qualified to participate in the Department of Early Childhood's Early Learning For All network. This public support is available to any income-eligible San Francisco resident with a child under the age of 5 and includes three levels of financial support based on family income:

1. ELFA Free Tuition
   *For families earning between 0-110% AMI*

   Families in this income range are eligible for free early care and education enrollment at any ELFA program. ELFA programs are not permitted to charge and/or ask families in this income bracket to provide program application fees, co-payments, enrollment fees, extended hour fees, extracurricular/outdoor activity fees, and/or deposits.

2. ELFA Full Tuition Credit (100% of DEC Published Rate)
   *For Families earning between 111%-150% AMI*

   Families in this income range receive a credit towards their tuition cost equal to 100% of DEC's Full-time ELFA reimbursement rate. However, ELFA programs are permitted to charge families in this income range copayments up to their private-payer tuition rate as well as fees for extended hours and/or extracurricular activities. This means the family will receive free or nearly free enrollment depending on the program's private-pay tuition rate and fee structure.

3. Effective 7/1/26: ELFA Half Tuition Credit (50% of DEC Published Rate)
   *For families earning between 151% - 200% AMI*

   Families in this income range receive a credit towards their tuition cost equal to 50% of DEC's Full-time ELFA reimbursement rate. Families in this income range are responsible for covering the remaining enrollment costs and any additional fees, as set by the program and based on their current private-payer rate.

## Purpose of Operating Guidelines

These Program Operating Guidelines guide programs in the Early Learning For All network, offering general information for administering public funds. This information reflects current enrollment program policies and procedures, but is subject to change by DEC.

## Philosophy And Commitment

The San Francisco Department of Early Childhood (DEC) is committed to a future in which all children enter kindergarten with the cognitive, social-emotional, and physical skills that support school success. Kindergarten readiness is a major predictor of later academic and life success and, as such, serves as the key indicator of child well-being in San Francisco. Early Learning for All programs support children's learning and social-emotional well-being. They help children learn social skills and foster inclusiveness, acceptance, and empathy. Children participating in high-quality early care and education (ECE) programs develop skills that better prepare them for school and lifelong achievement.

All DEC-funded programs are encouraged to adopt a philosophy that supports families and children throughout San Francisco, with policies aligned with DEC's vision for every child in the city to have the best start in life. These Program Operating Guidelines serve as a framework for programs receiving city and county funding for child enrollment services.

## Collaborating Agencies

COMPASS Family Services, Children's Council of San Francisco, Family Support Services and Wu Yee Children's Services are contracted non-profit, community-based organizations (CBO's), that coordinate family support services, program connections, and leverage local, state, and federal child care funds to assist eligible families with locating, enrolling in, and maintaining care with early care and education providers. These collaborating agencies focus on helping families access quality early care and education. Their services include, but are not limited to:

- Helping families determine their eligibility for enrollment in an ECE program
- Supporting families and child care programs through Resource and Referral services
- Leveraging state and federal child care funding to support families
- Issuing child care payments for ECE enrollments and other related payment administration
- Assisting unhoused San Francisco families with children under five years of age to obtain quality ECE services.
- Connecting CalWORKS eligible families with emergency back-up and mildly ill care when they still need to attend their CalWORKS activities.

## ELFA Qualified Programs

ELFA qualified programs, also known as "ELFA network programs" or simply "ELFA programs" are Centers and Licensed Family Child Care Programs approved through a comprehensive DEC program quality standards and validation process. Qualified programs are committed to fully meeting the requirements of the ELFA Participation Agreement and the Quality Standards Agreement including meeting and maintaining program eligibility and Quality Standards minimum thresholds and engaging in continuous quality improvement. Qualified programs are eligible for city-funded training, technical assistance, and workforce initiatives through DEC.

## Current Populations Served

Kindergarten readiness is a major predictor of later academic and life success, and as such, it acts as a key indicator of child well-being in San Francisco. Research suggests that third- and eighth-grade test scores in low-income districts in California fall behind national counterparts because children start less ready for school (First 5 Centers for Children's Policy, 2020). Despite gains in San Francisco school readiness over time, the San Francisco Unified School District's 2023 Kindergarten Readiness Study showed that 33.85% of entering kindergarteners were still not adequately prepared for school. Children who had not yet met readiness standards were disproportionately from Latino, African American, and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander households; households with non-native speakers of the language; and were more likely to have an identified disability.

Early Learning For All aims to meet the needs of all San Francisco's children from birth to five years old while focusing on increasing access to Black/African American, Latino, Native American/Indigenous, immigrant, and homeless families, as well as children at risk of abuse and/or neglect, or involved with the child welfare system, and children with identified special needs or disabilities.

# ELFA Enrollment Funding Types & Payment Policies

Below is a description of the Early Learning for All funding types. Child enrollment is funded through one funding type at a time and is subject to funding availability.

## ELFA Voucher-Free Tuition

This funding type offers a portable city-voucher for parents or guardians earning up to 110% of the Area Median Income (AMI) who do not qualify for other state or federal assistance. Families enrolled with a Free Tuition ELFA Voucher receive free ECE enrollment at ELFA programs. The Free Tuition ELFA Voucher remains valid until the child starts kindergarten and is contingent on funding availability.

Free Tuition ELFA Voucher-funded enrollments cannot replace spaces funded by state or federal programs. Free tuition ELFA Voucher-funded enrollments may not supplant state/federal-funded spaces. Children's Council and Wu Yee select families for Free Tuition ELFA Vouchers through DEC's Early Learning SF (ELSF) data system throughout the year based on funding availability. When Free Tuition ELFA voucher funding is available, Children's Council or Wu Yee identifies the next most-eligible family, according to DEC's enrollment policies. Children's Council or Wu Yee will contact the families and share information about the ECE options available for their children under the age of 5, as well as what to look for in an ECE program. Children's Council and Wu Yee are responsible for making sure families are supported in creating a family-child program connection that aligns with the child's developmental, cultural, and linguistic needs, as stated by the child's family

## ELFA Full Tuition Credit

The ELFA Full Tuition Credit is designed for children ages 0-5 from families with incomes ranging from 111% to 150% of the Area Median Income (AMI). The entire Tuition Credit amount is applied to discount the parent's tuition (i.e., no portion of the credit is allocated to the program.) The ELFA Full Tuition Credit amount is 100% of DEC's full-time ELFA reimbursement rate. The credit must be applied to the provider's published rate. The provider may not charge ELFA Tuition Credit families a higher rate than other private paying families enrolled in the program but they are allowed to charge copays if their private-pay tuition rates are higher than the ELFA reimbursement rates. Wu Yee Children's Services administers the ELFA Full Tuition Credit program and they provide support to the families in making a family-child-program connection that aligns with the child's developmental, cultural, and linguistic needs, as stated by the child's family. Families and ECE programs interested in the ELFA Full Tuition credit must contact Wu Yee.

## ELFA Half Tuition Credit (Effective 7/1/26)

The ELFA Half Tuition Credit is designed for children ages 0-5 from families with incomes ranging from 151% to 200% of the Area Median Income (AMI). The entire Tuition Credit amount is applied to discount the parent's tuition (i.e., no portion of the credit is allocated to the program.) The ELFA Half Tuition Credit amount is 50% of DEC's full-time ELFA reimbursement rate. The credit must be applied to the provider's published rate. The provider may not charge ELFA Tuition Credit families a higher rate than other private paying families enrolled in the program. Wu Yee Children's Services administers the ELFA Full Tuition Credit program and they provide support to the families in making a family-child-program connection that aligns with the child's developmental, cultural, and linguistic needs, as stated by the child's family. Families and ECE programs interested in the ELFA Full Tuition credit must contact Wu Yee.

