



A Partnership of  
Harris County, BakerRipley,  
and United Way of Greater Houston

# POLICY MANUAL



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## Background on Early REACH

Early REACH is a 2-4 year pilot program designed to establish approximately 800 - 1,000 new spaces in high-quality child care centers. This pilot program is funded through Harris County's American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding.

Harris County will partner with existing child care centers to offer high-quality spaces to prioritized families. Spaces will be available to children ages 0 to 4 who either A) live in areas of Harris County with a high Social Vulnerability Index,<sup>1</sup> and/or B) whose families face economic hardship. In addition to increasing the number of children served in high-quality centers, the pilot aims to stabilize small child care businesses by securing a livable wage for child care workers.

Harris County is partnering with BakerRipley and United Way of Greater Houston to oversee, implement, and make decisions on behalf of Early REACH. BakerRipley will convene an advisory committee composed of child care centers, families, Workforce Solutions representatives, and other key stakeholders to oversee Early REACH's successful implementation. For more information about how to participate in this advisory committee please visit this [website](#).

## Overview of Program Standards

The following Early REACH program standards establish rules, procedures, and guidance around the implementation of this pilot. Because this is a pilot program, changes may be made throughout the duration of implementation under the request of BakerRipley or the advisory committee. Harris County has final approval on all program standards changes. Any changes will be documented and promulgated to all affected parties immediately.

## Child Care Centers

### Eligibility to participate

To participate in Early REACH, a child care center must:

- Have an effective, full permit issued by Texas Health and Human Services, Child Care Regulation (CCR) to operate in Harris County, Texas
- Meet compliance with minimum CCR requirements and any federal, state or local laws as they pertain to operating a child care business
- Meet one of the following quality standards:
  - Be certified as a Texas Rising Star (TRS) 2, 3, or 4 rated center or meet Entry Level Designation; or
  - Be seeking or have accreditation from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC); or
  - If the center is not currently involved in a quality improvement program, they must demonstrate a commitment toward wanting to raise their standards
- Be able to serve children from 0 to 4 years of age by no later than the start of the school year
- Have the ability to increase the number of publicly-funded spaces currently offered
  - Example Center A (eligible): Center A currently has 45 children enrolled at their center but their building capacity is 90 children. They can apply for up to 45 Early REACH contracted spaces because they are expanding their capacity by creating additional spaces they did not have the ability to do prior.
  - Example Center B (not eligible): Center B currently has 120 children enrolled at their center and their building capacity is 120 children. They will not be eligible for Early REACH contracted spaces because

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this program, high need on the social vulnerability index is considered to be 0.75 or above on the [CDC/ATSDR SVI](#).

they do not have the ability to create additional spaces in their center, beyond their current enrollment number.

While Early Reach will be accepting child care centers across Harris County, priority will be given to those who are located in a quality child care desert<sup>2</sup> and those who have the ability to accommodate a larger capacity of Early REACH children and families. Child care centers will be considered part of the Early REACH pilot once they have submitted a completed application, been approved, and have entered into a contract with Early REACH. By May 26, 2023, BakerRipley will ensure there is a publicly available application for interested child care centers.

### Lead Teacher Requirements

Participating centers are required to assure that each participating classroom will be assigned one lead teacher (at a minimum), responsible for oversight of Early REACH program activities and assessment of children. That lead teacher must at a minimum:

- Hold a CDA or if no CDA, be enrolled in a CDA class within 60 days of hire to be completed within one year of hire date
- Be present in the Early REACH classroom for the portion of the program day in which the greatest number of children who participate in the program are in attendance

### Staff Compensation

All centers must assure that staff associated with the Early REACH program and counted in the ratios for Early REACH classrooms are paid at least \$15 per hour. This includes lead teachers, assistant teachers, floaters, and substitutes. For centers where this represents a change in practice, technical assistance will be provided in updating their budget as part of their participation in the Early REACH pilot to support this shift in payment practice.

Centers participating in the program will be required to submit proof of compensation for each staff associated with the Early REACH program in the form of an offer letter to their assigned compliance support monitor. Centers that joined the program on or before November 1, 2023, will have until November 10, 2023, to submit offer letters for all Early REACH staff currently employed with the center via email to their assigned Compliance and Support Monitor (CSM). Offer letters for staff hired after November 1, 2023, must be submitted to assigned CSM's via email, no later than five (5) business days after new hire date. Offer letters must:

- Be written on center's/company's letterhead.
- Be signed by the employee and center owner and/or director, and must contain the following:
- Staff member's full name (as it appears on state issued ID)
- Title/position
- Employment Status – Part Time or Full Time
- Child care center address
- Early REACH Hire Date

**NOTE: Staff who were employed with the center prior to contracting with Early REACH and who have transitioned into an Early REACH staffing role must have documented proof of original date of hire AND the date in which the staff transitioned into an Early REACH role (i.e. Jane Doe: Original hire date -1/1/1996; Early REACH Transition Date: 8/1/2023)**

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<sup>2</sup> <https://tplapps.rice.edu/shiny/texas-county-child-care-deserts-03/>

Effective December 1, 2023, supplemental documents in the form of timesheets and payroll registers must be submitted no later than the 5<sup>th</sup> of every month for the prior month’s payroll activities to the center’s assigned CSM for all Early REACH staff.

