



# School Readiness Program Provider Orientation

Understanding Your Responsibilities & Requirements



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## About the School Readiness (SR) Program

- Child Care financial assistance for eligible low-income families
- Early learning services for children birth to school age
- Primarily funded by the Child Care and Development Fund and administered by the Division of Early Learning



The School Readiness Program helps families achieve financial self-sufficiency while ensuring children receive quality early learning experiences. Providers play a critical role in preparing children for success in school by delivering developmentally appropriate care and services.

## What is Program Integrity

- Ensures the appropriate use of federal and state funding including
  - Serving eligible families
  - Contracting with eligible providers
  - Minimizing waste, fraud and abuse
- Encompasses both intentional and unintentional errors

Program integrity is important in everything we do. We are to deliver child care assistance fairly and accurately. This means we comply with federal and state requirements.

An example of an **intentional** error is fraud. An example of an **unintentional** error is a data entry mistake or incomplete documentation.

## How to Assure Program Integrity

- Fiscal management
  - Have processes for sound fiscal management
- Fraud detection and prevention
  - Identify and address fraud
- Improper payment reduction
  - Reduce these types of payments
- Eligibility verification
  - Document and verify eligible children, providers, services and payments

There are 5 key elements. We'll begin with the 4 on this slide.

Remember that fraud is an intentional error. This could look like billing for children who don't exist or for always perfect attendance for every child.

Improper payment might happen when there are incomplete documents. This could look like missing absence notes.

## How to Assure Program Integrity (continued)

- Monitoring and oversight
  - Local – Early learning coalitions monitor providers
  - State – The Division of Early Learning monitors coalitions
  - Federal – The Department of Health and Human Services monitors the Division of Early Learning

And here's the 5<sup>th</sup> element of program integrity. Remember the slide *What is Program Integrity* a couple slides back? It said that **appropriate use of funds** is important, right? How do we confirm that everyone is using funds appropriately?

Through monitoring.

Program integrity, including monitoring, happens at **every** level—local, state and federal.

Monitoring includes desk and onsite reviews, quality assurance and corrective action. We'll discuss this in more detail later during this orientation.

## Purpose of the SR Contract

- Agreement between the provider and its local early learning coalition (ELC)
- Ensures eligibility to participate in the School Readiness (SR) and SR Plus Programs
- Valid for one fiscal year
- Covers the delivery of SR services to eligible children

The purpose of the SR Contract is to formally outline the requirements, responsibilities and standards that a provider must follow to participate in the SR program.

- Providers are eligible for reimbursement for SR services only **after** full contract execution and for the term of the contract.
- SR contracts are not transferrable. A change in ownership requires execution of a new contract.

## Provider Responsibilities in the SR Program

- Deliver high-quality early learning services that support child development
- Partner with families, early learning coalitions and the Division of Early Learning to support child growth and development
- Maintain program integrity and compliance with SR Program requirements outlined in the contract

As an SR provider, you are responsible for ensuring children receive safe, nurturing, and high-quality care. Accurate recordkeeping, collaboration with early learning coalitions and clear communication with families are essential for program integrity and compliance and child success.

The remainder of this orientation focuses on the SR Provider Contract.

## Governing Laws & Rules

- 45 Code of Federal Regulations Parts 98 and 99
- Chapter 1002, Florida Statutes, Part VI
- Chapters 6M-4 and 6M-9, Florida Administrative Code





These laws and rules govern all provisions in the contract. They ensure consistent implementation statewide and aligns to federal regulations.

They include:

- Child Care and Development Fund: 45 Code of Federal Regulations Parts 98 and 99
- Florida Statutes for the SR program: Chapter 1002, Florida Statutes, Part VI
- SR Rules: Chapters 6M-4 and 6M-9, Florida Administrative Code

## SR Eligible Providers

 Private Providers	 Public School Providers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Licensed child care facility</li> <li>• Licensed or registered family child care home</li> <li>• Licensed large family child care home</li> <li>• License-exempt nonpublic school</li> <li>• License-exempt faith-based child care provider</li> <li>• Licensed or license-exempt before- or after-school program</li> <li>• Accredited child development program certified by the U.S. Department of Defense operating on a military installation</li> <li>• Informal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public schools (including charter schools)</li> </ul>

Here are the entities that qualify as either a private provider or a public school provider.