## ELFA Enhancement on State Voucher

This funding provides a locally funded enhancement for state-funded child care vouchers. This DEC enhancement is to eliminate any gaps between the state's reimbursement rates (i.e., RMR-"Regional Market Rate") and DEC's ELFA reimbursement rates, should one exist. The local enhancement amount varies depending on the state voucher rate, the child's full-time or part-time status, and their age, as well as whether the child is receiving a state or federal voucher. The state enrollment enhancement only applies to children 0-5 years old enrolled in the program. The ELFA enhancement on state-funded vouchers is not intended to remove state regulations.

## Maximum Reimbursable Amount (MRA)

The Maximum Reimbursable Amount (MRA) is the total funding an ELFA-validated and MRA-approved program can earn through ELFA Free Tuition and ELFA Tuition Credit enrollments, and it does not include state and local voucher enrollments in the total contracted amount. Effective July 1, 2025, MRA-funded programs can only access ELFA Free Tuition and ELFA Tuition Credit enrollment funding through MRA funding.

MRA-funded programs must certify each enrollment's eligibility by using the ELFA Family Enrollment Form, gathering the family's income and residency information, and entering the family's information into DEC's Enrollment Tracking System (DETS). MRA programs are responsible for ensuring that each family and child's profile is complete in DETS and fulfilling requests to provide missing profile data when requested by their Program Officers.

A program can decide to use the ELFA voucher funding model instead of the MRA funding model. Alternatively, DEC's A&E Program Officers may recommend a program termination from MRA funding due to noncompliance with these Operating Guidelines, high error rate during a compliance visit, and/or missing DETS enrollment deadlines for two or more months/occasions.

## ELFA MRA Payment Policy

MRA is calculated using the previous fiscal year's first three quarters' actual ELFA peak enrollments recorded in DETS. Programs will receive their MRA funding via quarterly upfront payments. This method mirrors the private payer practices in the ECE field in San Francisco. The Q1 funding amount will be 25% (1/4) of the annual MRA (determined by peak ELFA enrollment month per funding type and age category in the first three quarters of FY 2024-25). Programs that do not fully earn their MRA funding will receive a reconciled payment in each subsequent quarter's advance.

Programs must work closely with their assigned A&E Program Officer to make sure they avoid over-enrollment of their MRA-funded spaces. Program Officers will not be able to increase the MRA of any program during fiscal year 2025-2026. A&E Program Officers will reconcile funding each quarter for MRA underearning, and any unused MRA will be recovered in each subsequent quarter. MRA funding is fungible between Free Tuition and Tuition Credit spaces, and there are no part-time rates for MRA-funded spaces.

All families enrolled in MRA-funded spaces must be determined eligible through documented means and verified as San Francisco residents, as outlined in DEC's Family Enrollment Form policies and procedures. Programs are responsible for maintaining a "family file" and making it available as needed by A&E Program Officers. No retroactive enrollments are allowed.

State funded agencies (Title 5) with MRA Free Tuition and Tuition Credit enrollments are responsible for ensuring that local funding is not used to offset over-enrollment in state-funded spaces. Title 5 programs with MRA funding will ensure that state resources are fully utilized before using local child-enrollment funding. To this effect, Title 5 programs are required to:

- Ensure that Early Learning For All enrollments using local funding (ELFA-MRA) serve families that **do not qualify for state funding (CCTR > 85% SMI and CSPP> 100% SMI, State Vouchers >85% SMI).** Title 5 programs must use the ELFA Family Enrollment Form, which includes verification and the reason why a family does not qualify for state funding.
- Screen and certify families for the state CCTR or CSPP. If the family is found eligible for CCTR-CSPP, assign "CCTR" or "CSPP" in DETS accordingly.
- Notify their assigned A&E Program Officer before enrolling a CCTR-CSPP eligible family in an ELFA Free Tuition or Tuition Credit space to coordinate and document enrollment in DEC's enrollment system, DETS. Retroactive enrollment of CCTR-CSPP families into MRA-funded spaces is not allowed.

Overspending CCTR and/or CSPP contracts is a Program's decision and responsibility, as it requires programs to "front" the cost of care for several months during the fiscal year, and this may represent a hardship to the program. DEC cannot make funding commitments for enrollments not coordinated and/or resulting from agencies' over-enrollment decisions. When programs project or have an overspending of their CCTR and/or CSPP contracts, programs need to reach out to their State Consultant and initiate a Voluntary Temporary Transfer (VTT) request for a Title 5 funding contract expansion and/or apply for a VTT inter- or intra-county transfer. Title 5 Programs cannot transfer over-enrollments in their state contracts to local funding (MRA) without approval from the A&E Program Officer.

Programs should use Voluntary Temporary Transfers (VTTs) to fund over-enrollments in their state contracts, which helps to maximize state-allocated funding in San Francisco. One added advantage for the agency with projected overspending is that their administrative fee for the overspent contract is calculated at the contract's administrative rate, including rate differentials. However, it is an agency's decision and responsibility to over-enroll in state-funded programs, and DEC cannot commit to fund uncontrolled overspending in state-funded enrollments.

Title 5 Programs are required to submit their most recent statement of earnings report to determine the performance level of their state contract as part of their ongoing participation in ELFA-MRA funding. As needed, the A&E team will review the Title 5 program's state contract performance, license capacity, and program enrollment model to determine the level of local funding required for families with income levels exceeding 85% of the SMI for CCTR and 100% of the SMI for CSPP enrollments.

## ELFA Participation Agreement

All ELFA programs, regardless of funding type (MRA or Voucher), must sign an agreement that outlines the requirements and programmatic guarantees necessary for city funding, including grants, ELFA vouchers, ELFA enhancement from State funding, MRA, and other local ECE funds. Enrollment reimbursement from the city is provided once the agencies have a fully executed agreement in place.

## Fiscal Agreements (FOR MRA Funded Programs)

Center-based programs that receive MRA will sign a participation agreement that is called "Fiscal Agreement," which includes both requirements for ELFA Participation as well as fiscal responsibilities.  The Maximum Reimbursement Amount (MRA) is the total funding a specified ELFA-based program can earn through ELFA Fully Funded and ELFA Tuition Credit enrollments, and it does not include state and local voucher enrollments in the total contracted amount.  Effective July 1, 2025, MRA-funded programs can only access ELFA Fully Funded and ELFA Tuition Credit enrollment funding through MRA funding.

## Age Definitions

DEC uses the following Infant, Toddler, and Preschool Age definitions to determine funding amounts:

- Infant:  ages 0 to 24 months
- Toddler: more than 24 months to less than 36 months
- Preschool: ages 3 until the child is eligible for kindergarten

Static Age (Applicable to MRA funded programs only)-Please note that for FY 25-26, the Access and Enrollment team will use the original age category in which the child started the year, along with the applicable reimbursement rate, to calculate the enrollment's earnings for the entire year.  For example, if a child is categorized as an infant in July, we will continue to pay the infant rate throughout the fiscal year.

## Child's Age Requirement: ELFA Voucher and Center-MRA

ELFA Voucher and/or center-MRA funded enrollments are for children under 5 years old at the time of enrollment. ELFA-funded children may continue receiving an ELFA subsidy until they reach kindergarten eligibility.  Funding for an additional year of preschool may be considered and granted on a case-by-case basis.  See ELFA Kindergarten Deferral Requests for more information.

## Early Enrollment Termination Notice and Payment

Families can initiate an early termination of their enrollment at any time. However, care at a new ELFA-funded program should preferably start at the beginning of the following month after the effective date of termination. A&E, Children's Council, and Wu Yee may grant exceptions to this rule on a case-by-case basis.

### For Locally funded ELFA enrollments

When programs and/or families initiate an early termination of a locally funded ELFA enrollment, DEC's new reimbursement method ensures that programs receive payment for the entire month of service regardless of the termination notice date. However, it is preferable that termination be effective on the last day of the month of service and that programs notify their DEC-program Officer, Children's Council, or Wu Yee, at least two weeks before the early termination so that we can coordinate with and assist the family as needed.

