



CARES 3.0 Handbook:

A Policy and Application Guide for Early Educators

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I. Tier Determination

Each Early Learning For All program is assigned to one of three tier levels based on the percentage of subsidy-eligible children served. Tier determination only occurs once per year. No exceptions will be made. If no other tier has been assigned, all programs are designated in the orange tier until the next tier determination round.

A. Tier Level

- Orange tier
 - Serving between 0-19% subsidy-eligible children
 - Centers and FCCs CARES eligible
- Blue tier
 - Serving between 20-49% subsidy-eligible children
 - Centers and FCCs CARES eligible
- Green tier
 - Serving 50% or more subsidy-eligible children
 - FCCs CARES eligible
 - Centers move to the Early Educator Salary Support Grant

B. Subsidy Eligible Enrollments

- CSPP (California State Preschool Program)
- CCTR (General Child Care Contract)
- Head Start
- Early Head Start
- CAPP (California Alternative Payment Plan)
- Local Vouchers
- CalWORKS

***Tuition-credit enrollments are NOT eligible towards the subsidy enrollment count**

C. Tier Determination Formula

Based on a 6-month average of enrollment from October through March.

$$\frac{\text{6-month average subsidy-eligible enrollment}}{\text{6-month average total enrollments (including private pay and tuition credit enrollments)}}$$

$$\frac{\text{6-month average subsidy-eligible enrollment}}{\text{80\% license capacity (exclude school age)}}$$

The number provided is multiplied by 100 to give the percentage of subsidy-eligible children served.

D. Enrollment Data Collection

FCCs

- License capacity and subsidy enrollments collected from DETS (DEC Enrollment Tracking System)
- Additional enrollment information may be submitted by the owner/operator as needed during the appeals period

Centers

- Subsidy enrollment collected from DETS
- Overall enrollment collected from administrators via survey

E. Timeline

July/August	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Data collection (pull from DETS, send center administrator survey)○ Initial calculations shared○ Appeals period
August/September	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Final determinations shared○ CARES eligibility list updated and shared with all educators
One week before CARES Round	Early Learning For All validation deadline to be eligible for CARES



II. Administrator Instructions and Responsibilities

A. Who is an administrator?

An administrator oversees general program operation, often including supervising, hiring, and enrollment. Some examples of administrator job titles can include FCC owner/operator, center director, site supervisor, and others. The program administrator can be a designated person that updates the Registry for the program.

B. Pre-Application Period

- [Workforce Registry Administrative Access](#)
 - Before the CARES application opens, at least one person per center or FCC needs to have administrative access to the Registry.
 - This access allows you to update your employee roster and verify current employees.
 - Review your program's Staff Report and re-verify staff employment information and update it if necessary, including:
 - Title/position
 - Wage information
 - Hours worked per week
 - Employment dates
 - Please remove any staff that are no longer employed at your program.
 - Review [this guide](#) for step-by-step instructions.

- For Spring 2026, all educators will need an updated employment verification date in 2026 to receive their CARES stipend. As the program administrator, it is your responsibility to re-verify their current employment.

C. Before the End of the Application Period

- As the program administrator, it is your responsibility to submit payroll verification for your employees that have applied to CARES according to the current [Payroll Policy](#).
- Submit all payroll documents to the secure DropBox by emailing them to Payroll.wstkw9mro61s5r3g@u.box.com. We recommend using copy and paste with this email address to send the documents and ensure the email address is accurate.
- Please do not send documents to the ECEstipend email address as this is not a secure method of sending payroll information.
- If you have employees on leave that are applying to CARES, they should provide a [Leave Form](#) for you to sign. This form may be submitted by either the administrator or the employee, but it is the responsibility of the employee to ensure it is submitted before the end of the application period.
- If you have an employee that started recently, they may ask for a copy of an offer letter. This letter may be submitted by either the administrator or the employee, but it is the responsibility of the employee to ensure the letter is submitted before the end of the application period.



III. Eligibility Requirements

To be considered eligible for the CARES 3.0 stipend program you must meet the following requirements:

A. Employment

- Be employed at a validated Early Learning For All program as deemed eligible by the Department of Early Childhood, from one day prior to the open date of the application until checks are mailed (typically about 10-12 weeks later).
 - Pre-ELFA programs are not eligible. The deadline for validation to be eligible for CARES is one week prior to the opening of the application.
 - Programs participating in the Early Educator Salary Support Grant are not eligible.
 - SFUSD educators are not eligible.
 - If your employment changes from the time the application opens to the time checks are mailed, please notify the Workforce Team immediately. Your eligibility may be impacted.
 - If you change employment to another CARES-eligible program, you may remain eligible if determined so by the Workforce Team.
 - If you change employment to a program that is not CARES-eligible, you will not be eligible for the stipend.
 - If you move to a program participating in the Early Educator Salary Support Grant, you will not be eligible for the stipend.
 - If your program's status changes from the time the application opens to the time checks are mailed, please notify the Workforce Team

immediately. Each program's continued eligibility will be determined on a case-by-case basis in alignment with the current validation policies and process.