### Classroom Requirements

To be considered for Early REACH funding, Early REACH classrooms must be open for full days of care Monday through Friday for at least 8 hours a day.

Texas Health and Human Services’, Child Care Regulation, defines classroom ratio as the number of children one caregiver may supervise. Child/caregiver ratio is based on the specified age of the children in a caregiver’s group or the age of the youngest child in the group. Early REACH centers must meet the following minimum ratios and group sizes in any classroom funded with Early REACH funding.:

Specified Age Group	Teacher to Child Ratio	Maximum Group Size and number of children two or more caregivers may supervise
Infant (0-17 months)	1:4	8
Toddlers (18-23 months)	1:8	16
Toddler (2 years)	1:9	18
Pre-K (3 Years)	1:13	26
Pre-K (4 years)	1:15	30

All centers participating in Early REACH must always adhere to Early REACH child/staff ratios. If a center fails to comply with these ratios, Early REACH may reduce the number of child care spaces to meet program standards. Repeated failure to comply with program ratios will result in probationary status.

It is incumbent on the participating center to provide services for the family for the purpose of continuity of care throughout the duration of the pilot as long as the enrolled child is eligible and funding is available. For example, if a center enrolls an Early REACH participating family whose child is 6 months old, the child cannot lose their funding when they become 18 months old.

### Supporting Attendance

Every Early REACH child care center must track attendance for each child enrolled and report attendance to BakerRipley on a monthly basis. Child care centers will receive payment for every child who attends at least one day in the month that the center is receiving payment for. The center is responsible for implementing a process to ensure children are

safe when they do not arrive at school. If a child is unexpectedly absent, and the designated family member has not contacted the program within one hour of the program start time, the program must attempt to contact the parent to ensure the child's wellbeing.

Early REACH child care centers will need to notify BakerRipley when an enrolled child does not attend the center and they are unable to contact the child's family for over 2 weeks. Early REACH program sites will be responsible for noting if excessive absences are due to a child's documented chronic illness, disability, or court-ordered custody or visitation agreement. If a child has excessive absences due to custody agreements the program site at a minimum, the center should work with the family member who enrolled the child to identify a plan for establishing continuous attendance when the child is with the enrolled family member.

BakerRipley will provide Early REACH program sites with information and resources about the benefits of regular attendance. BakerRipley will also attempt to make direct contact with a child's parents if a child has multiple unexplained absences (such as 10 days of consecutive absences without contact with the center). BakerRipley and the Early REACH program site will use attendance data to identify children with patterns of absence that put them at risk of missing more than forty program days per year, per the Texas Workforce Commission attendance policy for infants and toddlers, and develop strategies to improve individual attendance among identified children. These strategies may include contacting families directly to encourage attendance and connecting them with community resources to help them ensure their child's attendance.

#### *Supporting attendance of children experiencing homelessness*

If a program determines a child is experiencing homelessness, it must allow the child to attend for up to 30 days<sup>3</sup> or as long as allowed under state licensing requirements, without immunization and other records, to give the family reasonable time to present these documents. A program must work with families to get children immunized as soon as possible in order to comply with state licensing requirements. If a child experiencing homelessness is unable to attend classes regularly because the family does not have transportation to and from the program facility, the program must utilize community resources, where possible, to provide transportation for the child.

#### Required Reporting

Participating centers must complete monthly reports, which include:

- Number of classrooms participating in the Early REACH Program
- Number of expanded classroom spaces
- Number of children enrolled in a classroom space and their associated attendance with reasons for absence if given
- Number of children no longer enrolled in a classroom space with documented reason
- Number of teachers participating in Early REACH classrooms with basic demographic data such as race, ethnicity, and gender
- Number of teachers who exit Early REACH classrooms with documented reason
- Number of children with disabilities and documentation detailing the supports being offered to them

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<sup>3</sup> In accordance with HHS standards: <https://www.hhs.texas.gov/sites/default/files/documents/doing-business-with-hhs/provider-portal/protective-services/ccl/min-standards/chapter-746-centers.pdf>

All child care centers are required to report the following changes to their assigned BakerRipley Eligibility Specialist and quality improvement coach within a specified timeline:

- Within 24 hours:
  - Any allegations of suspected abuse, neglect, or exploitation against the child care center or any of its staff members by a family member of a child in care, Child Care Regulation, Child Protective Services, Law Enforcement, or any other child welfare agency.
    - *Note: This is in addition to reporting any suspected abuse, neglect, or exploitation to the Texas Child Abuse Hotline (800-252-5400) as required by Child Care Regulation.*
  - Any allegation of serious mistreatment or serious supervision of children reported to Child Care Regulation or any allegation that renders the center unsafe for children in care.
  - Any arrests, indictments, convictions, or involvement with Child Care Regulation, Child Protective Services, Law Enforcement, or any other agencies providing child or adult protective services of any of the following after acceptance into the program:
    - Child Care Center Owner(s)
    - Child Care Center Director(s) or Assistant Director(s)
    - Child Care Center staff including teachers, caregivers, substitute caregivers, or volunteers
    - Child Care Center Contractor(s) counted in the child-to-caregiver ratio or who may have unsupervised access to children in care
    - Any “high” weighted violations cited by Child Care Regulation
- Within 3 days:
  - Any change to the child care center:
    - Name
    - Phone number
    - Address
    - Leadership, such as the owner and/or director
    - Licensed capacity or any other licensing issues that affect Center’s ability to enroll or serve Early REACH students, even temporarily
    - Actual capacity to enroll or serve Early REACH students (including staffing or facility issues affecting care)
    - Type of operating permit

### Service for Children with Disabilities

Early REACH child care centers must ensure that children with disabilities are documented. Acceptable forms of documentation include confirmation of the child’s enrollment in or receipt of benefits from one or more of the following programs:

- Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits
- Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits
- Texas Health and Human Services, Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) program
- A Head Start program that identified the child as having a disability
- Public school special education services, including Early Childhood Special Education
- Documentation from a qualified healthcare provider



As part of their monthly reporting Early REACH centers will need to include specifications and documentation on how they are supporting children with disabilities through accommodations, service providers, and family outreach.

## Coaching and Quality Improvement Support System

Early REACH child care centers will have access to three main coaches that will support their quality improvement:

1. **Main Quality Improvement Coach:** All participating centers will work with an assigned United Way coach that will provide individualized, bespoke coaching services. Alongside this coach, participating centers will work through challenges, receive trainings, and be in regular contact with them about the day-to-day operations of their center.
2. **Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) Coach:** All participating centers will work with their assigned United Way coach to develop a continuous quality improvement (CQI) plan. CQI plans will specifically address the quality improvement needs of each Early REACH center. CQI plans will include required trainings and technical assistance schedules with the intent of continuously improving the quality of all classroom experiences, even those that have achieved the highest TRS-4 rating. Trainings may include how to use the Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA) tool, how to use the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) tool, Quarterly Professional Development trainings for teachers, Leadership Development training for directors, and training on how the center can obtain MWBE status.
3. **Quality Rated Cohort Groups Coach:** Child care centers that are struggling with implementing quality improvement plans or are placed in provisional or probationary status will be able to access additional resources through quality rated cohort groups. These cohort groups will offer child care centers the following benefits:
  - Opportunities to learn best practices from existing high-quality centers in the program;
  - Additional and targeted coaching hours; and
  - Higher touch technical assistance supports

United Way of Greater Houston will be providing these support services and will work in partnership with individual centers to ensure they have all the resources they need to provide children high-quality experiences in their classrooms.

## Monitoring

All child care centers participating in Early REACH will have at least three annual documented announced visits by United Way's compliance and support monitors to ensure compliance with Early REACH standards and policies. Additional visits, both announced or unannounced, may occur if the child care center fails to meet program requirements, fails to adhere to criteria outlined in the child care center's quality improvement plan, or indicates a need for technical assistance. Failure to adhere to program guidelines will result in an update to their current improvement plan that will be developed with the child care center. Failure to address concerns may lead to termination of contract. Failure to allow Early REACH coaches, Compliance and Support Monitors or other identified Early REACH staff access to the center may lead to termination of contract.

## Communication

- **With Families:** Child care centers are responsible for maintaining timely and necessary communication with all Early REACH families. Centers should ensure there is a documented record of attempted and successful communication with Early REACH families. Examples of where documentation should exist include but are not limited to issues related to attendance, transition to prekindergarten, families whose income has been determined over 100% SMI, eligibility review issues, communications to complete the application, expressed

concerns about center or program, transfer requests, adding a new child if newborn or gained custody, and voluntary withdrawal from the program.

- **With BakerRipley, United Way, and Harris County:** A timely, honest, and supportive communication environment will be expected of Early REACH centers, BakerRipley, United Way, and Harris County staff members, and communication expectations will be incorporated into the center agreement. Failure to meet communication expectations may result in the termination of the contract.