### For State-funded Enrollments

State-funded enrollments may require two weeks' notice of early termination of services to receive prorated payment for the entire duration of service. If the two-week period starts and ends in the same month, the payment will not be prorated, and the provider will receive the full month's payment for that enrollment. If the two-week early termination notice payment period continues into a second month and the children are no longer attending the program, payment for the second month will be prorated. The proration of payment for the second month is determined by the number of days into the second month that the two-week early termination notice payment period ran.

## Method of payment

Agencies receive child enrollment reimbursement for all ELFA funding types via direct deposit only. All agencies are required to submit proof of an account that can accept payment deposits. Children's Council and/or Wu Yee will assist new programs with setting up direct deposit.

Whenever necessary and to avoid payment delays, DEC may approve and request Children's Council and/or Wu Yee to issue paper checks to programs affected by error.

# Family Eligibility

## San Francisco Residency Requirement

To be eligible to receive an **Early Learning for All Voucher** or **Center-MRA** funded enrollment, children must be San Francisco residents during the time that they are enrolled in the funded program, <u>except for state-funded enrollments and families involved in the child welfare system</u> (FCS). For state and ELFA vouchered families, Children's Council and Wu Yee will obtain and retrain proof of residency for all enrollments. MRA-funded programs must keep a copy of proof of residency in each child's file along with the ELFA family Enrollment Form. Proof of residency must contain the name and address of at least one parent/guardian and be collected by the program at the time of enrollment. A P.O. Box address is not acceptable proof of San Francisco residency. Acceptable proof of residency includes any of the following documents dated within 30 days of the certification: includes any of the following documents dated within 30 days of the certification:

- A utility (electric, gas, water), cable television or phone/cell phone bill
- Pay stub
- Current automobile, homeowner, or rental insurance policy
- Rental agreement
- Bank statement
- Jury summons
- Voter ballot
- Property tax statement showing address
- Letter from a social services or governmental agency

In circumstances where a home is shared and/or one of the documents above is not available, a letter can be submitted from the lessor confirming residency. If a letter from the lessor is not obtainable, an ELFA Self-Declaration form may be submitted.

## Residency Requirement for Homeless Families

Homeless families self-report homelessness in San Francisco. ELFA-eligible homeless families receiving Compass' Child Care Case Management services who subsequently relocate outside of San Francisco to obtain permanent/stable housing will continue to receive their ELFA for up to 3 months from the date of their move. The ELFA will provide funding, up to the Regional Market Rate (RMR) ceiling, to obtain care with a licensed child care program. This funding acts as a bridge to maintain families' continuity of care and to assist families in finding and obtaining other available subsidized child care services in their new county. Children's Council of San Francisco issues the payment and tracks the San Francisco ELFA payment support.

## Sibling Priority

DEC will provide priority access to ELFA funding for any siblings ages 0 to 5 years and/or kindergarten to 12 years if the family is involved in or at risk of being involved in the child welfare system or is homeless.

Programs or parents should contact their COMPASS case manager, Human Services Agency's Program Specialist, and or Children's Council and Wu Yee when they know a family would like to enroll a sibling. The supporting agency must facilitate the sibling's enrollment and indicate that it is a sibling priority on their ELSF profile. If funding is available, a sibling may receive an ELFA voucher or center-MRA funding at the same program as their sibling or another ELFA-qualified program, depending on available space and family preference. If funding is not currently available, the sibling will be prioritized on ELSF for when funding becomes available. The ELFA funding rates for children over 5 years old will be set at the California Department of Education's regional market rate.

**Note:** Sibling priority for families outside the target population in the child welfare system or those experiencing homelessness can only be extended to siblings under 5 years of age, and only when funding is available.

## Income Eligibility Requirements

For ELFA Free Tuition vouchers and ELFA MRA Free Tuition, a family's gross income must be at or below 110% of the Area Median Income (AMI) at the time of their eligibility determination.  However, **Title V programs must use state funding for Title V – eligible families (CCTR>85% SMI and CSPP>100% SMI, State Vouchers>85% SMI).** They should only use local Early Learning For All funding for families that are not eligible for State funding. When enrolling a family in locally funded ELFA Free Tuition, Title V programs should complete section VIII of the ELFA Family Enrollment Form certifying that the family does not qualify for state funding and providing the reason(s).

For the ELFA Full Tuition Credit, a family's gross income must be at/or between 111% and 150% of the Area Median Income (AMI) at the time of their eligibility determination.

Effective July 1, 2026: For the ELFA Half Tuition Credit a family's gross income must be at or between 151% and 200% of the Area Median Income (AMI) at the time of their eligibility determination.

The family eligibility chart shows the maximum monthly gross income by family size, up to 150% of AMI, for the fiscal year 2025-26 and up to 200% AMI effective July 1, 2026.

## Certification of Family's Income Eligibility

As a contracted administrative Services Agency, Children's Council of San Francisco performs family eligibility certification for ELFA Free Tuition Vouchers and ELFA enhancement on State Vouchers.  Wu Yee Children's Services performs family eligibility certification for ELFA Free Tuition Vouchers and the ELFA Full and Half Tuition Credit vouchers.  Agencies administering Title 5 and Center-MRA enrollments are solely responsible for determining and documenting a family's eligibility for these funds.  All documentation collected by agencies about family eligibility, enrollment, or other related documents may be reviewed by DEC or other City Departments (e.g., Controller's Office) at any time during or after the funding period.

## Family Recertifications

Families receiving Early Learning for All (ELFA) funding via Center-MRA or voucher are not required to recertify eligibility after their initial eligibility determination, unless there are changes to their family status, family size, income, or residence.  If such changes occur, families must notify the child care provider immediately, and the provider must check for updated eligibility. Locally funded enrollments are eligible until the child reaches kindergarten age.  The family may voluntarily request to be recertified if their income has gone down from the time of their initial certification and they believe they may be eligible for increased financial support.

## Family Composition

Early Learning for All funding is available to all income-eligible San Francisco residents with children ages 0-5.  MRA-funded programs must document a family's household size based on the number of parents/caregivers in the immediate family, as well as any dependent children under the age of 18. *Copies of the birth certificates for all children in the family under the age of 18 must be kept on file.*  For

ELFA-funded vouchers, Children's Council and/or Wu Yee document the family's composition as part of the certification of families.

## Reporting Family Size and Income Changes

ELFA Voucher and Center-MRA funded families are not required to recertify eligibility after their initial income and SF residency determination until the child reaches Kindergarten age, unless there are changes in their family size, family status, income or residence. If such changes occur, families must notify Children's Council, Wu Yee, or the ELFA MRA-funded program immediately. Children's Council, Wu Yee, or the MRA-funded program's staff must then check the family's updated eligibility status and documentation.

## Change in Income

Recertification must occur if the funding source changes. If there is a change in income or family size at any point throughout the year, the agency or program must gather new income information, determine eligibility, and then determine the duration of the new period of eligibility. The family must provide documentation showing the family's total countable gross income to determine ELFA funding eligibility. All individuals counted in the family's size must submit proof of income using, but not limited to, the documents listed below dated within 30 days of the certification:

- Gross wages or salary (e.g. pay stubs, W2, tax return)
- Spousal support
- Gross income from self-employment
- Rental income
- Disability or unemployment compensation
- Foster care grant payments
- Worker's Compensation
- Cash assistance or,
- ELFA Self-Declaration Form

Copies of the document(s) used to determine income must be kept on file. All documentation collected by agencies about family eligibility, enrollment, or other related documents may be reviewed by DEC or other City Departments (e.g., Controller's Office) at any time during or after the funding period. Families must notify the agency immediately if there are changes in their family status, family size, income, or residence. If such changes occur, agency staff must check for updated eligibility.

## Change in Family Size

If there is a change in family size, documentation of the new family size would be needed, along with new income eligibility documentation. Copies of the birth certificates for all children in the family under the age of 18 must be kept on file. If there is a separation of parents, the family must provide legal documentation of the separation and any child support assistance, or complete the ELFA Self Declaration Form attesting to the separation and the provision or absence of child support.