- If you are employed at more than one site, please see below for eligibility:
 - If you work at least 20 hours per week at one employer that is CARES-eligible AND your other employer is either CARES-eligible or is not part of the Early Educator Salary Support Grant, then you will be eligible based on employment at the CARES-eligible site at the higher tier level.
 - If you work at least 20 hours per week at one employer, that is CARES-eligible AND your other employer participates in the Early Educator Salary Support Grant, then you are not eligible for the stipend.
- If you are the owner/operator of an FCC AND you have another employer, your eligibility will be determined solely by the program in which you are owner/operator.

B. Hours working with Children

- This information is verified by your employer on the Registry AND by the number of hours worked as shown on payroll.
 - If there is a discrepancy between what is on the Registry and what is shown on payroll, our team will default to what is on payroll unless communication has been received from either the educator or their employer.
- Educators on leave may still be eligible for CARES if the following conditions are met:
 - A [Leave Form](#) has been signed by the employer and submitted to the Workforce Team before the application deadline.
 - At the start of the leave, the educator was working at least 20 hours per week directly with children.
 - At the time of the checks being mailed, the employee has a tentative return date, or the educator has confirmed their intent to return with their employer.
 - Educators on leave will only be eligible for a maximum of two application cycles of CARES during their leave.

- If you are employed by STEP, your eligibility is determined by the average number of hours per week you work during a given time frame prior to the application period. Please refer to the communications shared by the STEP team for more specific information for each round.
- If you are a new employee and the number of hours on payroll is minimal, please submit an employer-signed New Hire Form or Offer Letter from your employer to the Workforce Team before the application deadline. Your employment must start before the first day of the application period.



IV. Qualifications

There are a few qualifying factors that influence the amount you are eligible for in CARES 3.0. This document defines these qualifications and can be used as a supplement to better understand the CARES 3.0 matrix.

A. Tier Level

Once per year, each Early Learning For All program is part of the tier determination process. The Workforce Team works directly with center administrators and FCC owner/operators to complete this process. For all programs that join Early Learning For All after the tier determination process, they are designated to the orange tier. For more information about this process, please review the [tier determination policy](#).

- The orange tier is for programs serving between 0-19% subsidy-eligible children.
- The blue tier is for programs serving between 10-49% subsidy-eligible children.
- The green tier is only for FCCs serving 50% or more subsidy-eligible children. Center-based programs at the green tier transition into the Early Educator Salary Support Grant and are no longer eligible for CARES.

B. Full Time/Part Time

- Part time is for educators working 20 or more hours per week, but less than 30.
- Full time is for educators working 30 or more hours per week.

C. Job Titles

- All job titles are sorted into either Lead Teacher or Assistant Teacher categories. For the most updated list of category designation, please review the [Job Title List](#).
- Please note this list is subject to change with notice from the Department of Early Childhood (DEC).
- If your job title is not on the list of eligible job titles, you are not eligible for CARES.
- If your job title on the Registry does not match your job title on payroll, we will default to the job title on payroll.

D. Permits

- General notes about the permit:
 - Permits must be fully awarded, current, and verified in the Registry by the end of the application period.
 - Pending permits are not eligible.
 - Expired permits are not eligible.
 - Alternate teaching credentials are not eligible.
 - As changes are made to the permit structure, this list may be updated with notice from DEC.
- Eligible permits
 - Assistant Teacher
 - CDA
 - Associate Teacher
 - Teacher
 - Master Teacher
 - Site Supervisor
 - Program Director

E. ECE Units

- General notes about the units:
 - Units must be verified on the Registry by the close of the application period.
 - Units must come from a [CTC-approved accredited institute of higher education](#).
 - As a policy, the Registry does not verify ECE units from a foreign transcript evaluation.
- Groupings of units
 - Less than 12 ECE units
 - 12 core ECE units

- 24 ECE units (is accompanied by a degree)