## Additional Eligibility Requirements

- Cannot have a public assistance fraud conviction within the last 5 years
- Cannot be on the USDA National Disqualified List
- Comply with any outstanding corrective action from a previous contract
- Complete a pre-contractual and an annual health and safety inspection
- Provide an E-Verify affidavit
- Have a program assessment score of at least a 4.0 (on a 7-point scale) or QIP, if applicable

These requirements ensure providers meet safety, integrity and quality standards. They're non-negotiable.

## Core Provider Responsibilities Overview

- Child Enrollment
- Child Assessment
- Developmental Screening
- Program Assessment
- Instruction
- Health and Safety
  - Ratio/group size
  - Active credential
  - Training for child care personnel
- Documentation
- Reporting

Your responsibilities fall into these major categories. We'll unpack each one, so you know exactly what's expected.

Note: The topic of documentation covers attendance, copayment and other reimbursement related documentation as well as SR child records.

## Child Enrollment

- Enroll only authorized children
- Serve children at approved location(s) on the payment certificate
- No reimbursement for unauthorized care

You can only serve children who have an active child care payment certificate. This protects you from providing child care services that will not be reimbursed.

Note: A multi-site provider must serve SR children at the physical location/building authorized for care on the child care certificate.

If you enroll a child without a certificate or with an invalid certificate or enroll a child at a second location but the certificate shows the first location, you will not be reimbursed.

## Child Assessment (Optional)

- Administer the assessment during the three assessment periods
- Assess all eligible children age birth to five years who have been enrolled at the provider for at least 60 days
- Maintain 75% teacher reliability
- Notify the coalition within 5 business days of not meeting this threshold
- Return to 75% reliability within 60 days

Providers may choose to conduct child assessments. The only permissible assessment tool is currently Teaching Strategies Gold (TSG).

## Developmental Screenings

- Screen children 6 weeks to 60 months
- Encourage parents to complete screenings within 20 calendar days
- Complete screening within provider's 45 calendar days, excluding state observed holidays, when parents do not complete the screenings
- Enter results into the statewide system
- Participate in intervention practices when needed

These screenings help identify children who may need early intervention. They're a critical part of the SR Program.

Families are given the first opportunity to complete their children's developmental screening. Coalitions and providers can support families with this process.

If parents do not complete the developmental screening, it will be available for you to complete in the Provider Portal. Please partner with parent(s) throughout this process.

## Program Assessment

- Earn a minimum composite score of 4.00
- Request another observation at your own expense if you score below 4.00
- If your new score is still below 4.00:
  - You might be placed on a quality improvement plan (QIP) if you meet all requirements or
  - Your current contract will be terminated, and your eligibility may be revoked

Coalitions observe 50% of classrooms for each care level to determine the composite score. Classrooms are randomly selected.

## Instruction

- Provide developmentally appropriate activities
- Use state-approved curriculum
- Support Florida Early Learning and Developmental Standards
- Implement a character development program

Curriculum isn't optional. It ensures children receive consistent, developmentally appropriate instruction.

## Health and Safety

- Maintain staff-to-child ratios and maximum group size
- Complete all required training timely
- Adhere to active credential requirements
- Conduct Level 2 background screenings for child care personnel
- Ensure a safe, smoke-free environment
- Allow health and safety inspections
- Comply with SR health and safety standards

Health and safety compliance is one of the most heavily monitored areas. It's essential for protecting children and your program.

## Prohibited Child Discipline

- No physical punishment
- No humiliating or frightening discipline
- No withholding of food, rest or toileting
- No denial of active play as a consequence of misbehavior

Discipline must always be developmentally appropriate and never punitive or harmful.

