

Head Start and State-Funded Preschool Enrollment of Children (3-5) Involved in Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS)

Early learning offers many benefits to a child—from kindergarten readiness to social-emotional skills to help with developmental needs.

Caregivers benefit as well from family support services to time for other activities to social connections. Children involved with DCFS, whether in care, receiving intact services or children of youth in care, often receive preference in enrolling in Head Start and state-funded preschools.

Rules, Requirements and Resources

What are the Key Eligibility Rules?



KEYPOINTS

- Children in care are automatically eligible for Head Start and state-funded preschool programs regardless of income.
- Children in families receiving DCFS services or recently involved in DCFS also may be automatically eligible.
- Children involved with DCFS can enroll after Sept. 1 when they turn 3.



HEAD START

- Age – 3 to 5 years old
- Residency – Some Head Start programs limit enrollment to those children who are residents in their district
- Caregiver Job/School Enrollment – No requirements



STATE-FUNDED PRESCHOOLS

- Age – 3 to 5 years old
- Residency – All children who attend a state-funded preschool program must live in Illinois and be eligible to attend Illinois public schools. A district may work with neighboring districts to fill its preschool slots with eligible children.
- Caregiver Job/School Enrollment – No requirements

What Documentation is Required?



KEYPOINTS

- State-funded preschools accept documents other than a birth certificate as proof of age if it is unavailable (e.g., passport, visa, court documents)
- No proof of income is required for children in care and may not be required for children involved in DCFS
- Placement Form 906 can be used as proof of residency for children in care
- The McKinney-Vento Act requires schools to enroll students experiencing homelessness immediately, even if a student is unable to provide documents typically required, including proof of residency
- Programs may work with the family to obtain acceptable proof of age if a birth certificate is not available due to homelessness.
- ESSA (Every Student Succeeds Act) www.ed.gov/essa



HEAD START

- Proof of age – Certified birth certificate
- Proof of residency – Driver's license, state ID, utility bill or Placement Form 906
- Proof of income – None if child in care; 12 months of check stubs, W-2, 1040 tax form
- Medical forms – Medical exam, dental exam, immunization records
- Deadlines for documents – Within 45 days of enrollment application



STATE-FUNDED PRESCHOOLS

- Proof of age – Copy of birth certificate (other proof - passport, visa, court documents)
- Proof of residency – Driver's license, state ID, utility bill or Placement Form 906 for children in care
- Proof of income – None if child in care; proof of public benefits (WIC, Medicaid, SNAP, TANF, CCAP) or paystubs, W-2
- Medical forms – Medical exam, dental exam, immunization records
- Deadlines for documents – Within 30 days of submitting application (children in care may attend immediately with documents/records submitted within a reasonable timeframe)

Where to Go for More Information?



KEYPOINT

It is always best to speak directly to the director or admissions staff person at the early learning program to find out exactly what eligibility rules and documentation requirements they have.



GO-TO RESOURCES

Below are some additional resources:

- Illinois Cares for Kids: www.illinoiscaresforkids.org
- Illinois Head Start: 217-241-3511
- State-funded Preschool Programs: 877-20-CHILD (24453)
- Other types of preschools and child care options are not listed, because their eligibility and documentation requirements vary from program to program. For more information on eligibility or documentation requirements for these types of center- and home-based programs contact INCCRRA at 866-697-8278.



DCFS SCHOOL READINESS TEAM

To contact the DCFS School Readiness Team, please email your inquiry to: DCFS.SchoolReadiness@Illinois.gov

NOTE: The above information provides general guidance only and is not a definitive legal statement of eligibility requirements.

DCFS.Illinois.gov

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