F. Degrees

- General notes about degrees
 - Degrees are verified on the Registry through transcripts. Diplomas are not verified on the Registry and will not count toward your education qualification.
 - Degrees must be verified on the Registry by the end of the application period to be eligible.
 - Degrees must come from a [CTC-approved accredited institute of higher education](#).
 - Degrees earned from outside the U.S. will need to be evaluated by a [CTC-approved transcript evaluator](#). A full course-by-course analysis must be completed. Once completed, the full report may be uploaded to the Registry and must be verified by the close of the application period.
- Eligible degrees
 - Associate's degree (AA, AS, AAT, or AST) in any field of study
 - This degree must be accompanied by at least 24 ECE units to be eligible for the higher stipend amount.
 - Bachelor's degree (BA or BS) in any field of study
 - This degree must be accompanied by at least 24 ECE units to be eligible for the higher stipend amount.
 - Master's degree (MA or MS) in a related field of study
 - Related fields include, but are not limited to:
 - Early Childhood Education
 - Child and Adolescent Development
 - Child Development
 - Education
 - Early Childhood Special Education
 - Additional degree fields are approved at the discretion of the Workforce Team
 - This degree must be accompanied by at least 24 ECE units to be eligible for the higher stipend.



V. Application Process

A. Before you Apply

- Review the [eligibility document](#).
- Make sure all your information is accurate and up-to-date on your Registry profile, including your email address, mailing and residential address, employer, job title, hours worked per week, and wages.
- If your employment has not been confirmed on the Registry in 2026, please have your employer confirm your employment.
- Make sure you are [subscribed to our email list with your email listed on the Registry](#) to ensure you receive the emails. If you have unsubscribed, we are unable to send any emails to you regarding your CARES application. It is your responsibility to ensure you are subscribed to receive these emails.

B. Applying on the Registry

- The application for CARES is only available on the Registry.
- Please review the [step-by-step application guide to complete your application](#).
- If the Registry is blocking you from applying, this may be due to your eligibility. Please review the [eligibility document](#) and contact the Workforce Team if you believe your eligibility is incorrect.
- You may or may not receive a confirmation email from the Registry. Please review alternate steps listed below to ensure your application is successfully submitted.
 - If there is no application on file for you by the end of the application period, you are not eligible for that round. There will be no exceptions.

C. Ensuring your application is Submitted

- Confirmation email
 - You may or may not receive the confirmation email that usually comes when you have successfully applied for CARES. This email may go to your Spam or Junk folder or may be blocked by your email provider. We recommend relying on one of the other methods listed below to confirm your application status.
- Registry profile notification
 - When you are logged in to your Registry account, you will see the notifications button in the top right corner of your screen. Once you have successfully applied, there will be a notification confirming this status.
- Registry Stipend Status
 - When you are logged in to your Registry account, on your home page you will see “My Stipend Requests.” Please click on this. You will see all current and previous stipend applications you have submitted. Please ensure that the CARES application for the current application period is present. If it is not present, please apply again.
- Contact the Workforce Team
 - If you are still unsure if your application was submitted, you may contact the Workforce Team via email at ECEstipend@sfgov.org or leave a voicemail at 628-652-3005. Please include your full name and Registry ID number so we are able to better assist you. Please note that it often takes us between 2-3 business days to respond during application periods. We recommend trying to apply earlier in the application period, so you have time to ensure your application is successfully submitted.

D. Additional Documents

- [W9](#)
 - To be able to process your stipend payments, we need an accurate and current W9 on file for you. You need to upload a current W9 to your Registry profile by the end of the application period.
 - If you already have a W9 uploaded from previous rounds and no information has changed, you do not need to submit a new one.
 - Please review the W9 guide for support in filling this out. You may also reach out to Children’s Council directly for support at support@childrenscouncil.org.
 - If you would prefer to pick up your check-in person, please let Children’s Council know as soon as possible.

- [Payroll](#)
 - If payroll is required, please communicate with your program administrator to ensure payroll has been submitted according to the current [Payroll Policy](#).
 - If you are applying while on leave, please submit a signed [Leave Form](#).
 - If you are a newer employee and your hours on payroll are limited (you can confirm this with your administrator), please submit a signed offer letter.
 - Failure to submit these documents by the end of the application period may result in ineligibility for CARES

E. After the Application

- Once your application and additional documents have been submitted, the Workforce Team will review your application and eligibility. Please allow us at least two weeks after the closure of the application to review all applications and prepare the Estimates and Eligibility email.
- During this period, your stipend status will be moved from “Applied” to “In Progress” on the Registry. This status will not change again until the final approval and denial emails.
- Eligibility and Estimates Email
 - This initial email will confirm your eligibility and provide an estimate if all documents have been submitted.
 - It is possible to be eligible for the stipend but have an estimate of \$0. This can be due to missing or incomplete documents. The email will specify the reason for your estimate.
 - If you believe you have received an incorrect estimate, or if any of your information is incorrect, or if the payroll submitted was not accepted, then you may file an appeal, and we will review your application and information.

