



Common Start FAQ for Providers

What are the goals of the Common Start Coalition?

The Common Start Coalition is a diverse group of providers, parents, educators, employers, and community advocates dedicated to providing affordable, accessible, high-quality early education and care for all Massachusetts families. The Coalition's bill accomplishes this goal by driving three major changes:

- Increasing public funding to support a **sustainable, mixed-provider system** of early education and child care that meets the diverse needs of families. This mixed system includes family child care centers, center-based providers, and public and private programs of varied types.
- Providing the structure needed to **increase educator wages and benefits** in ways that bolster the profession and pay educators what they are truly worth to society.
- Expanding financial assistance to ensure that **no family needs to pay more than 7 percent of its income** for early education and child care.

How did the Coalition arrive at these goals?

The Coalition arrived at these goals by assessing the main problems in the current system of early education in Massachusetts:

- Massachusetts has the highest cost of child care in the nation, but many providers still do not have the funding they need to increase educator salaries or invest in the types of comprehensive services that many families need. Providers that accept subsidized families often face losses on each seat they enroll because those subsidies do not account for the true cost of providing high-quality care.
- Families often cannot find or afford high-quality child care, forcing many parents to choose lower-quality care or leave the workforce entirely.
- Early educators face low wages that leave many using public benefits, working second jobs, or searching for new careers, leaving many providers understaffed

The problems in the early education and child care system could be solved by changing the current system.

How would the Common Start bill change how early education and child care are financed in Massachusetts?

The Common Start bill creates a new framework for funding early education and care in Massachusetts. This framework would allocate new funding to providers and open up more families to financial assistance to support their needs for high-quality care. The bill is envisioned as a tool for incremental change, and funding would be expanded over a period of five years until all providers and families that wish to participate are able to thrive.

How would this system change provider funding?

Once the system is funded, providers could receive funding from two main sources. First, they could benefit from new operating support dollars via Bedrock Funding. This funding would combine with competitive per-child reimbursement rates to cover the “full cost of quality early education and care.” Together, this increased funding would aid business stability, elevate educator pay, and improve providers’ ability to deliver high quality education and child care. Family subsidies would increase the number of children in a community who are able to afford and attend high quality programs.

How would the bill decide the “full cost of quality care”?

The bill specifies a framework that EEC would use in calculating costs, but it does not create a precise formula or set quantitative targets. The bill lists major categories of costs that would need to be included by EEC, including adequate educator costs and quality class materials. The cost of care calculations would ultimately be created by the department (with public input) through their regulatory process and then updated yearly.

What is bedrock funding?

Bedrock Funding is a direct-to-provider allocation that participating providers would receive to offset the operating costs of providing high quality early education and care, including higher educator pay. Bedrock Funding would help providers achieve this goal by providing the funds necessary to establish, run, and maintain healthy, high-quality learning environments. Bedrock Funding would be determined by the capacity (not attendance) of each provider. Specific funding amounts would be based on the final dollar figure that the Legislature appropriates to this system.

Does this bill favor certain types of providers over others?

No. The Common Start Legislation is designed to build off of the state’s existing mixed system of providers to ensure that families in the Commonwealth have access to high-quality early education and care services that make sense for their family preferences and situation. Common Start envisions building on and expanding a dynamic, diverse system of family child care providers, center-based providers, and public and private programs.

How would this bill affect Family Child Care Providers?

Family Child Care Providers (FCC’s) are a vital part of a mixed system of care, and this system would support their continued role as child care providers. Bedrock funding is designed in this bill to take into account the relatively higher costs faced by smaller providers, with the aim of providing FCC’s and small center-based programs with funding to continue to be competitive with larger providers.

What would providers need to do to benefit from this system?

No provider would be obligated to participate, but all licensed and certain licensed exempt providers in the mixed-delivery system for early education and care would be eligible to opt-in if the provider:

- Enters into a contractual agreement with EEC
- Serves local community needs by agreeing to enroll children with subsidies, should they apply
- Pays educators according to the new educator compensation guidance
- Submits data required by EEC

Is this bill simply a Universal Pre-K bill?

No. This bill provides increased funding for early education from birth through five, and after-school care for older children. It does this by increasing funding for providers and families through a mixed system of delivery. It does not pull preschool-aged children out of current programs and put them in new “universal pre-K classrooms,” as other initiatives in other states may have done in the past. The bill aims to use the existing system of family child care providers, center-based providers, and public and private programs to provide a dynamic system of early learning across the full suite of early learning years.

Would this bill cap provider rates?

This bill does not regulate the prices that providers charge families without subsidies. Providers that choose to participate in this system would receive new state “Bedrock Funding” to support their operations, and they would also be reimbursed on a per-child basis through a mix of subsidies and parent fees.

Would this system provide financial assistance to middle class families that have not had access to subsidies in the past?

Yes, the system, once fully funded, would ensure that **all families** would have the option of using a subsidy to pay a copay of no more than 7% of their income for early education and child care, with providers receiving the remaining amount from EEC. This means that even families well above middle incomes would want to use subsidies to help pay for their early education and child care.