



February 22, 2016

Rachel Shumacher, Director  
Office of Child Care  
Attn: Office of Child Care Policy Division  
Administration for Children and Families  
330 C St SW  
Washington DC 20201

**RE: Docket ID ACF-2015-0011**

Dear Ms. Shumacher,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the 2015 CCDF Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (December 18, 2015). The Afterschool Alliance is a non-profit organization that works to ensure that all children and youth have access to quality afterschool and summer learning opportunities. Our network of more than 26,000 afterschool partners is expanding learning opportunities for students nationwide and tapping community partners to keep children safe and well-nourished, and provide engaging, hands-on activities that raise school attendance, academic achievement and graduation rates.

The mission statement of the Child Care Development Fund is to “provide affordable access to early child care and afterschool programs.” School-age programs serve between 20% and 40% of children receiving CCDBG funds. Yet, funding for school age programs’ quality, training, and professional development using CCDF funds are frequently less than proportional to the population served. This could be a result of much of the law’s language, despite its broad intent, historically being focused on early childhood education. The new law and new regulations offer an opportunity to correct this disparity and ensure continuity of care.

In an effort to ensure gains in school readiness are not lost once children reach school-age, school-age afterschool and summer learning providers should have the resources to provide care, enrichment, and hands-on learning for students that complements and reinforces but does not replicate school day instruction. We are pleased to see your proposed rule recognize and highlight the evidence-based benefits of afterschool programs including their contributions to narrowing achievement gaps; building students’ personal and social skills in ways that improve school behavior, attendance, and performance; providing a safe, supervised location for children; and reducing working parents’ stress.

Because we recognize how essential the school age component of child care is to maintaining early gains and achieving the outcomes above, ***we encourage you to explicitly make specific reference to school age programs wherever possible as you finalize your regulations.*** Explicit mention of school age components, throughout the regulatory process will ensure that states are designating their funding as a result of intentional choices and not a misreading of the allowances of the law. It will also better align the language of the law with its full mission and intent: providing continuity of care for families of children ages birth through twelve.

We include below some high priority areas with specific comments on the proposed regulatory language, both areas of support and where we would like to see change, in order to ensure that essential school-age components are explicitly considered and to support the general ease of use of the proposed regulations.

We would also be happy, at your request, to go through and highlight each area of the law and regulations where school aged care, should have been but has not been explicitly specified.

### **SPECIFIC AREAS:**

#### **Consumer Education** (Section §98.33 **page 80491** of Federal Register)

We appreciate the mention that provider specific information should include “all eligible and licensed child care providers, excluding those related to children in their care”. Because many states offer exemptions from licensing for school-aged care centers, it will be important to make these centers and their information available to parents by ensuring that websites are not limited to licensed care, moreover expanding the website to all eligible providers/centers further provides parents with choice.

Within this section, we would suggest that the regulations specify (in addition to zip code, years in operation etc.) that it be recommended states provide an ability to “search by age group”, so that parents seeking categories of care for older children aged 6-13 may find them easily accessible.

#### **Ratios and Group Sizes:**

With regards to ratio and group size standards (**page 80500** of Federal Register), while we agree both with your determination that these standards are “necessary to ensure that the environment is conducive to safety and learning” and your decision to not establish a federal level requirement, we felt it was a large oversight that none of your research in this section related to school age care. We would recommend adding language referencing school age care by stating “these considerations should also be carefully undertaken for children in school-age care settings.”

#### **Professional Development:**

Careful review of the language in the section on Training and Professional Development (Section 98.44 on pages **80508 to 80510** of the Federal Register) shows an over-emphasis on early childhood and neglect of the 6-13 age group that comprises a large portion of those in care. After each identification of early childhood we recommend adding the words “and/or school-age.”

We commend that this is done on **page 80509** where “Core Knowledge and Competencies” specifies being able to “provide high quality child care and school-age care”. However it is neglected in many other places, including for example, where you recommend (on **page 80508** of the Federal Register) adding consultation with the State Advisory Council on Early Childhood Education and Care and we would suggest you include additional consultation with school-age care networks where available.



Without an explicit focus on school-age care, these programs will be at a disadvantage when meeting quality standards necessary for either licensing, graduated pay systems or other elements of the state plans. Additionally, training and professional development focusing on youth development and age-appropriate instruction should be mentioned as something to be made available to staff of school-age afterschool and summer learning providers. States should also consider addressing higher compensation as a means to increase quality, diversity and retention of school-age program staff.

### **Criminal Background Checks:**

We strongly support these requirements (**§98.43**); however, we note that these national systems may pose challenges to States seeking to access them within the stated timeframe and to coordinate that information with their State systems. We encourage ACF to work with the Department of Justice and the FBI to outline a clear process for States, Territories and Tribes to employ when seeking to use the FBI fingerprint check and the National Crime Information Center's National Sex Offender Registry. We recommend that ACF clarify that states be allowed to use CCDBG funding to cover the cost of the background checks for school-aged providers so that the cost of the background checks is not a barrier for these providers.

### **Assessing Child Care Quality**

The 2014 law and NPRM require states to expend funds for activities designed to improve the quality (**§98.53**) of child care, including funds for “(7) Evaluating and assessing the quality and effectiveness of child care programs and services offered, including evaluating how such programs positively impact children.” We strongly agree with the essentiality of improving child care quality and identifying which elements of quality work, for what children, and why. Transparency in this area is both important for state accountability and for informing the field and other states on best practices. This state funding allocation should also be earmarked for quality improvements in school-age programming as well.

### **Health and Safety Requirements**

The NPRM requires lead agencies to describe its requirements for preservice, orientation or ongoing training on health and safety standards. It is unclear to what extent the state's trainings or requirements must align with standards and training requirements set forth by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). Furthermore, health and safety training specific to school-age providers is essential. The health and safety needs of school-aged children differ from those children enrolled in early childhood programming. Health and Safety standards must be age-appropriate and training should reflect developmentally appropriate practice.

Sincerely,

Jodi Grant  
Executive Director  
Afterschool Alliance