

DCFS School Readiness Team

Early Childhood Education for Children 3 to 5 Years Old

Finding, choosing and enrolling your child in a high quality early learning program involves making important decisions for your family and your child. Early learning offers many benefits for your child—from kindergarten readiness to social-emotional skills to help with developmental needs. Below is general information and resources to find more information about programs in your community.



Finding an Early Learning Program

Here are some ideas for finding a quality program that is a good fit for your child (2.5 to 5 years old) and your family:

- Visit the Illinois Cares for Kids website to explore early learning programs early learning programs (Head Start, state-funded preschool programs and fee-based options) available in your community www.illinoiscaresforkids.org.
- Contact INCCRRA at 866-697-8278 or your local Child Care Resource and Referral Agency to learn more about specific providers, the services they offer and funding programs: www.illinoiscaresforkids.org.
- In Chicago, contact Illinois Action for Children's hotline number 312-823-1100.

- I can afford any tuition fees or co-pays, or the program accepts CCAP subsidies.
- This is a state that is NAEYC accredited and/or has a Gold or Silver rating from ExceleRate.
- There are no complaints/violations against the site (<https://sunshine.dcf.illinois.gov/Content/Licensing/Daycare/Search.aspx>).

Links to more checklists for choosing a preschool program include:

- Illinois Action for Children's Preschool Checklist: http://www.actforchildren.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/CCRR_CL_Preschool_2012.pdf.
- Child Care Aware's Choosing Quality Childcare: <https://www.childcareaware.org/families/choosing-quality-child-care/>.



Choosing a Quality Early Learning Program

Knowing what to look for in a program is key. Here are some general checklist items to think about when choosing a quality early learning program and links to more detailed checklists:

- There is a spot available in the program for my child.
- The program is open during the hours I need child care (e.g., evening, early morning).
- I can easily get to/from the program by car, public transportation, biking or walking.



Enrolling in an Early Learning Program

Who is eligible?

- Children from low income families or those at risk of academic failure are eligible for Head Start and state-funded preschools (Preschool for All and Preschool Expansion Grantee programs).
- There are no caregiver work or school enrollment requirements for Head Start or state-funded preschool programs, but some before/after preschool child care may require that caregivers work or attend school.

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Are developmental/readiness screenings required by preschools and why?

- Screenings are conducted to determine children’s eligibility for some preschool programs (e.g., PFA); general screenings are conducted for all students to identify potential education or social-emotional needs.
- Contact your school district to request a screening.

What documents are required and when?

- It is always best to speak to the director or admissions staff person at the early learning program directly to find out what documents are required for enrollment and the deadlines for submitting them. In general:

Program*	Proof of Age	Proof of Residency	Proof of Income	Medical Forms	Deadline
Head Start	Certified birth certificate	Driver’s license, state ID or utility bill	12 months of check stubs, W2, 1040 tax form	Medical exam, dental exam, immunization records	Varies by program
(PFA, PEG) State-funded Preschools	Copy of birth certificate (other proof of age, such as passport, visa, court documents may be accepted)	Driver’s license, state ID, utility bill; some districts may collaborate with neighboring districts to fill spots with out-of-district children	Proof of public benefits (WIC, Medicaid, SNAP, TANF, CCAP) or paystubs, W-2	Medical exam, dental exam, immunization records	Within 30 days of submitting application

**Other types of preschools and child care options are not listed in this chart, because their documentation requirements vary from program to program. For more information on documentation needed for these types of programs contact INCCRRA at 866-697-8278.*

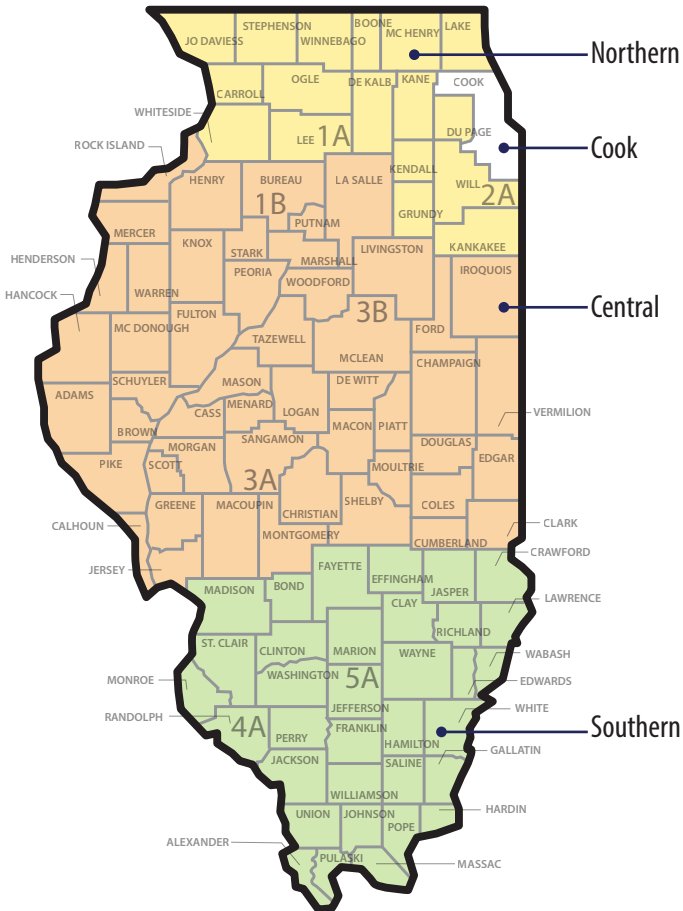
This chart provides general guidance only and is not a definitive legal statement of documentation requirements.

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**Contact your DCFS
School Readiness Team**
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