## Change of San Francisco Residency

If a family moves to a new address within the City and County of San Francisco, they are required to notify Children's Council, Wu Yee, or their ELFA Funded Program. The change should be noted in the family's file along with proof of the new San Francisco address. Acceptable proof of residency includes any of the following documents dated within 30 days of the certification:

- A utility (electric, gas, water), cable television or phone/cell phone bill
- Pay stub
- Current automobile, homeowner, or rental insurance policy
- Rental agreement
- Bank statement
- Jury summons

- Voter ballot
- Property tax statement showing address
- Letter from a social services or governmental agency

In circumstances where a home is shared and/or one of the documents above is not available, a letter can be submitted from the lessor confirming residency.  If a letter from the lessor is not obtainable, an ELFA SELF-Declaration form may be submitted.

A P.O. Box address is not acceptable proof of San Francisco residency. Families that fail to report a change of address may be disqualified from receiving Early Learning For All funding. Programs that fail to track and verify San Francisco residency requirements may have their participation in ELFA support services, such as quality and workforce initiatives, terminated and/or be ineligible for future locally funded enrollments.

## Families that Become Eligible for Increased ELFA Tuition Support Due to a Change in Family Size, Family Status or Income

Should a family's income decrease or their family size or status change making them eligible for increased ELFA tuition support, they should provide new eligibility documentation to the appropriate administrator immediately.  Families with voucher-funded enrollments should provide this information to Wu Yee Children's Services.  Families with MRA-funded enrollments should provide documentation to their program administrator. Families at ELFA-funded MRA programs must also complete and sign a new ELFA Family Enrollment Form, declaring under penalty of perjury that all family and income information provided is true, accurate.

If the family is deemed eligible for an increase in financial support, the support will remain in place for up to one (1) year or for the remainder of the time until the child reaches kindergarten age, whichever happens first.

### Loss of Residency Eligibility: Required Actions

If a family relocates outside of San Francisco and is not case managed by Compass Family Services, ELFA funding must be terminated within 30 days of the relocation. The family is welcome to continue at the program as a private-pay family.

### Failure To Comply

If changes in family size, status, income or residence occur and are not reported within 30 days of the change, the family may be ineligible for any level of financial support, fraudulent, false, or misleading information and documentation provided will be grounds for immediate termination of participation in any locally or State-funded child care programs, and for DEC to pursue recoupment of funds for child care payments received by the family.

# Family Fees

For State-funded enrollments, the California Department of Education establishes a Family Fee schedule based an annual State Medium Income survey data. However, DEC currently covers Family Fees for all San Francisco families receiving State-funded ECE services at a San Francisco Early Learning for All (ELFA ) provider. This policy may be modified at any time and is contingent upon funding availability. ELFA Free Tuition rates include a state equivalent family fee. Families with children at risk of abuse, neglect, or exploitation, and/or those connected to the child welfare system (i.e. Family and Children's Services) are exempt from any income eligibility requirements and/or family fees.

### Co-Payments, Enrollment Fees, Extended Hour Fees, and /or Deposits

ELFA programs are not permitted to charge and/or ask families with ELFA Free Tuition enrollments (funded via Voucher or Center-MRA) to provide program application fees, co-payments, enrollment fees, extended hour fees, extracurricular/outdoor activity fees, and/or deposits.

The ELFA initiative prioritizes equitable access to high-quality early care and education for all families, regardless of their financial circumstances. By eliminating additional fees and co-payments for ELFA Free Tuition enrollments, we remove potential financial barriers and ensure that our city's most economically pressured families can participate fully in these vital programs. To support this vision, DEC provides robust investments, including competitive reimbursement rates, workforce compensation, and quality improvement grants. These investments support fiscal sustainability and competitive compensation while also ensuring every child in San Francisco can access high-quality early care and education.

For the ELFA Full and Half Tuition Credits, the entire Tuition Credit amount must be applied to discounting the parent's tuition (i.e., no portion of the credit is allocated to the program). ELFA Tuition Credit Families are responsible for covering any remaining enrollment costs and/or extended hour, extracurricular/outdoor activity or other fees , as set by the program and based on the current private-payer rate and fee structure.

# Enrollment Policies and Processes

### DEC's Enrollment Priorities

DEC requires all ELFA-funded programs to apply the following guidelines to prioritize enrollments for ELFA funded spaces during the 2025-26 program year.

Category 1 (First Priority)

DEC requires ELFA-funded programs to give top priority for enrollment to the following groups (in no particular order):

- Children who are clients of Family and Children's Services (FCS) or are at risk of abuse, neglect, or exploitation
- Children eligible through the Emergency Child Care Bridge Program for Foster Children
- Children experiencing homelessness
- Children of domestic violence survivors

Category 2 (Second Priority)

We ask that you grant the following groups second priority for enrollment before enrolling children outside of these groups (in no particular order):

- Children with disabilities or special health care needs whose individualized education programs (IEP) and/or individual family support plans (IFSP) include ECE services.
- Children from low-income families, including those who receive or are eligible for free or reduced meals, Medi-Cal, SNAP (food stamps), WIC, CalWORKs, and other public assistance programs.

*Provisions*

I. If your program is subject to enrollment priorities attached to federal/state funding/subsidies, then apply those priorities before local priorities.
II. Siblings of a previously enrolled child may be enrolled before applying the DEC enrollment priorities.

DEC reserves the right to monitor ELFA programs to ensure compliance with enrollment prioritization.

## Enrollment through ELSF

Earlylearningsf.org, also known as ELSF, is a website DEC and our partners use to connect eligible families to Early Learning For All programs that best meet their needs and that have current vacancies.  When funding is available, Children's

Council, Wu Yee, and Title V programs, including Early Head Start and Head Start, pull families from ELSF according to DEC and State enrollment priorities. For locally funded enrollments, Children's Council and Wu Yee provide families with a list of options that are closest to meeting the family's and child's developmental needs *and that have current reported vacancies.*

Therefore, it is critical for programs to report any current and/or planned vacancies on ELSF by logging on to the ESLF website and following the guidelines for posting a vacancy. For questions or technical assistance, please get in touch with Children's Council at: support@childrenscouncil.org / 415-343-4669, or Wu Yee Resource and Referral at: randr@wuyee.org / 1-844-644-4300.

Once a family is pulled from ELSF and receives a list of program options, they can choose to move forward with enrollment or continue exploring additional ELFA program options. Program participation in the ELFA network does not guarantee full enrollment. Programs are responsible for marketing to families and ensuring they maintain optimal enrollment.

## Provider and Family-Initiated Enrollment (Formerly known as "Two-Way Enrollment")

Access and Enrollment (A&E) is committed to addressing families' immediate childcare and early education needs by providing rapid enrollment access, regardless of the program setting. To support this, ELFA Validated Programs can conduct an eligibility check that will enable families to begin services immediately if they meet the income and San Francisco residency requirements and/or are case managed by Compass. When a family and an ECE program determine that the ECE program attends to the developmental, linguistic, and geographical needs of the child, Families and Programs can request a "Provider and Family Initiated Enrollment" as follows:

### MRA-Funded Programs

MRA-funded programs will utilize the ELFA-MRA Family Enrollment Form and conduct eligibility certification in accordance with ELFA-MRA funding enrollment procedures. For specific guidance or questions about this process, ELFA MRA-funded programs can contact their A&E program officer.

### All other ELFA Programs (Centers and FCCs)

1. The program must ensure the family agrees to all program-specific requirements. Program-specific requirements must apply to all families in the program, regardless of funding source, including private-payers.
2. If the family agrees to program-specific requirements, then the program must complete the "Provider and Family-Initiated Enrollment" form. **The complete signed form guarantees 30 days of childcare services and payment for those 30 days only.**
3. The Program must inform the family that they will have 30 days to submit the required income and SF residency information and complete an intake at Children's Council or Wu Yee. Failure to complete the eligibility process within 30 days will result in the termination of enrollment and payment. This does not apply to families case-managed by Compass.
4. Programs must send the "Provider and Family-Initiated Enrollment" form to: Children's Council support@childrenscouncil.org, or Wu Yee randr@wuyee.org, or the family's case manager at Compass Family Services.
5. Within 5 days of receiving the "Provider and Family Initiated Enrollment" form, Children's Council or Wu Yee will follow up with the family to verify eligibility. Once they verify eligibility, Children's Council or Wu Yee will extend enrollment in the selected program beyond the initial 30 days. For families case-managed by Compass, Compass will process the "Provider and Family-Initiated Enrollment" form and enrollment and share with Children's Council to process payment to the program.

