



The School Readiness Program and Homeless Families

Child care for Florida's homeless families

The Office of Early Learning (OEL) is dedicated to providing accessible, affordable and quality early learning services for Florida's children and families through the School Readiness Program. The School Readiness Program is intended to increase future educational success for children and to enable parents to work and become financially self-sufficient.

[House Bill 7165](#) expands the School Readiness Program to incorporate homeless families, effective August 1, 2013. The bill amends the definition of an "at-risk child" to include a child in the custody of a parent who is considered homeless as verified by a Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) designated lead agency on homelessness (s. 1002.81(1)(f), Florida Statutes (F.S.)). Through the School Readiness Program, OEL will collaborate with DCF to serve Florida's homeless families. A memorandum of agreement between early learning coalitions and DCF's Office on Homelessness-designated lead agencies will establish the process for collecting the required eligibility documentation.

Eligible children

Children are eligible for school readiness services if they are in the custody of a parent who is considered homeless, as verified by a DCF-designated lead agency on homelessness. Florida statute generally defines homelessness as an individual or family who lacks a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence ([refer to s. 420.621\(5\), F.S., for the complete definition of homelessness](#)). Eligible children must be younger than 13 years of age and a U.S. citizen or a qualified alien.

Qualifying for school readiness services

DCF's Office on Homelessness recognizes [28 lead agencies](#) that provide continuum of care services for homeless families in the state of Florida. These agencies create the framework for a comprehensive array of supportive services and emergency, transitional and permanent housing to address the varying needs of people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

The designated lead agency's case manager with whom the family is working will initiate the referral process if he or she determines that the family needs child care. The case manager may request school readiness services for the referred families in increments of six months or less. Once the referral is complete, the case manager will refer the family to the appropriate early learning coalition for school readiness and child care resource and referral services. In order to qualify and remain eligible for services, the child's parent(s) must actively participate in case management services through one of DCF's Office on Homelessness-designated lead agencies.

How to apply

To apply for the School Readiness Program, parents should contact the early learning coalition or the designated lead agency on homelessness in their local community.

Useful links

DCF's Office on Homelessness – <http://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/homelessness>

List of early learning coalitions – http://www.floridaearlylearning.com/OEL_Coalitions_Map.html

Head Start Program – <http://www.floridaheadstart.org/program%20directory.html>