Supplemental Guide for Children in Foster Care or Experiencing Homelessness

Foster Care

Eligibility for Scholarships

A child in foster care is automatically qualified by income for an early learning scholarship. However, age as well as sibling status eligibility must still be met.

- The child is age three or four as of September 1 of the current school year and not yet eligible for kindergarten. Note the scholarship fiscal year begins July 1.

- A child between the ages of zero and five of a parent under the age of 21 who is pursuing a high school or general education equivalency diploma is eligible for a scholarship if the parent meets the income eligibility guidelines. Teen parents pursuing their high school diploma or GED need to supply their birthdate on the application to document their priority.

A sibling between the ages of zero and five of a child who has been awarded a scholarship is eligible upon request; provided the sibling attends the same program and funds are available.

- Scholarships must be considered for a younger sibling of a current recipient if requested. Siblings are children who share one or both parents through blood, marriage or adoption, including siblings as defined by the child’s tribal code or custom. For siblings to be considered for a scholarship, the application or award form must be submitted by the same legal guardian and be listed on the application. However, unless the parent is a teen parent, a scholarship can only be awarded to a younger sibling when it is confirmed that the child is attending the same program as the older sibling and funding is available.

- The application asks if the sibling is attending the same program as their older sibling. A younger sibling cannot be awarded a scholarship unless the parent/legal guardian has indicated that they are attending the same program as the older sibling. If this is not indicated on the application, the parent/legal guardian may request a scholarship for the younger sibling once they have established that the child is attending the same program. While the sibling is eligible to be added, funds must be available before awarding. Siblings must meet the eligibility requirements under the same income as the three or four year old child, or child of a teen parent.

- Sibling children are determined by the foster care agency as part of their protective service case.
Application process for children in Foster Care

The foster care agency is the legal guardian for a child in foster care.

- Foster care parents cannot apply for the scholarship directly. The foster care worker and the foster care parent may need to coordinate some of the details on the application to ensure accurate information; but the worker must actually be noted as the legal guardian. If a child is in foster care, the address for the parent/legal guardian on the application/award form will be the foster care agency address, with the address where the child is living noted on the application as the child address.

- The foster care agency address will be entered into the ELSA database under the parent/guardian address, with the resident school district updated to be the school district based on the parent(s) home address if needed. The address where the child is currently residing or as indicated by the foster care worker, will be entered under the child’s record in ELSA.

- For assigning the SSID number, the foster care agency must inform the Regional or Scholarship Administrator of the resident school district that is applicable to the child. Children of the foster care family 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 a scholarship.

Change in Guardianship

Scholarships are awarded to eligible children who remain eligible until they are kindergarten age eligible, regardless of a change in their foster care status.

- If the child in foster care is returned to his birth or adoptive family, or is adopted, the child retains the scholarship and the family does not need to reapply.

- The foster care worker needs to provide authorization/verification of the change of guardianship to the SA/RA in order for communication to be made on the child’s behalf with the new guardian.

- The new legal guardian should be sent the part of the application/award form to update their contact information, and complete the agreement, consent, and Tennessen warning. No disruption to the child’s scholarship shall occur while waiting for the return of the updated forms.

Scholarships for Children Experiencing Homelessness

Eligibility for Scholarships

The Commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Education has deemed homeless status, as defined under the McKinney Vento act for educational access, a priority to receive early learning
scholarships. Children may be defined as experiencing homelessness if any of the following pertains to their family’s residential status.

- Family is residing in a shelter
- Family is doubling up temporarily with other family or friends due to economic hardship
- 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. Age and income requirements must be met. For families that meet the definition of homeless, a scholarship may be awarded in order 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 SA/RA will indicate eligibility as “Proof of Income” for the purpose of ELSA, and provide the family a reasonable amount of time for the family to provide documentation, including, if applicable, self-declaration of having no income.

**Age eligibility**

- The child is age three or four as of September 1 of the current school year and not yet eligible for kindergarten. Note the scholarship fiscal year begins July 1.

- A child between the ages of zero and five of a parent under the age of 21 who is pursuing a high school or general education equivalency diploma is eligible for a scholarship if the parent meets the income eligibility guidelines. Teen parents pursuing their high school diploma or GED need to supply their birthdate on the application to document their priority.

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While the sibling is eligible to be added, funds must be available before awarding. Siblings must meet the eligibility requirements under the same income as the three or four year old child, or child of a teen parent.

**Income at or below 185 percent of Federal Poverty Guidelines**

Families have two options to demonstrate their income eligibility. Written documentation must be included with the application before an award can be made.

**Option 1:** A family can document that their child is participating in one of the following public assistance or publicly funded programs:

- Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP)
- Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP)
- Food Support (SNAP)
- Free and Reduced-Price Lunch Program (FRLP)
- Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)
- Head Start
- Foster Care
- Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (automatically qualifies for FRLP)

For families that choose option 1, applications/award forms must include written documentation that the family is participating in one of the above programs. No further income verification is needed if a family qualifies under Option 1.

**Note:** Families cannot be determined income-eligible for scholarships based solely on CACFP provider area eligibility. Families must be eligible for CACFP based on their own income in order to use CACFP for option 1 of the application.

**Option 2:** Families that do not document their eligibility through option 1 may use option 2 to verify their income eligibility. To be eligible under this option, families must have income equal to or less than 185 percent of the federal poverty guidelines in the current calendar year (see chart included in the Application/Award Form Supplemental Information packet.)

**Families must provide documentation of earned income. Proof of income may include:**

- A recent tax form, W-2 form or the two most recent pay stubs
- A financial aid statement
- A signed statement from their employer company letterhead
Option 2: Eligibility is determined by first determining the annual income of the household and corresponding number with the family size. Income must be at or below 185% of the Federal Poverty Guideline for their family size. Families that meet the definition of homeless and are doubling up with another family should only count children and adults that are economically dependent on each other for sharing of revenue and expenses.

- If the family has no source of income and is not participating in any of the programs listed under option 1, the SA/RA may accept a signed statement from the parent attesting to having no source of income.

Application and 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.

Additional questions about accessing the Early Learning Scholarships program should be directed to MDE.ELS@state.mn.us with the subject line Scholarships.