### Suspension/Expulsion

While Early REACH will not withhold funds from any program that deems suspension and expulsion necessary in an individual case, centers must assure that suspension and expulsion will only be used as a last resort for a child for the safety of the child, staff, and other children in the classroom. The process of suspension and expulsion can only be determined with trusting collaboration between an early childhood mental health consultant, parents or designated adult family members, program staff, and other community support when no other developmentally appropriate options are available. United Way coaches will be available to provide support and technical assistance for Early REACH centers as they make decisions that are best for the child regarding suspensions and/or expulsions.

When suspension or expulsion is necessary, the goal should be for the child to be returned to normal participation as soon as possible with various strategies in place, such as:

- Maintain documentation for the child in the classroom and at home.
- A written plan for support for the child in the classroom and at home.
- Coaching or professional development for supporting staff in trauma-based restorative strategies and how to manage challenging behavior
- Ongoing direct contact with the family about student progress in the classroom.
- Determining whether a referral to early intervention services is appropriate for the child.

### Early REACH Provisional Status

Centers may be placed on provisional status in the Early REACH program if they are new centers to Early REACH and not initially TRS certified, have not received TRS entry-level designation, or are not NAEYC accredited.

New centers on provisional status:

- Will be enrolled in a quality rated cohort group as directed by United Way compliance and support monitors
- May participate in Early REACH if they maintain adequate progress as reported to Early REACH by United Way's compliance and support monitors. Adequate progress may include, but is not limited to, qualifying and attaining entry-level designation for Texas Rising Star (TRS). For more information on attaining entry level designation please visit this [website](#).

Centers that do not achieve at least a two-star rating during the initial twelve months may, at United Way's sole discretion and not subject to appeal, be granted an additional six months in Early REACH on probationary status.

### Early REACH Probationary Status

Centers may be placed on probationary status in the Early REACH program if they:

- Do not achieve at least a TRS two-star rating during the initial twelve months of participation in the program
- Fail to maintain a two, three, or four-star rating in TRS
- Lose their NAEYC accreditation Are in a probationary period with TRS

- Failing to meet program expectations and/or contractual obligations including but not limited to child/staff ratios or any violation that places a child at risk.

Centers placed in Early REACH probationary status:

- Will be enrolled in a quality rated cohort group as directed by quality rated guidelines and requirements
- May continue to participate in Early REACH and accept new children into participating classrooms for up to six (6) consecutive months if they maintain adequate progress as reported to Early REACH by the center's Compliance and Support Monitor

### Service Improvement Agreement

Centers may be placed on a written service improvement agreement with timelines and deliverables if Early REACH, in its sole judgment deems it necessary following a Center's failure to follow Early REACH program policies or to comply with any of the terms, conditions, or obligations under the Early REACH Center Agreement.

A center on a service improvement agreement that fails to cure the conditions outlined in the service improvement agreement by the required timeline may be subject to consequences including;

- Reduction of authorized classroom spaces or denial of new classroom spaces,
- Removal of Early REACH children, and/or
- Removal from the Early REACH program.

### Removal from Early REACH Program

Centers may be removed from the Early REACH program and have their Early REACH agreement terminated if they:

- Receive a citation from Child Care Regulation for abuse, neglect, or exploitation of a child in care
  - Note: if the citation is overturned after due process (administrative review and/or appeal of the citation), the center can reapply for readmittance into Early REACH
- Commit fraud including providing false or misleading information to the program or dual enrollment of a child who is already receiving subsidized care
- Fail to make progress towards continuous quality improvement plan
- Fail to meet quality rating requirements as outlined in this policy manual
- Fail to meet the expectations for centers outlined in this policy manual
- Undergo any of the following facility changes throughout the life of their contract:
  - Change in ownership
  - Change in location
  - Change in facility type with Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) Child Care Regulation (CCR)
  - Revocation of the permit to operate

*Note: The Center will not be entitled to payment until requirements to be an Early REACH Center are met and a new Agreement is signed in the event a center is removed from the Early REACH program for any reasons listed above. This includes the application phase after the sale of a facility and before a new permit is issued by CCR.*

### Implementation Study

The Early REACH program will be partnering with a research institution to learn from this pilot and study the effects that this new payment model could have on the Harris County early childhood system. Early REACH child care centers that choose to participate in the research study will be seen as crucial partners in creating a new funding model that uses public funds to serve children and families in a way that benefits them the most. Early REACH child care centers that

participate in the study will be expected to contribute data, participate in semi-structured interviews, and allow researchers to come to visit their facilities. More information about the study and how to participate will be provided in the coming months.