### ECE Educators, as Parents, Accessing Locally-Funded ECE Services

The Department of Early Childhood (DEC) allows licensed family childcare (FCC) and center-based program owners and employees to access locally funded early care and education (ECE) services for their children ages 0-5. To qualify for ELFA MRA or voucher-funded enrollment, families must meet all income and residency requirements.

Eligible families may use this funding to enroll their children in ELFA programs not owned by the individual seeking services. To avoid conflicts of interest that could affect program quality, DEC does not allow providers to receive payment for caring for their own children.

However, employees of ELFA programs may use ELFA funding at their place of employment if:

- They are not responsible for the care of their own child, and
- They are not assigned to their child's classroom.

Payments must be made directly to the program, not to the parent or caregiver. This policy applies only to locally-funded ECE services and does not override any state-funded ECE policies.

# Supporting Children with Special Needs

### Program Requirements for Children with Identified Disabilities or Special Needs

DEC defines children with identified disabilities or special needs as children with an assessment from a professional that has determined the child has special needs or the child has an existing Individualized Education Plan (IEP), Individualized Family

Services Plan (IFSP), or Regional Center Report, or is receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI).

Programs receiving DEC funding will make reasonable accommodations for children identified as eligible for special education and/or related services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IEDE). The child's Individualized Education Program will determine appropriate special education and related services placement. All DEC-funded programs must comply with applicable provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Action (IDEA).

## ELFA Kindergarten Deferral Requests

DEC offers targeted training opportunities in areas such as learning and development, child assessment, social-emotional development, and best practices for providers caring for children in group care settings. When a family considers deferring kindergarten for their child, providers will assume the responsibility for utilizing DEC services and other research-based practices to support continuous quality improvement and ensure positive developmental outcomes for the child, potentially leading to an additional enrollment period.

The Department of Early Childhood \will make a case-by-case determination based on the unique developmental situation of each child, the program's work plan to address the child's developmental needs, and funding availability.

To request approval for a child to defer kindergarten and remain in a program for additional instruction, programs and families must submit the following to DEC-Access-Enrollment@sfgov.org:

- Compilation of assessments and developmental screenings (Desired Results Developmental Profile [DRDP], Ages & Stages Questionnaire [ASQ] through the Sparkler Application), and a formal documentation of developmental milestones being unmet. Information submitted must specify the developmental milestones that need attention, such as language and literacy, cognitive development, social-emotional development, and physical development that will need attention during the extended period.

- Programs must submit a **work plan** outlining developmental goals for the child based on the DRDP and/or ASQ results; and/or
- A documented exceptional need dated within the past year, unless it is a permanent or ongoing diagnosis. Acceptable documentation may include:
    - An active Individualized Education Program (IEP)
    - An official letter, report, or evaluation results from a licensed medical provider, psychologist or psychiatrist
    - An official letter from a social worker, case worker, or shelter
    - Court documents (e.g., foster care placement orders, Child Protective Services involvement, or appointment of an Educational Rights Holder)

If an additional year of ELFA-funded preschool is granted, ELFA-qualified providers will be required to participate in a structured monitoring plan established by the Department of Early Childhood (DEC). Programs must use the A&E "Monitoring Requirements for Early Learning For All (ELFA) Funded Preschool Extension Form" to document and track compliance.

Programs may receive at least two visits per year to verify that the plan is being followed and that the child's developmental milestones are being addressed. Monitoring and quality improvement activities will be aligned with the ELFA Quality Standards. Active collaboration between families and providers will help ensure that an additional year of preschool meaningfully supports the child's developmental progress and facilitates a successful transition to kindergarten or first grade, depending on the child's enrollment pathway. Refer to the ELFA-funded preschool extension flow chart for a visual representation of the process.

# Enrollment Reporting and Record Keeping Requirements

## Reporting Child Enrollment/Attendance

Accurate records of child enrollments and attendance are an essential part of maintaining eligibility to participate in ELFA MRA, ELFA voucher, and State voucher-funded programs for both programs and parents. Attendance is reported as follows, based on the program type:

### MRA-funded enrollments (ELFA Free Tuition, ELFA Enhancement (CCTR/CSPP), ELFA Full Tuition Credit, ELFA Half Tuition Credit)

- Programs are required to enter and certify monthly enrollment data into the DEC Enrollment Tracking System (DETS) by the 5th calendar day of the following month; however, this is subject to change, and providers will be made aware of any changes well in advance to ensure continued reimbursement to providers.
- The “start date” and “end date” for each enrollment reported in DETS must represent the dates of active, ELFA-certified, and MRA-funded enrollment dates. These dates must not overlap with the funding dates for any other funding source to avoid duplicate payments.

### State-funded voucher enrollments (CAPP and CalWORKs)

- Following state policy, programs are required to report attendance for state vouchered children to receive payment. The Children’s Council will make the DEC-approved attendance guidelines available to programs.

### Voucher-funded enrollments (ELFA Free Tuition, ELFA Full Tuition Credit and ELFA Half Tuition Credit vouchers)

- Programs are required to track daily attendance and submit monthly attendance records using paper or electronic timesheets to the Children’s Council and/or Wu Yee, depending on which agency is funding the enrollment for reimbursement purposes.

Notes on DETS:

Family Child Care programs and/or Centers that receive ELFA-funded and/or state-funded vouchers do not report voucher enrollment data into DETS.

Centers that do not receive ELFA-MRA enrollment funding are required to report child enrollment information for their federal, state, and other related enrollment funding into DETS as a requirement of their participation in other DEC-funded initiatives.

## Absences

A quality early childhood program prepares children for kindergarten while also developing the social and emotional foundation they need to thrive in school. Programs must establish consistent policies for recording excused absences across all enrollment types and provide families with information to support their full utilization of early learning services. This family engagement strategy allows programs to have a vital role in promoting the benefits of consistent attendance while identifying attendance patterns that may jeopardize enrollment eligibility.

Programs are responsible for informing families and A&E Program Officers, Children's Council, and/or Wu Yee of all terminations of DECE funding due to excessive absences or any changes in the family's participation in the program within five program days. Before any enrollment termination, programs and/or Children's Council and/or Wu Yee must engage the family to assist with resources needed to prevent disenrollment.

## Limited Term Service Leave

Limited Term Service Leave (LTSL) is offered for children enrolled in an ELFA program when families do not require services for an extended time but expect to need child care afterward. The maximum duration of LTSL is 12 weeks, or 16 weeks for maternity or medical leave. ISAs help families select the LTSL option that best suits their needs.

## Enrollment Recordkeeping

All ELFA-funded programs (including ELFA MRA-funded and ELFA Voucher programs, administered by the administering Agencies) must establish and maintain a basic file for enrollment information. Required A&E documentation for each enrollment file (see the list below) varies slightly by funding source. Programs must retain all records, whether hard copy or electronic format, for a minimum of five years. And programs must maintain a recordkeeping system readily accessible to individuals conducting audits or reviews.

