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Local Commissioners Memorandum

Transmittal:	08-OCFS-LCM-03
To:	Local District Commissioners
Issuing Division/Office:	Strategic Planning and Policy Development
Date:	April 16, 2008
Subject:	Federal Fiscal Year 2008-2009 Education and Training Voucher Program
Contact Person(s):	See Page 6
Attachments:	Attachment A: Sample Revenue Intercept Letter for the Education and Training Voucher Program
Attachment Available Online:	Yes

I. Purpose

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide guidance to local social services districts on the Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2008-2009 Education and Training Voucher (ETV) program. This program will help youth aging out of foster care make the transition to self-sufficiency and receive the education, training and services necessary to obtain employment. For FFY 2008-2009, \$2,620,762 in federal funding is available for this program in New York State. The ETV funds must be fully liquidated (spent and claimed to the federal government) by September 30, 2009. This LCM also describes the application process and selection criteria for awarding FFY 2008-2009 ETV program funds and the funding requirements. It should be noted that for FFY 2008-2009, social services districts are requested to submit names of eligible youth and intercept letters by July 1, 2008 (refer to Section V. - Application and Selection of Program Participants). OCFS is beginning the ETV process during the summer in hopes that funds will be available for disbursement to eligible youth earlier in the academic school year.

Recognizing the importance of education in helping youth successfully transition to self-sufficiency, many local social services districts have demonstrated their commitment to assisting youth within their jurisdiction to pursue post-secondary educational and vocational training opportunities through participation in the ETV program. An eligible youth participating in the ETV program when he or she attains 21 years of age may continue to receive an ETV voucher until the youth attains 23 years of age, provided the youth continues to be enrolled in and attending a post secondary educational or vocational training program and is making satisfactory progress toward completion of that program.

Most of the youth enrolled in the ETV program are attending a college or university. Local districts are reminded that youth attending vocational training programs also may be eligible for the ETV program. Encouraging youth to receive their high school diploma and continue on with college or attend a vocational training program which will prepare them for employment is the best-case practice for youth to achieve success.

The Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) will continue to contract with the Orphan Foundation of America (OFA) to administer and serve as New York State's fiscal agent for the ETV program for FFY 2008-2009. OFA has administered the ETV program for New York State for the past four years. OFA has more than 15 years' experience administering college and vocational scholarships for foster youth. It has information on, and access to, other scholarship programs for foster youth. OFA has been working with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families on the ETV program. OFA administers the ETV program for several other states and has automated systems to support administration of the program. Among other things, OFA has automated the application forms and record retention for audit purposes. OFA has a national network of hundreds of volunteers who provide adjunct services such as mentoring, tutoring, and internships to scholarship recipients.

II. Background

The Promoting Safe and Stable Families Amendments of 2001, Public Law 107-133, was signed into law on January 17, 2002. Title II, Section 201, of the amendments, entitled "Education and Training Vouchers for Youths Aging Out of Foster Care," amended section 477 of Title IV-E of the Social Security Act, targeting additional resources specifically to meet the education and training needs of youth aging out of foster care.

Under this program, eligible youth may receive up to \$5,000 per year to attend a post-secondary education or vocational training program. The federal law specifies that youth eligible for vouchers under this program include foster care youth and former foster care youth who have not yet attained the age of 21 years who are eligible for services under the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP), and youth adopted from foster care after the age of 16. A youth participating in the ETV program when he or she attains 21 years of age may remain eligible until the youth attains 23 years of age.

Since the ETV program began in FFY 2003-2004, over 800 youth have received an ETV award each year. During FFY 2007-2008, approximately 810 youth statewide were awarded ETV funds. For FFY 2007-2008, \$2,692,620 in federal funds was available to New York State for this program. Priority was given to youth over the age of 21 who had received an ETV award in FFY 2006-2007 and who continued to be enrolled in and attending a post-secondary educational or vocational training program and were making satisfactory progress toward completion of that program.

III. Funding Requirements

For FFY 2008-2009, \$2,620,762 in federal funding is available for the ETV program.

Federal law establishes a 20 percent match requirement in order to access ETV funds. For the past several years, OFA contributed a portion of the required match. For FFY 2008-2009, OFA will continue to contribute a portion of the required match. As a result of the OFA contribution, the local social services district match requirement is 12.5 percent, consistent with the local district match requirement for the FFY 2004-2005, FFY 2005-2006, FFY 2006-2007 and FFY 2007-2008 ETV programs.