## Payments

### Overview

Families participating in the Early REACH program will not be responsible for paying for their children’s care. BakerRipley will pay Early REACH child care centers directly on behalf of families. The information in this section will focus on the payment model and rates child care centers should expect when they elect to participate in the Early REACH program.

### Rates

Age Group	Daily	Monthly	Quarterly
Infant (0-17 months)	\$74.00	\$1,609.50	\$4,828.50
Toddlers (18-36 months)	\$69.00	\$1,500.75	\$4,502.25
PreK (36+ months)	\$64.00	\$1,392.00	\$4,176.00

Spaces subject to the rates outlined above are defined as a full day, full week, full year of child care. Early REACH rates are based on full-time care and will be paid as such even if the participating child is attending on a part-time basis.

**Paid Holidays/Closure Days:** Early REACH centers will be paid for each classroom space for up to nine (9) holidays/pre-planned closures during each calendar year. Additional closures that are not classified as Emergency Closures will not be paid. The Center will report planned closure days each year.

**Emergency Closures:** Early REACH centers will be paid for days when the facility is closed due to emergency situations, such as weather, fire, electrical, or gas outage for up to five (5) business days per calendar year. The Center must notify BakerRipley that the facility is closed within 24 hours of emergency closing.

### Payment Model

#### Initial set up

- After Early REACH child care centers are selected, BakerRipley will award each selected center a number of contracted spaces by age band. The number of awarded spaces by age group in the initial contract will determine that center’s initial monthly payment.
- In the first three calendar months of a center’s participation in the pilot, BakerRipley will make upfront payments to the Early REACH center at the beginning of each month based on the number of contracted spaces by age band they were awarded.
  - Example: if a center was contracted ten (10) toddler seats, they would receive a monthly payment of \$14,490 (10 contracted spaces x toddler monthly rate \$1,449 = \$14,490)
- BakerRipley will make monthly payments to Early REACH centers for their first three full calendar months of participation without taking enrollment into account. Therefore, Early REACH centers have the first three full calendar months of the pilot to recruit and enroll eligible children for their contracted Early REACH spaces. If a center is contracted mid-month, the prorated month will not count towards the first full three calendar months. This includes centers contracted between June 2023 through August 2023.

- Example 1: A center is contracted on the first business day of the month in July 2023; the first three full calendar months will be July, August, and September for receiving payments. Beginning October, Early REACH will not pay for spaces that have remained unfilled for the first three months. If unfilled spaces are filled in months four (October) or five (November), the center will receive a supplemental payment for newly filled spaces.
- Example 2: A center is contracted mid-month in July, the first month for calculating the first three months begins in August. However, they will still receive a prorated payment for July. The three months would be August, September, and October. They will no longer received payment for spaces that have remained unfilled for the first three months beginning month four (November) and also month five (December). After three calendar months of participating in the pilot, if a center has filled all contracted spaces, their monthly upfront payment will remain the same or be adjusted based on the age bands served, if different and as long as funds are available. If they did not enroll all spaces and have openings in their allocation, that center's monthly payment will be calculated based on the enrolled spaces.
- Example 3: if the previous center who was contracted ten (10) toddler seats in June has filled only five (5) of them at the end of August, their payment for September would be \$7,245.00 (5 enrolled spaces x toddler monthly rate of \$1,449.00 = \$7,245.00)
- Centers will have months four and five to fill the spot with an eligible child. Centers may fill this spot with an eligible child from a different age band than the child that previously occupied it with the approval of their assigned BakerRipley eligibility specialist. If the spot is unfilled, that spot may be reallocated for month six, based on demand, capacity, and funding across the pilot program.
  - Example: if center A has unfilled spaces, but center B is oversubscribed, spaces may be moved from center A to center B in month six if BakerRipley is otherwise unable to add more spaces to meet demand. Note: A reduction and/or increase of spaces will require an amendment to their agreement via an Early REACH Authorization Change Form to approve the reduction and/or increase of contracted spaces.

#### On-going

- Centers will be paid in advance monthly as long as spaces remain filled.
- If a child withdraws from or stops attending an Early REACH space, or moves from one Early REACH center to another, that center will still be paid for that contracted space for the month following the last month the child attended for at least one day.
  - Example: if a child's last day is in July, the center will continue to receive payment for that child's space for the month of August while the center works on filling the space with another child.
- The center has two calendar months following the last month the child attended for at least one day to fill that space. Any vacant space unfilled for two calendar months may be reallocated to another participating Early REACH center, depending on demand, capacity, and funding across the pilot program.
  - Example: if a child's last day is in July, the center has August and September to fill that space.