For enrollment initially funded via MRA funding:

- ELFA Family Enrollment Form that includes family size, income, and San Francisco residency eligibility information about the child and family
- Documentation of family size-Birth certificates for all children under the age of 18
- Documentation of San Francisco residency (data within 30 days of certification
- Documentation of family income (dated within 30 days of certification)

For enrollments initially funded via Collaborating Services Agencies:

- Voucher certificate issued by the Collaborating Services Agency for enrollment with effective dates of funding
- Or a Voucher to MRA Record of Eligibility Issued by Children's Council, Wu Yee or DEC

For all files:

- DEC Data Acknowledgement Form: Families must be asked to sign this form annually, and programs must maintain a copy in each family's program file. The form must be kept on file, even if the parent chooses not to sign it, as an acknowledgement that the family is aware of DEC's data collection policies.
- Site information on total classrooms, age designation for classrooms, and teacher-child ratios for each classroom
- ELFA Family Enrollment Form includes information about the child and family. (Note: for ELFA funded children, this form must include information about the family income level and San Francisco residence.) children, this form must

include information about the family income level and San Francisco residence.)

- Documentation of Home Residence
- Copies of Child's Developmental Screenings and Assessments (ASQ & DRDP)
- Documentation of two Parent-Teacher Conferences per program year

# Program Schedule Policies

## Equal Access to Full-Time Care

All families receiving EFLA funding are eligible for full-time early care and education, depending on the parents' preference and the selected program's published schedule. Full-time is a minimum of 30 hours per week. All participating ELFA programs must offer ELFA-funded family's equal access to the program's hours of operation, including programs with staggered schedules. Programs cannot limit a family's access to care based on funding source. For example, a program with a published full-time schedule of 9 am-5 pm should not provide services from 9 am-3 pm to ELFA-funded families, unless this is the family's preferred schedule. Failure to comply with this policy may be considered discriminatory and a violation of DEC policy.

State-funded vouchers are available for both full-time and part-time schedules and payment arrangements. Children's Council is responsible for providing guidance and support for state-funded voucher enrollments.

## Programs Operating Multiple Shifts

DEC supports programs in providing high-quality early care and education (ECE) that fosters children's cognitive, social-emotional, and physical growth. To ensure a safe and healthy environment, particularly for programs offering extended hours or multiple shifts, providers must prioritize health, safety, and nutrition at all times. Programs operating multiple shifts must:

- Notify Community Care Licensing of their program service hours. Children's Council and Wu Yee will collect information and documentation that support this requirement.
- Notify Children's Council and Wu Yee of the program's multiple shifts and provide a copy of their parent information sheets, a copy of the program's brochure, and internal policies, along with the information posted on their website, if applicable. This information helps Children's Council and Wu Yee update the program's information, description, and services.
- Avoid at any time pressuring families to enroll in a shift offered and/or suggesting that families misrepresent their eligibility or participation in the program to fill a vacant space. Misrepresentation can be a reason for a program to be terminated from its involvement in ELFA.
- Avoid engaging in misrepresentation of hours of services provided, schedules, days of service, and operation, along with or in coordination with families, which can be grounds for termination from ELFA
- Be aware that operating a multiple-shift program increases the complexities of "program transitions" and that, in certain circumstances, it may put the program in an "over-capacity' status. Consistent over-capacity violates CCL regulations.

## Program Closure Days

DEC will allow programs to take up to 15 paid closure days per fiscal year. These flexible paid closure days off can be taken at any time during the fiscal year. The 15 paid closure days include five professional development days. Programs are not required to use all of their paid closure days.

## Back-up care

ELFA-funded families whose ELFA provider is closed are eligible for 15 days of back-up child care per fiscal year.

Children's Council and Wu Yee are responsible for assisting the family to find a program that meets the family's needs during the 15 allowable days.

Two programs cannot be paid for the same period; therefore, to accommodate payment for the back-up child care, it will be prorated for the backup program based on the days of care being provided.  Payment for the regular program will be prorated if the 15 days of back-up care are outside the 15 closure days allowed per calendar year for ELFA-funded enrollments.

## Payment Proration for Program Closures Beyond the Allowable 15 Days per Year

### ELFA-Funded Vouchers

Programs must submit their calendar of operation for the fiscal year to Children's Council and Wu Yee. If a program with ELFA-funded Voucher enrollments has closure days that exceed the allowable 15 days during the fiscal year, proration may occur.

No other prorating factors will apply to payments for ELFA-funded enrollments.

### State-Funded Vouchers

Programs with state-funded voucher enrollments are allowed only 10 paid closure days.  Children's Council is responsible for informing programs about how these 10 paid closure days are determined.

Prorating rules for state-funded programs still apply to state-funded vouchers. Children's Council is responsible for informing programs about the prorating rules for state-funded vouchers.

If a program is terminated from ELFA due to a CCL violation or any other Operating Guidelines violation, the payment may be placed on hold for the duration of any adverse action appeal.

# ELFA Program Quality Requirements

## ELFA Quality Standards and Programmatic Assurance Requirements

Qualified programs are committed to a process of continuous quality improvement and to fully meeting the requirements of the Programmatic Assurances and aligned Quality Standards set by DEC. As stipulated in the ELFA Participation Agreement, programs are responsible for meeting the following Programmatic Assurances to remain an ELFA-qualified program and serve city-funded children:

| QUALIFICATIONS |
| --- |
| Centers Director Qualifications: Associate degree with 24 units ECE/CD +/with 6 units management/administration and 2 units supervision or Site Supervisor Permit, and 21 hours professional development annually.<br><br>Center Lead Teacher Qualifications: classroom led by a teacher with 24 units of ECE/CD plus 16 units of General Education or Teacher Permit (or higher) according to the State of California Commission on Teacher Credentialing. |
| Family Childcare Qualifications: 12 ECE units, including 9 units for core classes (Child Growth and Development, Intro to Early Childhood Curriculum, and Child, Family, and Community) & 3 ECE elective units for educator's providing instruction and supervision to the children. |
| QUALITY ASSURANCE |
| Continuous Quality Improvement<br>Develop a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) annually and participate in continuous reflection and learning to increase the quality of child learning and teaching. Participate in annual program quality validation visits. |
| Family Partnership<br>Program effectively engages families by:<br>• Creating a welcoming environment that incorporates the unique cultural, ethnic, and linguistic background of families through the |

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| lens of equity, such as greeting all families during pick-up and drop-off.<br>• Conducting parent teacher conferences twice a year<br>• Communicating with families in person and through a variety of tools such as email, text, blog, newsletter, bulletin board, and phone call.<br>• Providing opportunities for families to be engaged in their children's learning and development as their children's first teacher. |
| Safe and Engaging Environments<br>Provide indoor and outdoor environment that supports child caring, competence and excellence in learning. |
| Engaged Educators and Interactions<br>Provide nurturing, responsive, language and cognitive rich interactions between adults and children, as outlined in the CLASS observation tool. Programs use the CLASS as a reflective tool to improve adult child interactions. |
| Learning Opportunities<br>Program delivers learning opportunities that offer developmentally, culturally and linguistically appropriate learning experiences that support all children's development across all California Learning Foundations. Learning opportunities are informed by-<br>• Child observation and assessment<br>• Developmental screening<br>• Universal Design for Learning (UDL) |
| |
| Continuous Professional Development<br>• Each educator must complete (once) 6 hours of training on each of the following topics: child Development/Learning Foundations (0-5), Inclusion and Meeting the Needs of Young Children with Disabilities or Other Special Needs, and Family Engagement and Support/Strengthening Families and anti-Bias/Equity training. College units may be applicable.<br>• Programs must support teachings staff to develop professional |

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| development plans<br>• Program leaders and FCC owners develop professional development plans<br>• Program leaders and FCC owners develop professional development plans focusing on serving diverse communities and reflective supervision. |
| Non-Denominational Teaching<br>Sites may not deliver any direct faith –based instruction during program time supported with DEC funds. |
| Ratio and Group Size<br>Age category and maximum class size for child care centers:<br>• FCCs (as per California Community Care Licensing Guidelines)<br>o Infants (0-18 months) 1:4<br>o Toddler (18-36 months) 1:6<br>o Preschool (3-5 years) 1:10<br>• Center without State funding:<br>o Infant (0-15 months) 1:4, class size 8<br>o Toddler (12-36 months) 1:6 class size 12<br>o Preschool (30 months-5 years) 1:10, class size 20<br>• State-funded (CSPP and CCTR) Centers<br>o Infant 1: 3, class size 9<br>o Toddler 1:4, class size 12<br>o Preschool 1:8, class size 24 |

## Quality Improvement Plan

DEC-funded programs must create and carry out a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) that includes analysis and reflection on child assessments, observations, and other program data. The QIP aims for ongoing improvement in program quality, focusing on curriculum, staff interactions with children, and classroom practices. DEC will offer technical assistance, coaching, training, and other support to help programs develop and implement their Quality Improvement Plans.