The ETV match must be a cash match based on the total amount awarded for each voucher. Attached is a form letter that authorizes OCFS to intercept funds otherwise due to the local district to finance its match requirement. Districts interested in supporting eligible youths' participation in continuing their education/training beyond high school must complete and send this form to OCFS by July 1, 2008. The form requires a district to specify the maximum total contribution available from the district to match all of the ETV vouchers it is willing to support. Since the district's cash contribution is 12.5 percent of the total voucher, the district must provide \$625 (12.5 percent of \$5,000) for each \$5,000 voucher, the maximum amount allowable for any eligible youth.

IV. ETV and Chafee Funds

Appropriations law precludes the use of general Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP) funds to supplement the \$5,000 per year ceiling that an eligible participant may receive under the ETV program. Social services districts are advised that a district's CFCIP allocation may not be used for expenses associated with institutions of higher education that are eligible for reimbursement under the ETV program, but may be used for other non-higher educational learning activities (such as GED programs, mentoring programs and other supportive services for eligible youth). Therefore, only ETV funds must be used for room and board expenditures, tuition at a post-secondary educational institution, or child care expenses for former foster care youth 18-20 years of age who are in the ETV program. CFCIP funds are not appropriate for these uses. Local social services districts are reminded that districts may use their CFCIP allocation for expenditures related to a youth entering a post-secondary educational or vocational training program. This would include, for example, expenditures for scholastic aptitude tests including SAT/ACT/PSAT required for admission to many colleges and universities, applications for admission to college or vocational training programs,

examinations for attendance at a vocational training program, visits to colleges/vocational training programs, clothing for interviews at a post-secondary educational program or vocational training program, and other supports and services needed by a youth to prepare for successful attendance at a post-secondary educational or vocational training program.

V. Application and Selection of Program Participants

Youth eligible for vouchers under this program are foster care youth and former foster care youth, including youth placed in OCFS custody, who have not yet attained the age of 21 years who are eligible for services under the CFCIP, and youth adopted from foster care after the age of 16. A youth participating in the ETV program when he or she attains 21 years of age may remain eligible until the youth attains 23 years of age, provided the youth continues to be enrolled in and attending a post secondary educational or vocational training program and is making satisfactory progress toward completion of that program.

The following priorities will be applied in the initial selection of eligible participants for the ETV program for FFY 2008-2009:

- First priority will be given to youth over the age of 21 who had received an ETV award in FFY 2007-2008 who continue to be enrolled in and attending a post-secondary educational or vocational training program and are making satisfactory progress toward completion of that program.
- Second priority will be given to any other youth who received an ETV award in FFY 2007-2008.
- Third priority will be given to youth who are 20 years of age and will be 21 by July 1, 2009, and who are enrolled in and attending a post-secondary educational or vocational training program and are making satisfactory progress toward completion of that program. These youth would not have received an ETV award in FFY 2007-2008.
- Fourth priority will be given to youth who are 17, 18, 19 and 20 years of age who are enrolled in and attending a post-secondary educational or vocational training program and making satisfactory progress toward completion of that program.

Local social services districts must:

1. Identify eligible youth and submit names to OFA by **July 1, 2008**, through OFA online application (<http://www.statevoucher.org>);
2. Electronically mail to: NYS@statevoucher.org by **July 1, 2008**, a separate list of youth identified by the district as eligible recipients of a voucher; and
3. Submit by **July 1, 2008**, an intercept letter to Ms. Sharon Morris, Division of Child Welfare and Community Services, NYS Office of Children and Family

Services, 52 Washington Street, Room 331 North Building, Rensselaer, NY 12144.

Either the district or the youth may complete the ETV application online at the OFA website <http://www.statevoucher.org> . The names on the completed online applications must be consistent with the list of eligible youth submitted by districts to OFA. After vouchers have been awarded for those names submitted by July 1, 2008, and if additional funds are available, applications will be accepted on a rolling basis and will not be subject to the priorities.