Payments to a center cannot exceed the number of contracted spaces as stated in the center agreement. Additionally, payments cannot exceed more than 100% of each center's licensed or actual capacity, or exceed the sum of the capacity of each classroom as defined by the allowed ratios in this agreement. BakerRipley may adjust the number of Early REACH contracted spaces by delivering an Early REACH Authorization Change Form. Such form will be considered delivered when hand-delivered, sent by certified mail, return receipt requested or by email with a delivery receipt.

### Rate Differences in Tuition and Center Fees

Upon enrollment in Early REACH, a family will not be charged the difference between the center’s published tuition rate and the amount of the contracted space for any child participating in the program.

However, Early REACH is not responsible for covering fees outside of tuition for families in the Early REACH program including:

- Incidental fees associated with early drop-off or late pick-up outside normal operating hours.
  - Centers may charge these fees; however, these costs will not be covered by Early REACH and should be charged directly to the family.
- Field trips
- Transportation fees
- Other center fees

In order to support programs serving children from diverse economic backgrounds or using multiple funding sources, a program may charge fees to private-pay families and other non-Early REACH enrolled families to the extent allowed by any other applicable federal, state, or local funding sources.

## Children and Families

This section details the eligibility, application, and attendance requirements for children and families participating in the Early REACH Pilot Program.

### Eligibility Requirements

Children and families are eligible to participate if they meet these requirements:

- **Residency:** Live in Harris County AND
- **Age:** Children are aged zero to four AND
- **Demonstrate financial need via one of the following:**
  - Live in a family that makes [85% less of State Median Income](#) (SMI) (approx. \$75,468 annually for a family of four, see table below for more information) OR
  - Live in an area of high need according to the [Social Vulnerability Index](#) (high need considered to be 0.75 or above) OR
  - Are experiencing homelessness OR
  - Are in foster care OR
  - Receive WIC, SNAP, TANF, free or reduced lunch, or SSI income

***NOTE: There is no requirement for family members or children to be citizens to be served by Early REACH.***

Family Size – Number of Persons in the Family	Monthly Income 85% SMI	Annual Income 85% SMI
2	\$4,276	\$51,312
3	\$5,283	\$63,396

4	\$6,289	\$75,468
5	\$7,295	\$87,540
6	\$8,301	\$99,612
7	\$8,490	\$101,880
8	\$8,679	\$104,148
9	\$8,867	\$106,404
10	\$9,056	\$108,672
11	\$9,245	\$110,940
12	\$9,433	\$113,196
13	\$9,622	\$115,464
14	\$9,811	\$117,732
15	\$9,999	\$119,988

A recruitment and outreach plan will be developed to detail the method to reach prioritized families. Child care centers shall make all reasonable efforts to recruit eligible families and children to fill their approved classroom spaces. BakerRipley shall conduct outreach efforts and search the Early REACH waitlist for eligible families and children to fill approved classroom spaces. If, after 30 days, outreach efforts have been conducted by both the center and BakerRipley, all families on the Early REACH waitlist have been contacted, and no eligible children are available to fill a classroom space, a non-eligible family may be enrolled if:

- Family income is equal to or less than 100% SMI OR
- The children are living at an address that falls within a Census Tract with a Social Vulnerability Index (SVI) between 0.5-0.75 on a scale from 0 to 1.

### Eligibility Determination

The following documents will be accepted to verify eligibility:

Eligibility Requirement	Documents to Verify Eligibility
<b>Residency:</b> Live in Harris County	Please provide one of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Current photo ID with address</li> <li>● Current utility bill (water, gas, cell phone, internet, or other utility provider to applicant address)</li> <li>● Lease</li> <li>● Mortgage Statement</li> <li>● Deed</li> <li>● Mail from government office, financial institution, or utility provider to applicant at address</li> </ul>



<p><b>Age:</b> Children are aged zero to four</p>	<p>Please provide one of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Birth certificate (U.S. Government-Issued or Foreign Government-Issued)</li> <li>● Court records</li> <li>● Passport</li> <li>● State-issued identification</li> <li>● Hospital certificate of live birth</li> <li>● Immigration card</li> <li>● Social Security Administration record</li> <li>● Immigration court order</li> <li>● Homeland Security documents</li> <li>● Medical Records such as Immunization Record or Medicaid Card</li> </ul> <p><i>Note: Procedures shall be developed to allow enrollment of children without documented proof of age who are clearly (visibly) under the age of 4 at the time of enrollment and will remain below 4 for 1 year after initial enrollment. Such enrollment shall be for 1 year to allow the family to obtain documented proof of the child's age.</i></p>
<p><b>Proof of Income or Other Eligibility</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Live in a family that makes 85% less of SMI OR</li> <li>● Live in an area of high need according to the SVI (high need considered to be .75 or above) OR</li> <li>● Are experiencing homelessness OR</li> <li>● Are in foster care OR</li> <li>● Receive WIC, SNAP, TANF, free or reduced lunch, or SSI income</li> </ul>	<p>Proof of Income with one of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 2022 tax return listing all adult household members</li> <li>● 2022 W-2(s) for every job held by each adult household member</li> <li>● 2022 1099(s) for every job held by each adult in the household</li> <li>● Unemployment compensation statement</li> </ul> <p>OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Pay stubs from the past 30 days prior to application</li> <li>● Profit &amp; Loss ledger from the past 30 days prior to application date</li> <li>● Stipend(s), alimony, pension/retirement/annuity monthly award letter(s)</li> <li>● Letter from employer verifying monthly salary/wages prior to application</li> <li>● SSI or SSDI income statement</li> <li>● Proof of Public Benefit (TANF, WIC, SNAP, National School Lunch Program (Free and/or Reduced School Lunch)</li> <li>● Certification of Zero income statement</li> </ul>

