ACCESS TO EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION
PRACTICE GUIDE
June 2015

Policy Statement:

The Department of Children and Families shall maximize the enrollment of eligible preschool-aged foster children in eligible preschool programs.

   Legal reference: Special Act 14-22.

Purpose:

Early childhood interventions optimize children's curiosity and readiness for school. Involvement for children in preschool programs has been found to offer important foundational learning experiences. Children who attend high-quality early learning programs are shown to perform better not only academically, but throughout their lifetimes as well.

Studies have shown the short- and long-term effects of quality early learning programs. Positive impacts from high-quality preschool programs can last a lifetime and help children become:

- more likely to succeed academically;
- less likely to require special education or remediation;
- more proficient at reading and math;
- more likely to graduate from high school;
- more likely to attend and complete college; and
- less likely to commit crimes.

DCF Policy 45-1 and this Practice Guide are intended to assist Social Workers with maximizing the enrollment of children in eligible programs.

Eligible Programs:

Eligible preschool is defined in state statute as:

- a school readiness program, as defined in Conn. Gen. Stat. § 10-16p;
- a preschool program offered by a local or regional board of education or regional educational service center;
- a preschool program accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC);
- a Head Start program;
- any preschool program that the Commissioner deems suitable to meet the needs of the child.

Best practice is for children to be enrolled in a full-time program. If a full-time program is not appropriate based on the needs of the child, this information must documented in a narrative entry and in the case plan.

Full-time programs are defined as five days per week, based on an academic school day and year, including summer programming.

If a full-time program cannot be secured or is not appropriate, a part-time program should be secured.

Part-time programs can include but are not limited to half days, multiple days per week.

Target Population:

Early education has demonstrated long-term results for children's overall well being and academic achievement. It is essential to stress the importance of these early learning opportunities during DCF's interactions with families.

The target population is defined as preschool-aged children, meaning any child aged three to five years who is placed in out-of-home care by DCF pursuant to an order of commitment. A child may be enrolled when he or she is 2.9 years old by the beginning of the academic school year (*e.g.,* a two-year-old child with a birthdate of 10/31 should be enrolled in a program).

Note: Children in mental health or medical facilities should be enrolled in the educational setting that collaborates with those programs.

Identification and Enrollment Process:

The DCF Social Worker, in collaboration with the FASU Support Social Worker and the caregiver, shall identify potential programs best able to meet the educational needs of the child and enroll the child in one of them. In assessing the best program for the child, the Social Worker shall take into consideration the child's specific needs, including the child's exposure to traumatic events and his or her stress reactions. In addition, there are gaps in preschool program offerings in some parts of the state; therefore, the location of the program, the travel impact on the child and the family's schedule must also be taken into consideration   (The most appropriate mode of transportation for this very young group of children should be the foster family.)

For children under an Order of Temporary Custody, the DCF Social Worker must secure the parent or guardian's permission to enroll the child in a program.   The DCF Social Worker should consult with legal staff if any barriers to securing permission for enrollment arise.

In order to identify an eligible program in close proximity to the child's home, the DCF Social Worker and caregiver can access Infoline 2-1-1 for a list of programs. Below is a list of online resources to assist in program identification.

Program type	Website/Source
NAEYC program	http://families.naeyc.org/find-quality-child-care
Head Start Locator	http://ecklc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/HeadStartOffices
Office of Early Childhood	https://www.elicense.ct.gov/Lookup/LicenseLookup.aspx
Infoline 2-1-1	http://www.211childcare.org/
Local Education Agencies	Contact the LEA's Superintendent of Schools.

Wait List:

If the selected program in close proximity has a wait list, the DCF Social Worker in conjunction with the caregiver shall explore alternative programs.

Payment:

The caregiver must apply to Care for Kids for funding. The DCF Social Worker shall work with the caregiver to ensure the application is submitted in a timely manner and that payment is secured.

Cross reference: DCF Policy 36-55-25.10, "Daycare for Foster Children."

Documentation:

Every child in the care of DCF must have an educational icon created in LINK. The DCF Social Worker will create the child's educational icon in LINK and enter updates as needed. The educational icon must include:

- the name of the preschool or early childhood program;
- town of nexus;
- contact person;
- phone number; and
- educational setting.

Note: If the child is receiving Special Education services, the Social Worker must include this information in the educational tab of the LINK record.

Responsible LEA tab:
The DCF Social Worker must include the town of nexus status, town and LEA jurisdiction with the reason for change.

Education Site tab:
The DCF Social Worker shall select one of the grade options listed in LINK:

- Birth to Three;
- Head Start;
- Pre-K; or
- Kindergarten.

Case Plan:

The DCF Social Worker shall include relevant educational information in the child's case plan including enrollment activities and decision points.

Cross reference: Case Planning Practice Guide.

The following are examples of information that can be included in the case plan:

- medical or behavioral health needs of the child, including the child's attachment history of separation and loss, the child's coping responses and the child's exposure to other traumatic events;
- documentation that an appropriate program is not available in the community in which the child resides or the foster parent works;
- explanation of why a child is participating in a part-time instead of a full-time program (*e.g.,* child is located in an area where only part-time slots are available);
- the child is eligible for special education services; and
- the primary language of the child.