

## Supplemental Guide for Priority Populations

Priority populations for Early Learning Scholarships include children receiving child protective services, in foster care, or experiencing homelessness. This guide supports implementation and is a collaboration between the Minnesota Departments of Education and Human Services.

### Scholarships for Children Receiving Child Protective Services

#### Eligibility for Scholarships

A child is automatically eligible for an Early Learning Scholarship if he or she receive child protective services and is between the ages of 0 and 5 years, as of September 1 of the current school year. A child receiving child protective services is defined as a child whose family is the subject of a family assessment, family investigation, or is involved in any type of child welfare or child protection-related case management through a county or tribal social service agency, but who is not in foster care. Children in foster care qualify for an Early Learning Scholarship under separate eligibility criteria. Sibling children may also be eligible for an Early Learning Scholarship as determined by the county or tribal social service agency in the case plan.

#### Application Process for Children Receiving Child Protective Services

Comply with the following processes when applying for a child receiving child protective services:

- When a child's family is receiving child protective services but the child is not in foster care, the county or tribal social service agency should work together with the child's parent or legal guardian to complete and submit an Early Learning Scholarship application.
- Under the eligibility of children receiving child protective services, a parent or legal guardian cannot apply for the Early Learning Scholarship directly. Instead, once a parent or legal guardian completes the application, the application should be referred by a county or tribal social service agency to the Area Administrator for an Early Learning Scholarship – Pathway I or the Scholarship Administrator for an Early Learning Scholarship – Pathway II.
- When the Early Learning Scholarship program application is signed by the parent or legal guardian and/or the county or tribal social service agency worker, this signed application serves as documentation of the child's protective service case.
- The Area Administrator may contact the county or tribal social services worker to verify.

# Scholarships for Children in Foster Care

## Eligibility for Scholarships

A child is automatically eligible for an Early Learning Scholarship if they are in foster care and between the ages of 0 and 5 years, as of September 1 of the current school year.

- Children of the foster care parent are not considered siblings of the child in foster care. Families that provide foster care and wish to apply for a scholarship must do so separately. All eligibility requirements must be met to receive an Early Learning Scholarship.

## Application Process for Children in Foster Care

A child in foster care is in the temporary care and custody of the county or tribal social service agency. The child's parents or legal guardians retain their legal rights until there has been a termination of parental rights. Until then, there is a short term shared custody between the county and the parents or legal guardians, unless there is an agreement or a court has issued an order indicating otherwise.

The county or tribal social service agency has temporary care and custody when a child is in foster care.

Comply with the following processes when applying for a child in foster care:

- Foster care parents cannot directly apply for the Early Learning Scholarship. The county or tribal social service agency worker and the foster care parent may need to coordinate some of the details on the application to ensure accurate information, while the worker is required to sign the application on behalf of the county or tribal social service agency. If a child is in foster care, the address for the parent/legal guardian on the application/award form will be the county or tribal social service agency address, while the address where the child is placed in foster care should be included on the application under the Foster Care Information section.
- The pathway application is to be submitted to the Area Administrator for the county in which the county or tribal social service agency is located.
- The county or tribal social service agency address should be entered into the Early Learning Scholarship Administration System (ELSA) database under the parent/guardian address. Update the resident school district on the "Child" page to be the school district based on the address of the parent/guardian from whom the child was removed (required). The address where the child is currently residing, or as indicated by the county or tribal social services worker, will be entered as the child's address in ELSA.
- In the case of a child in foster care, the scholarship should be administered at the county or tribal social service agency responsible for placement. If the Tribal Nation and Area Administrator area overlap with each other, coordination between the two parties must consider which agency can best serve the child with the priority status. If the worker or family specifically requested services by the Tribal Nation, then that is the direction to take.
- The county or tribal social service worker should have listed their business addresses under appropriate area of the application. Standard practice is if the application came to the Area Administrator location, you can process it.

- For assigning the State Student Identification (SSID) number, the foster care agency must inform the Area Administrator or Scholarship Administrator of the resident school district that is applicable to the child.

## Change in Legal Status

Scholarships that are awarded to children in foster care may be renewed until the child/children are kindergarten age eligible, regardless of a change in their foster care status.

- If the child in foster care is reunified with their family, adopted, or their custody is transferred to a relative under a transfer of permanent legal and physical custody (TPLPC), the child retains the scholarship, and whoever is the child’s legal guardian does not need to reapply.
- The county or tribal social services worker needs to provide authorization/verification of the change of legal status to the Area Administrator or Scholarship Administrator in order for communication to be made on the child’s behalf with the new legal guardian.
- The Area Administrator or Scholarship Administrator should send the part of the application/award form to the new legal guardian so they can update their contact information, and complete the agreement, consent, and Tennessee Warning. No disruption to the child’s scholarship shall occur while waiting for the return of the updated forms.
- If the child is age-eligible to renew their scholarship, the new legal guardian will complete renewal paperwork.

## Scholarships for Children Experiencing Homelessness

### Eligibility for Scholarships

Children experiencing homelessness are considered a priority to receive Early Learning Scholarships. Children may be considered as experiencing homelessness as defined under the McKinney-Vento Act, if any of the following pertains to a family’s residential status currently or in the past 24 months:

- Family is residing in a shelter
- Family is doubling up temporarily with other family or friends due to economic hardship
- Family is moving from place to place
- Family is living in a car, outside, public space, hotel, or motel due to lack of accommodation

Homelessness is not an automatic qualifier to receive a scholarship; income requirements must be met. For families that meet the definition of homeless, a scholarship may be awarded to support stability of programming for the child or to expedite the child being able to enroll or attend a high-quality Early Learning Program.

If no proof of income is available at the time of application for a family experiencing homelessness, the Area Administrator and/or Scholarship Administrator can award a scholarship and indicate eligibility as “Proof of Income” for the purpose of ELSA. Access to supportive services are not to be hindered. The Area Administrator must allow the family a reasonable amount of time to provide income eligibility documentation, or a self-

declaration if they do not have income. If the family is determined to be over income, the award will need to be rescinded. If documentation has not been received within 30 days of the scholarship award, Area and Scholarships Administrators should follow up with family. In the case where early learning services have already begun, the Area or Scholarship Administrator may reach out to the program. Documentation, including declaration of no income, must be received within 90 days of the scholarship or the scholarship will be cancelled. If the family is determined to be over income or no documentation of income is provided, no recoupment of payment will happen, but the family and the program should both give a 15-day notice period that the scholarship will be cancelled.

## **Awarding Scholarships to a Child Experiencing Homelessness**

In efforts to support continuity of educational experience while supporting housing stability, flexibility to determine geographical service area must be considered. McKinney-Vento allows the family to be served within the residential school district of their last known address or district enrollment, their current address/location, or where they are seeking stable housing.

Questions about accessing the Early Learning Scholarship program, including specific questions regarding priority population access and eligibility, should be directed to [MDE.ELS@state.mn.us](mailto:MDE.ELS@state.mn.us) with the subject line "Scholarships."