

NEW YORK

Cuomo to boost child care scholarships, aid for providers to meet COVID-19 needs

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As schools reopen and more people head back to offices after months of remote life amid the COVID-19 pandemic, Gov. Andrew Cuomo announced that more federal CARES Act funding would be dedicated to supporting child care needs.

This week, the state announced plans to dedicate \$88.6 million, via NY Forward grants, to help provide scholarships for families of essential workers; rental assistance for child care programs that had to find new space as schools are reconfigured to meet COVID-19 safety standards; and equipment and extra classroom space for programs to expand as the need for child care returns.

The New York State Office of Children and Family Services administered the federal CARES Act grants.

Child Care Resource and Referral agencies across the state will process payments to providers.

"We are glad to see the remaining CARES funds will be distributed to support child care providers, families, and, ultimately, children in safe, quality child care settings," Child Care Resources of Rockland Executive Director Vicki Caramante said on Friday.

'PROGRAMS ARE CLOSING': Call for Cuomo to aid child care providers

GOING REMOTE: How many students are skipping in-class learning?

WHAT IS A LEARNING POD? It depends on whom you ask

CCRR and local child care providers joined an Aug. 27 statewide Child Care Day of Action, which called on Cuomo to release more CARES Act funding to help child care providers meet

the demand for safe and quality care.

The pandemic cascaded challenges upon the child care sector. Enrollment, and therefore revenue, dropped as parents were working from home, and those with older children already had them home when schools went remote. Costs increased from cleaning and safety measures.

"I have heard from child care providers throughout our state about how important this funding is as they continue to operate safely with adequate social distancing to keep both staff and children safe," said Lt. Gov. Kathy Hochul, who co-chairs the state's Child Care Availability Task Force.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated inequalities that already existed in our society, particularly among working women," said Hochul, who announced the new funding on Thursday at Mount Kisco Child Care Center. "Nowhere is that more present than with child care."

How to access

The state Office of Families and Children's Services will manage the grants.

"Child care is foundational to our economic recovery and we are proud to support programs in adapting to the health and safety changes necessary to operate in our current climate," OCFS Commissioner Sheila J. Poole said.

The \$88.6 million in grant funds will be used as follows:

\$20 million: Child care scholarships for children of essential workers and first responders, including health care providers, pharmaceutical staff, law enforcement, firefighters, food delivery workers, grocery store employees and others who are needed to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. For families with an income less than 300% of the federal poverty level – or \$78,600 for a family of four. The funding will support 5,400 children in child care for 14 weeks.

\$20 million: Rental assistance for school-based child care programs displaced by the pandemic. Up to 2,300 school-age child care programs can access \$2,000 in monthly rental assistance for four months. Funding can also help pay for transporting children to the new location.

\$20 million: Grants to reopen or restructure child care programs so they meet new guidelines for social distancing. That could include purchasing partitions, short-term

rental space, supplies or broadband access.

\$28.6 million: Grants for child care providers to cover half of the cost — up to \$6,000 — to open a new classroom. Funding would phase out in the second and third months as parents enroll more children in child care.

To apply: Applications will be posted by Sept. 18 and accepted on a rolling basis until Dec. 31. Child care providers may apply for the funding at ocfs.ny.gov/programs/childcare/.

Nancy Cutler writes about People & Policy. Click here for her latest stories. Follow her on Twitter at @nancyrockland. Support local journalism; go to lohud.com/specialoffer to find out how.