## Community Care Licensing Requirements

Centers and Family Child Care homes must have a current license with Community Care Licensing Division (CCLD) of the California Department of Social Services, and be 'in good standing' (per the Health and Safety Code Sections 1596.773 and 1596.886), which means they do not currently have any of the following:

- An administrative action taken or in the process of being taken (denied application, denied exemption, temporary suspension order, expedited revocation action, revocation action, non-compliance conference, or exclusion action that is being initiated, in process, or has already taken place)
- A license in probationary status

ELFA Centers and FCC Programs are required to inform DEC and Wu Yee and/or Children's Council of Type A violations noted during a licensing visit. Upon receipt, ELFA programs must forward any licensing report, documentation of noncompliance conference between CCLD and the licensee, and/or a copy of an Accusation that indicates CCLD intent to revoke the facility's license to DEC. A full copy of the CCLD report must be forwarded to DEC within three (3) calendar days for review. Failure to provide this information may result in suspension or termination of DEC funding. DEC reserves the right to review a DEC-funded site's licensing records at any time during the terms of the Funding Agreement.

ELFA-funded programs are responsible for ensuring compliance with Community Care Licensing (CCL) regulations, including those related to license capacity, which serves as a minimum standard of quality. Programs are responsible for tracking and maintaining the capacity and ratios of all children (both with private pay and those receiving local or state funding) at any given time.

## Intentional Approach to Family Engagement & Parent-Teacher Conferences

DEC requires all DEC-funded programs to take an intentional approach to engaging families and developing relationships that foster children's development. While there are many strategies to engage families, DEC encourages programs to, at a minimum, hold at least two (2) individual parent-teacher conferences each program year to discuss child progress. DEC may request to review documentation of these conferences during site visits.

### DRDP Reporting for Center-Based Programs

All center-based programs that receive CDSS, CDE, EHS/HS funding as well as locally funded ELFA are required to report DRDP data into DEC's Data Reporting System (DETS)

- 1st and 2nd DRDP assessment results
- Head Start requires a 3rd DRDP assessment

DRDP assessments are completed within 60 calendar days of a child's enrollment and every 6 months thereafter. Results of DRDP assessment should be entered by December 31st for the 1st DRDP and by June 5th for the 2nd DRDP. Note: For guidance on children with a later enrollment date, please reach out to your DEC Point of Contact.

# Workforce Initiative Requirements

Early educators employed at programs participating in ELFA have access to professional development and compensation supports.

ELFA Administrators with sites/programs participating in CARES 3.0 are required to:

1. Maintain site profile information on the CA Workforce Registry throughout the fiscal year.
2. Verify early educator staff employment through the CA Workforce Registry, twice a year (fall & spring), or as requested.
3. Meet the San Francisco Minimum Wage Ordinance (http://sfgov.org/olse/minimum-wage-ordinance-mwo).
4. Submit payroll documentation of early educator staff participating in CARES 3.0 every fall and every spring for any new staff hired after the fall round.

Administrators shall not misrepresent employment information of early educator staff that their site/program employs during the employment verification process.

ELFA Administrators with sites/programs participating in Early Educator Salary Support Grant (EESSG) must follow the funding and participation requirements outlined in the "Early Educators Salary Support Grant-Phase I and SF Early Care and Education Workforce Development & Compensation Initiatives-Phase II" Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

Programs must maintain good standing in all ELFA-related programming, including CARES 3.0 and EESSG, to continue to participate in the ELFA Network.

# Other Program Requirements

## DEC Nondiscrimination Requirement

All city-funded programs must have written policies that include language prohibiting discrimination against any child, parent(s), activities, and practices. These policies must ensure an environment free from unlawful discrimination, harassment, intimidation, and bullying based on factors such as race, color, ancestry, national origin, ethnic background, age, religion, marital or parental status, physical or mental disabilities, sex, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, or gender expression. Additionally, policies should prohibit discrimination based on association with individuals or groups with these characteristics. Written enrollment policies must also be accessible to parents or guardians upon request.

## ELFA Participation Agreement and Liability Insurance

All programs qualified through a validation process are required to sign an ELFA program Funding or Participation Agreement between DEC, the program, and both Resource and Referral Agencies.  This Agreement outlines the requirement and programmatic assurances for receiving the city funding, including, but not limited to, grants, ELFA Vouchers, ELFA Enhancements of State Funding, Center-MRA, and other local ECE funding. Agencies must have a fully executed Funding or Participation Agreement to receive City-funded enrollment reimbursement.

In addition, all programs signing an ELFA Funding or Participation Agreement are required to submit a copy of their liability Insurance certificate. Details regarding the different Insurance and Liability types, as well as the required coverage amounts, can be found in the signed Funding or Participation Agreement.

## Program Evaluation

All DEC-funded programs will be expected to participate in DEC-sponsored evaluation activities as needed. Evaluation activities will always be designed to inform, understand, and improve the impact of City-funded programs. programs may be asked to provide additional information about their operations or student population, administer and/or take surveys, participate in focus groups or interviews, allow observation of classrooms, and conduct outreach to identify parents interested in participating in evaluation activities or other activities to support evaluation efforts.

## Annual Financial Audit Requirement

Programs agree to maintain and make available to the City, its employees, authorized representatives, and federal and State funders, during regular business hours, accurate books and accounting records. Programs will permit the City to audit, examine, and make excerpts and transcripts from such books and documents, and to make audits of all invoices, materials, payrolls, records, or personnel and other data related to all other matters covered in the Funding or Participation Agreement, whether funded as a whole or in part by DEC.

Programs shall maintain such data and records in an accessible location and condition for a period of not less than five years after the final payment under the

ELFA Funding or Participation Agreement, or until after the final audit has been resolved, whichever is later. The State of California or any federal agency having an interested in the subject matter of this Agreement shall have the same rights conferred upon the City by this Section.

### DEC and Early Learning For All Branding Requirements

The San Francisco Department of Early Childhood (DEC) must be acknowledged in all external communications efforts related to the services and activities funded by DEC. The following forms of acknowledgment are acceptable:

1. Including statement of funding on digital or printed materials: "Funding [for this project/program/event] provided [or provided in part] by the San Francisco Department of Early Childhood."
2. Including DEC's logo on digital or printed materials.
3. Including verbal acknowledgment in spoken remarks indicating that the project/program/event was made possible with support from DEC.

The DEC team will provide ongoing support and guidance in fulfilling this requirement. ELFA programs may be asked to furnish copies of relevant promotional and/or marketing materials for review before being released to the public.

## Unauthorized Activities

### Faith-Based Teaching Limitation

Programs may not deliver any faith-based instruction during program time supported with DEC funds. The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that public funding of religiously affiliated programs violates the Establishment Clause if it has "the effect of advancing religion."[1] Faith-based organizations are precluded from using any part of government funds to support religious content or activities, including religious worship, instruction, and proselytizing. Faith-based organizations may use public

[1] Agostini v. Felton, 21 U.S. 203 (1997).

funds only to support the non-religious services they provide.  They may not require DEC-funded program participants to engage in religious practice or activities.