## Documentation

### *Attendance*

- Maintain required daily sign-in/sign-out
- Submit monthly attendance reports
- Collect absence documentation from the parent
- Notify coalition after 1 unexcused absence for at-risk child
- Notify coalition after 5 consecutive or 10 unexplained child absences in a calendar month with no contact from the parent

Accurate attendance is directly tied to reimbursement. It must be precise and timely.

## Documentation

### *Reimbursement Basics*

- Based on approved reimbursement rates
- Includes eligible differential payments
  - Contracted slots
  - Special needs
  - Quality programs
    - Gold Seal
    - Quality Performance Incentive
    - Child Assessment
- May be paid for temporary closures caused by a declared state of emergency
- Provider contract shows the rates and differentials

You're reimbursed based on attendance, eligible absences and approved rates. There are also additional payments for participation in specific programs. Providers caring for children with special needs may also receive additional payments.

#### Differentials:

Contracted Slots: Program that allows a provider to serve children in a specific location

Special Needs: Requires submission of documentation reflecting (a) the need for accommodations based on the special needs diagnosis and (b) completed training for instructional staff assigned to the child with special needs

Gold Seal: Requires documentation of a current Gold Seal designation from an accrediting agency

Quality Performance Incentive: Requires a program assessment composite score of 5.00 or higher

Child Assessment: Requires completion of Teaching Strategies Gold 3 times a year and submission of child assessment data and teacher reliability documentation

## Documentation

### *Parent Fee Basics (Copayments)*

- Cannot charge SR families more than private-pay families
- Collect the required family copayment from parents
- Document copayment collection with receipts
- Notify parents of outstanding SR copayment balances and establish repayment plans if needed

You're required to collect the SR/SR Plus parent copayment identified on the payment certificate. Documenting the receipt of paid copayments is important.

## Documentation

### ***Recordkeeping & Confidentiality***

- Maintain SR child records for a minimum of 5 years
- Protect child/family data
- Provide access to records upon request to the –
  - Department of Children and Families or local child care licensing agency,
  - Division of Early Learning
  - United States Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Education and Comptroller General

Record maintenance and access to SR/SR Plus records are contractual requirements.

Confidentiality is a legal requirement. Your staff must understand and follow these expectations.

## Reporting

Event	Coalition Notification Required
Change in ownership	30 calendar days prior
Change in contact or program information (e.g., ages served, rate changes, operational hours, etc.)	Within 14 calendar days
Child transfer to another location (multiple locations)	Prior to changing location
Change in insurance	10 calendar days prior
Changes to information on SR application	Within 14 calendar days
Temporary emergency closure	Initial: 1 <sup>st</sup> closure day Resumption: within 2 business days
Permanent Closure	30 calendar days prior

SR providers must notify coalitions when certain events occur.

## Reporting (con't)

Event	Coalition Notification Required
Dismissal of SR children	Within 14 calendar days
Request for second program assessment	Within 30 calendar days
Unusual incidents	No later than COB the next day; Written report within 3 business days
Placed on the USDA disqualified list	Within 5 calendar days
Convicted of public assistance fraud	Within 5 calendar days
Child absences	By the 5 <sup>th</sup> absence day  At-risk children/Rilya Wilson Act: immediately with any unexcused absence
Reimbursement discrepancy, overpayment or underpayment	Within 60 calendar days

SR providers must notify coalitions when certain events occur.

## **Coalition Responsibilities & Monitoring**

- Provides training and technical assistance
- Does not require more than what is in the contract
- Monitors for compliance
- Accesses sites and records during business hours

## **Noncompliance & Corrective Action Notice**

Early learning coalition:

- Identifies the specific requirement(s) the provider failed to meet
- Describes in detail the required corrective action
- Sets a deadline for completion
- Informs the provider of its right to request a review

Serious or repeated issues can lead to probation or termination.

## Questions

Contact the Provider Relations team at the Early Learning Coalition of Manatee County with questions about your SR contract.

**(941) 757-2913**

**[providerrelations@elc-manatee.org](mailto:providerrelations@elc-manatee.org)**





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