***Additional Children in an Eligible Family:*** Once a family has been deemed eligible for participating in the Early REACH pilot program, any new children the family may have will also be eligible for the Early REACH program.

### Eligibility Duration

A child's eligibility is valid for the duration of the Early REACH program or until September 1st after their 4th birthday.

### Application Process

By May 22, 2023, BakerRipley will ensure there is a publicly available application for families. This application will be made available in at least the following languages as soon as practicable: English, Spanish, Chinese, and Vietnamese. The application will be made available in formats accessible to priority families including but not limited to this [website](#).

The application should be completed by a parent or other family member who is a primary caregiver, foster parent, authorized caregiver, guardian, or the person with whom the child has been placed for purposes of adoption pending a final adoption decree. The official application date shall be the date the initial application was received by BakerRipley.



### Applicant Selection Process

While funding is available, applicants who are deemed eligible for Early REACH will be approved. Once a family has been approved, they will be notified and asked to rank the top 3 child care centers of their choice for enrollment. Early REACH will work with families and centers to help ensure a family is matched with their highest choice possible, given constraints around spaces and capacity. This match is contingent upon there being centers with open spaces to fill as part of their contract. In the event that a family does not get their top choice and chooses not to enroll in the center they are matched with, they will be placed on the wait list for the center of preference until a space opens up at that center. In the event there are no centers with Early REACH space open, then the family will be added to a waitlist for a space.

In the event of more applications than funding available, Early REACH will also maintain a wait list for families who have applied but are not yet selected for funding. Families of children not selected will be informed of their place on the waitlist and connected to other resources to support their enrollment in child care.

After the Early REACH program has reached its funding capacity it will prioritize enrollment from the waitlist using the following rubric:

Prioritization Criteria	Points
Families living in an area of high need according to the Social Vulnerability Index (high need considered to be 0.75 or above)	40
Children in foster care	40
Children experiencing homelessness	40
Families receiving WIC, SNAP, or at/or below the poverty level	30
Children aged 0 to 2	20
Children eligible for IDEA Part B or Part C/Special Education services	25
Children and families currently enrolled in an Early REACH program	30

**NOTE:** *If there are more children who meet priority factors than available spaces, a randomized process will be used to select families.*

### Targeted Outreach

Centers with vacant spaces after BakerRipley has screened all applicants meeting the prioritization criteria above may be given the opportunity to recruit families that have not already applied. In these cases, BakerRipley will provide the center a unique application link for the center to share with families to apply. This unique link will be active for a

minimum of 30 days with a possibility of extension on a case by case basis. This will occur after the Early REACH eligibility team has completed the following:

- Reviewed all applications of families that selected the center.
- Reviewed applications of families living within 10 miles of the childcare center.
- Extended the childcare center to families outside the specified criteria.

### Disenrollment Procedures

The Early REACH procedures manual will address how families will disenroll from the program. Such procedures shall include but are not limited to

- Determining if an alternate Early REACH placement (transfer) would be beneficial for the families (e.g., if a family is moving to a new part of Harris County where an Early REACH center is located) and referring or adding the family to the waitlist for that program.
- Documentation on how Early REACH supports children transitioning to Pre-K programs as they disenroll.
- Documentation of reasons why the family is disenrolling. If the family is disenrolled for any reason other than their own stated desire to disenroll, documentation will include that they were informed of their right to appeal the disenrollment.

### Parental Commitment and Expectations

In accordance with our commitment to maintaining a safe and respectful environment for all, Early REACH requires participants to conduct themselves in a respectful manner towards our dedicated staff and center personnel. Any form of disrespectful behavior, including but not limited to, verbal abuse, harassment, or intimidation, will not be tolerated. Failure to adhere to this policy may result in the termination of assistance or denial of services.