## Unauthorized use of Funding

DEC prohibits the use of its funds to cover expenses not directly related to the delivery of quality early education and care services for children and families. Prohibited expenses include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Purchase of vehicles or other transportation equipment;
- Bad debts, including losses arising from uncollectible accounts and any related legal costs;
- Costs of amusement or entertainment that does not benefit children in the Program; Cost of idle facilities unless those costs are related to the Program and the costs of the idle facilities have been approved by DEC;
- Costs incurred after the Contract has been terminated;
- Fund-raising costs;
- Investment management costs;
- Costs of organization of a nonprofit corporation such as incorporation fees or consultant fees;
- Public relations consultant fees;
- Costs of legal, consulting and accounting services incurred in prosecution; and
- Compensation to the members of the board of directors, if applicable.
- Fees used to offset unpaid or uncollected family fees and/or family co-payments.

## Misrepresentation or Fraud

Any fraudulent, false or misleading information and documentation provided will be grounds for immediate termination of participation in any locally or State-funded child care programs, and for DEC to pursue the recoupment of funds for child care payments received by the program.

Some examples of fraud include, but are not limited to the following:

- False or misleading reporting of actual attendance days on the child care attendance form. This includes signing for hours of care that were not provided.
- Families providing false or misleading reporting of income, SF residency, family size, and actual 28-section attendance days on the child care attendance reports. This includes signing for hours of care that were not provided.
- Asking families to participate in completing forms, eligibility documents, attendance forms, or to report hours of service different from the actual hours of care provided.
- Falsified, misleading, or inaccurate documentation regarding licensing.

Any program and/or family terminated for any of the above reasons may request an appeal from the Department of Early Childhood (DEC). If the appeal is lost, the program may be required to reimburse DEC for child care funding received during the time the appeal was being heard.

# Non-Compliance, Suspension, and Termination

## Corrective Action Process & Conditional Status Amendments

DEC staff regularly monitor city-funded early learning providers for compliance with these Program Operating Guidelines. When monitoring activities identify areas of non-compliance, DEC strives to work collaboratively with the Provider through a defined Corrective Action Process (see Appendix A) to resolve issues and support the Provider's efforts to meet relevant early learning provider requirements. The Corrective Action Process aims to resolve problems efficiently and amicably, while also clearly outlining consequences for ongoing non-compliance. Refer to Appendix A, Corrective Action Process, for additional details.

The Conditional Status Amendment is an addendum to the Provider's funding agreement with Children's Council, Wu Yee, and/or DEC. As part of the Corrective

Action Process, it is used to document areas of non-compliance and identify specific activities with timelines for completion.  DEC Program Officers will initiate the Conditional Status Amendment in collaboration with the funded agency's Program Director and/or other lead staff. These documents become part of the Funding Agreement and constitute contractual obligations.

Programs with non-compliance areas not resolved through the Corrective Action Process may have their Funding Agreement suspended or terminated by DEC.

## Criteria for Suspension & Termination

DEC reserves the right to suspend or terminate a Provider's participation in city-funded programs and initiatives for any of the following reasons:

1. Provider's license is suspended or revoked.
2. A Provider is found to have committed a violation of licensing requirements, which is deemed by DEC to be a serious deficiency;
3. A Provider's teaching staff is found to have committed a violation of licensing requirements, which is deemed by DEC as a serious deficiency;
4. A report of child abuse by Provider is substantiated;
5. Provider is repeatedly uncooperative with DEC staff (e.g., refuses unannounced visits, quality monitoring or quality support, non-compliance with reporting requirements);
6. Provider provides false information to DEC;
7. Provider makes fraudulent use of city funds;
8. Serious or repeated instances involving noncompliance with city-funded initiative program requirements including Funding and Participation Agreement policies and/or failure to maintain high-quality early learning programming and environment as described in the Quality Standards and Quality Programmatic Assurances.
9. City-funded initiative programming no longer exists or is insufficient

## Review Procedure for Suspended or Terminated Provider

Should a program fail to resolve areas of non-compliance through the Corrective Action Process, DEC will issue written notice of suspension or termination and will include the effective date and reason(s) for this action.

A review procedure will be available to any Provider whose Funding Agreement is suspended or terminated for the reasons stated in (1) through (11) above. The Provider may contest the suspension or termination by filing a petition to DEC to request a review hearing. **The Provider must file this petition within ten (10) days of the notice of suspension or termination**, and include:

1. A clear statement of the action being appealed;
2. The reason(s) the action is unwarranted; and
3. Any written documentation in support of the appeal.

If the Provider files a petition requesting a hearing, DEC will schedule the hearing within 30 days of receipt. The Provider will receive at least fourteen (14) days advance written notice of the time and place of the review hearing. No later than 30 days after the hearing, DEC will issue a final written decision to the Provider via registered mail.

## Obligations of Terminated Provider

After receiving notice of DEC's decision to terminate the contract, the Provider must submit the following to DEC:

1. A current inventory of equipment purchased in whole or in part with City funds;
2. Names, addresses and telephone numbers of all families served by the City Funding Agreement; and
3. Monthly enrollment and attendance reports until the final date of Funding Agreement

# Appendix A – Corrective Action Process

San Francisco's Department of Early Childhood (DEC) routinely monitors early learning providers to ensure compliance with the Program Operating Guidelines Funding and participation Agreements. If monitoring activities reveal issues of non-compliance, DEC strives to work collaboratively with the affected provider to resolve the issues and support efforts to meet the applicable requirements. The corrective action process aims to address problems efficiently and amicably but also includes consequences for ongoing non-compliance.

The guidelines provide an opportunity for affected providers to be successful early learning partners with the City and County of San Francisco.

## Process Summary

When reviews of program data or site visits identify areas of non-compliance, DEC will initiate the corrective action process and take the following actions:

1. Initial Collaboration: A DEC representative will discuss particular areas of concern and needed action to meet programmatic requirements with the Program Director/Owner. DEC will also discuss a timeline for resolution. Such communication may occur in person or by phone and be documented by DEC staff for future reference and follow-up.

2. Conditional Status: DEC may require amendment of the Program & Funding Agreement to place the Provider on Conditional Status to address areas of non-compliance. Conditional Status begins when DEC staff work with the Provider to develop an Action Plan. This Action Plan serves as an amendment to the Provider's current Funding Agreement, stipulating specific areas of non-compliance, actions for resolution, timelines for completion, and responsible parties. The Provider will be required to facilitate special site monitoring with appropriate DEC staff, including supplemental site visits, additional reporting, site support plans, or other conditions. Failure to meet

the goals of the Action Plan will result in suspension or termination of the Funding Agreement or no offer of continued funding.

DEC reserves the right to place a Provider on Conditional Status, require development and completion of Action Plans, withhold funding, and/or terminate a Provider's funding eligibility at any time during the Funding Agreement period.

## Conditional Status Action Plan

DEC may require collaborative development of an Action Plan to address areas of non-compliance.

1. DEC Program Officer will schedule an appointment with the provider's Program Director (and other appropriate staff) to review in detail all non-compliance findings and develop an Action Plan together.

2. The Action Plan will identify the needs of the Provider and itemize unmet programmatic requirements. It will include due dates and timeframes for progress where applicable.

3. Provider concerns discussed and documented, as appropriate, in the "Clarification" section.

4. The Provider and DEC assigned staff sign the Action Plan. Executed copies are made available to all parties. They will become an amendment to the Provider's Funding Agreement with [Children's Council or Wu Yee] by placing the provider on conditional status.

5. If the Funding Agreement amendment to Conditional Status is during the last ninety (90) days of the program year, and the Provider is offered continued funding, the Funding Agreement for the subsequent contract period will include Conditional Status and the applicable Action Plan amendment.

6. If the Provider does not agree with the non-compliance findings or disagrees with the area(s) of non-compliance per the Action Plan, the Provider's comments are documented in the appropriate place on the form. In these cases, DEC will proceed with suspension or termination actions.

## Duration of Conditional Status

A Provider shall remain on Conditional Status until the Provider has corrected area(s) of non-compliance and/or has met requirements identified in the Action Plan Amendment.

A Provider may request written verification from DEC of the corrected area(s) of noncompliance even if the Provider is not removed from conditional contract status.