F. Appeals

- Appeal Notice and Timeline
 - If an applicant believes they have received an incorrect stipend estimate, they may file an appeal through the Appeal Survey link provided in the Eligibility and Estimates email within five (5) business days of the Department of Early Childhood’s issuance of notice for stipend Eligibility and Estimate.
 - Applicants have five (5) business days to respond and submit an appeal.

- Delivery of Appeal
 - Appeals must be made by completion and submission of the Appeal Survey by the given deadline.
 - Appeals made orally (e.g. by telephone) or by email will not be considered.
 - Appeals submitted after the deadline will not be considered.
 - When appealing for Payroll: Payroll documents and supporting documents for payroll must be uploaded to the Payroll Drop Box*, not the Workforce Registry or via email. Any payroll documents or their supporting documents not submitted to the Payroll DropBox will not be considered.

*The Payroll Drop Box is a secure document portal and is utilized for the security and confidentiality of the information applicants are submitting.

- If applicants are having difficulty accessing the Appeals Survey or uploading to the Payroll Drop Box, please contact the Workforce Team at ecestipend@sfgov.org before the given deadline.
- Applicants may appeal their CARES estimate for any of the following reasons:
 - Eligibility for CARES (ELFA employer, hours, teacher role)
 - Incorrect payroll
 - Missing supplemental forms (Leave Form, offer letter)
 - Incorrect qualifications listed (job title, full-time/part-time status, ECE units, degree, or permit)
- Appeals must include a detailed description about why the applicant is appealing for any of the reasons listed above.
- Appeals are denied when:
 - Applicants reach out to ecestipend@sfgov.org the Workforce Team after the Appeals deadline.
 - Documentation does not support the appeal (e.g. inaccurate/incorrect document for payroll).
 - Submission is after the deadline -- If the appeal or a needed document (e.g. Child Development Permit) was submitted only during appeal.
 - The employer has not verified employment
 - Employment has changed and is no longer eligible

- If no appeal is submitted, the estimate stands even if that estimate is \$0. No further appeals will be granted or considered outside of the formal appeals process.
- Appeal Determination
 - The final decision about an appeal is determined by the Workforce Team. The Department of Early Childhood Appeals outside the formal appeal process or outside the Workforce Team will not be considered.
 - Please allow 2 weeks 15 business days after the appeal period closes to respond to your appeal.

G. Final Approval and Denial Emails

- After all appeals have been processed and responded to, the Workforce Team will send out a final email confirming your approval or denial status.
- At this point, your stipend application status on the Registry will move from “In Progress” to either “Approved” or “Denied.”

H. Checks Mailed Emails

- If approved, you will receive an email once checks are placed in the mail. Checks typically arrive within 2-7 days but may take longer during busy periods for the post office. If you have not received your check by the date indicated in the email, please contact Children’s Council.
 - All checks above \$10,000 must be picked up from Children’s Council’s offices.
 - If your mailing address is different from your residential address, you will need to confirm this with Children’s Council before your check is mailed.
- Children’s Council verifies all information on the W9 before checks are sent. The support team at Children’s Council will reach out if there is something missing or incorrect with your W9. Failure to respond to Children’s Council’s requests within 3 weeks may result in your stipend being forfeited.
 - Within one month of checks being mailed, the stipend status on the Registry will be updated from “Approved” to “Paid” with an amount.
 - Please note that we are aware that there are currently issues with the amounts listed for your previous stipends.

I. Issues with your Check

- If there is an error in the amount on your check, please contact the Workforce Team as soon as possible.
- If there is an issue with receiving your check, please wait until the date listed in the email to contact Children's Council.
 - Please note that reissuing a check may take a few days and require an in-person pick up.

II. Uncashed Checks

- All CARES checks are valid for 90 days from the date the check was issued. If your check is lost or misplaced, please contact Children's Council support@childrenscouncil.org as soon as possible.
- If your check has not been cashed by the end of the 90-day period and you have not contacted Children's Council, a new check will not be reissued.
 - If you will be out of town when checks arrive and you are unable to cash the check, please contact Children's Council as soon as possible to make alternate arrangements.
 - It is the responsibility of the participant to contact Children's Council for check-related issues.