### Grievances Related to Eligibility, Application, and Enrollment

Families have the right to appeal decisions made related to eligibility, application, and enrollment in Early REACH. Once a family has been deemed ineligible, they will receive written communication via email stating BakerRipley's grievance policy for denied applicants to contest the result of the eligibility, application, and enrollment process.

### Attendance Expectations for Families

Early REACH child care centers will need to communicate to all selected families that they must agree to enroll their children for full time (5 days a week), full year care (aligned to the center's calendar). The maximum number of allowable annual unexcused absences for a child funded in the Early REACH program is 40 cumulative days or 10 consecutive days. Annual absences will be counted from July through June. Once a family has reached 20 cumulative days or 5 consecutive absences, they will be required to develop an attendance action plan in collaboration with their child care center to support the child's regular attendance in the program. This attendance action plan will also be submitted to their United Way compliance and support monitor to keep on file. At a minimum, this attendance action plan will identify barriers to attendance and provide necessary supports to the family. If a participating family continues to struggle with attendance, their child care center or Early REACH may place them at risk of losing their funded space. Families that do not bring their children into their assigned center for 10 consecutive days without contact with the center or with BakerRipley would be considered to have dropped out and are subject to losing their space.

## Appendix: Definitions

**Advisory Committee:** A community-based committee composed of child care centers, families, representatives from Workforce Solutions, and other key stakeholders to serve in an advisory capacity to the Governing Council.

**Children in foster care:** Refers to the 24-hour substitute care for children placed away from their parents or guardians and for whom the state agency has placement and care responsibility. This includes but is not limited to, placements in foster family homes, foster homes of relatives, group homes, emergency shelters, residential facilities, child-care institutions, and pre-adoptive homes. A child is in foster care in accordance with this definition regardless of whether the foster care facility is licensed and payments are made by the state or local agency for the care of the child, whether adoption subsidy payments are being made prior to the finalization of an adoption, or whether there is a federal matching of any payments that are made.

**Expulsion:** Complete removal or un-enrolling a child based on repeated and continuous behavior.

**Governing Council:** A group of individuals from BakerRipley and United Way of Greater Houston who have been appointed to oversee and make decisions on behalf of Early REACH.

**Homelessness:**<sup>4</sup> Families who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. If a child is living with non-parent relatives due to loss of housing, economic hardship, substance abuse, incarceration, or a similar reason, the child may meet the definition of a homeless child.

**Parent/Caregiver:** In these policies, “Parent/Caregiver” is made in reference to parents, legal caregivers, or person(s) acting as *in loco parentis*.

**Quality child care desert:** Defined where demand exceeds supply in quality child care seats by at least 3-to-1. Based on a 2020 analysis conducted by the Texas Policy Lab, measured by assessing the ratio between the total supply of quality child care available to the amount of demand/children in the community. The Texas Policy Lab defines a child care market by assessing care within a 3-mile radius census tract because low-income families usually use care available within a 3-mile radius from their homes.

**Social Vulnerability Index:** The Center for Disease Control (CDC) SVI uses U.S. Census data to determine the social vulnerability of every census tract. Census tracts are subdivisions of counties for which the Census collects statistical data. The [CDC/ATSDR SVI](#) ranks each tract on 16 social factors, including poverty, lack of vehicle access, and crowded housing, and groups them into four related themes.

**Suspension:** excluding a child from the classroom, whether by placing him/her in another part of the building or excluding the child from the building or sending a child home early, or limiting the number of hours per day (s)he can attend.

**Unexcused absence:** absences in which the family does not communicate with the child care center they are enrolled in.

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<sup>4</sup> A full definition of homelessness is available on the McKinney Vento [website](#).

## Appendix: Director Requirements

As part of participation in the Early REACH program directors of Early REACH child care centers will be responsible for:

- Attending all quarterly trainings as required for Early REACH participation unless the coach grants prior approval
- Working with Early REACH coach on individualized professional development opportunities for director and staff including directors' meetings, family connections training, and quarterly conferences
- Completing each professional development session in its entirety
- Participating in all evaluation activities related to Early REACH training and professional development including but not limited to surveys, interviews, and focus groups
- Implementing ideas and learnings from Early REACH leadership training supporting directors as the Center's instructional leader
- Ensuring staff who work in an Early REACH classroom attend required individualized training and coaching
- Designating one staff person to represent the Center for all family engagement training
- Providing support to teachers who work in Early REACH classrooms to complete classroom or child assessments and enter any applicable data into evaluation systems used by the program
- Documenting required Early REACH requirements in a timely manner
- Allowing teachers access to technology including, computers, printers, cameras, tablets, etc. to assist in documentation and any required teacher assignments

***Information in this policy manual is subject to periodic updates. As more information becomes available, BakerRipley will update this document.<sup>5</sup>***

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<sup>5</sup> Last updated November 2023.