The online application will require demographic information such as the name of the post-secondary educational or vocational training program the youth is currently enrolled in and/or attending, which priority is applicable to the youth, and the amount of funds being requested for costs of attending a post-secondary educational or vocational training program. OFA will use the information provided on the application to determine eligibility and construct an ETV award for the student. The ETV award will be the lesser of the \$5,000 maximum ETV award or the total cost of participation net of any other available resource.

OFA will work with participating local districts to establish eligibility of applicants for funding. Local districts must respond to OFA quickly when asked whether a youth qualifies for funding (i.e., is the youth a foster child or former foster child who has not yet attained the age of 21 years, a youth adopted from foster care after the age of 16, or a youth who received a voucher for FFY 2007-2008 through the ETV program). OCFS anticipates that demand for vouchers may exceed availability, and quick turnaround of information will facilitate an eligible youth's acceptance prior to the exhaustion of funds. Youth selected and receiving ETV reimbursement must make satisfactory progress in their post-secondary educational or vocational training program to remain eligible. A youth may be considered to be making satisfactory progress as long as the youth has not been suspended from the post-secondary educational or vocational training program. This would include youth placed on academic probation who continue to be enrolled in and are attending their post-secondary educational or vocational training program.

Local district limitations on selection criteria of eligible youth receiving ETV benefits must be consistent with the state criteria set forth above and uniformly applied to all youth in the district. For example, a district may limit vouchers to only youth in the first priority, with at least a specified grade point average. The local match would then be required for all eligible youth meeting those criteria for which vouchers are available.

The number of names submitted to OFA by July 1, 2008, will be categorized by priority and availability of the local social services district's match. ETV funding remaining, after eligible youth for whom a local social services district match is available within priority group one are served, will be available for vouchers for youth within priority group two for whom a local social services district match is available. Similarly, ETV funding remaining, after eligible youth within priority group two are served, will be used for vouchers for youth with priority group three for whom a local social services district

match is available. Finally, any funding remaining, after eligible youth within priority group three are served, will be used for vouchers for youth within priority group four for whom a local social services district match is available. If funding is insufficient to provide vouchers for an entire priority category, funds will be prorated within the priority reached. Based on the amount of funding available within the priority, need for funding will determine the amount of the voucher. Applications will be accepted on an ongoing basis and, should funding be available after July 1, 2008, applicants for whom a local social services district match is available will be awarded vouchers based on receipt of application.

VI. Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Coordinator

In accordance with 05-OCFS-LCM-01, each local social services district is required to identify a person to serve as the ETV coordinator. Local social services districts must advise their OCFS Regional Office of any changes in the name and/or phone number of the ETV coordinator by July 1, 2008.

OFA will coordinate efforts with the local social services district ETV coordinator regarding program applicants within the local social services district's jurisdiction.

VII. Contact Names

Buffalo Regional Office – Mary Miller (716) 847-3145

Mary.Miller@ocfs.state.ny.us

Rochester Regional Office - Linda Kurtz (585) 238-8201

Linda.Kurtz@ocfs.state.ny.us

Syracuse Regional Office - Jack Klump (315) 423-1200

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Albany Regional Office – Glenn Humphreys (518) 486-7078

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Spring Valley Regional Office - Pat Sheehy (845) 708-2499

Patricia.Sheehy@ocfs.state.ny.us

New York City Regional Office - Patricia Beresford (212) 383-1788

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Bureau of Indian Affairs - Kim Thomas (716) 847-3123

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/s/ Nancy W. Martinez

Issued By:

Name: Nancy W. Martinez

Title: Director

Division/Office: Strategic Planning and Policy Development

**Sample Revenue Intercept Letter
Education and Training Voucher Program**

(Date)

Sharon Morris
Division of Child Welfare and Community Services
NYS Office of Children and Family Services
52 Washington Street, Room 331 North Building
Rensselaer, NY 12144

Dear Ms. Morris:

The _____ County Department of Social Services will commit 12.5% of each applicable approved Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program award for FFY 2008-2009, up to a total amount of \$_____, to serve as its share of the ETV Program costs to be devoted to serving ETV eligible individuals.

This letter authorizes the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) to intercept Federal or State reimbursement from the RF-2 or 2A settlement otherwise due the _____ County Department of Social Services in the amount of 12.5% of each applicable approved ETV award, up to a total amount of \$_____, and to transfer that amount to the New York State Office of Children and Family Services.

Sincerely,

Local Commissioner