

6M-4.740 Program Assessment Requirements for the School Readiness Program.

(1) Definitions. The following definitions are applicable to all rules under Chapter 6M-4, F.A.C.

(a) “Care Level” means the age of the majority (51% or more) of enrolled children in a classroom. Three care levels are used to meet the required observation quota: Infant (ages 0-18 months), Toddler (ages 19-35 months), and Pre-K (ages 36 months-kindergarten entry.)

(b) “Classroom” means any well-defined room in which care is provided or classes are held, or a room arranged with materials and equipment and set up as a learning space with intent to implement a plan of activities for the School Readiness program. The classroom provides a space where learning can take place uninterrupted by outside distractions. If floor to ceiling walls are not present, the classroom walls must be defined by stable barriers, and must adhere to the requirements for such barriers as established in Forms OEL-SR-6202, OEL-SR-6204, and OEL-SR-6206, incorporated by reference in Rule 6M-4.620, F.A.C. Any classroom that is eligible to receive a School Readiness child enrollment at any time is considered a classroom under this definition. Any classroom that serves children in the School Readiness program for less than two (2) consecutive hours a day is not considered a classroom under this definition.

(c) “Composite Classroom” means a School Readiness provider classroom randomly selected through the DEL-defined system to meet the composite score calculation requirements of 50% of classrooms at each care level served by the provider. Observations conducted in Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) classrooms within VPK program hours are not subject to random classroom selection and may be used to calculate the Composite Program Assessment Score for the School Readiness program in accordance with paragraph 6M-8.621(5)(b), F.A.C.

(d) “Composite Program Assessment Score” means an average of all DEL-adopted program assessment dimension scores, omitting the negative climate score, if included in the tool.

(e) “Contract Minimum Threshold” means the minimum score required by Section 1002.82(2)(n), F.S., and defined in subsection (2) of this rule, that a provider must achieve on a program assessment to be eligible to contract for the School Readiness program.

(f) “Early Learning Coalition” or “coalition” means the entity charged with administering School Readiness program services pursuant to Sections 1002.83 and 1002.84, F.S. “Early Learning Coalition” or “coalition” includes applicable DEL contractors.

(g) “Negative Climate Score” means the measure of the level of expressed negativity shown by teachers and/or children in a classroom.

(h) “Observer” means a certified reliable observer for the age group of the classroom being observed, that meets the requirements of Form DEL-SR 740.

(i) “Personnel” means the director and all teachers entered into the DEL-defined system on the Class Roster and includes all instructional staff assigned to classrooms as lead and assistant teachers. Instructional staff does not include substitutes or others who fill in for an absent teacher or those who are temporarily in a classroom for a teacher break.

(j) “Program Assessment” means the assessment required by Section 1002.82(2)(n), F.S., that measures of the quality of teacher-child interactions, including responsive caregiving, emotional and behavioral support, engaged support for learning, classroom organization, and instructional support for children.

(k) “Quality Improvement Plan” means a targeted twelve (12) month plan to improve program quality using performance goals and strategies.

(l) “School Readiness Child Care Slots” means the number of birth to kindergarten entry School Readiness child care slots paid during a month of service.

(2) Program Assessment Requirements. All School Readiness providers serving children from birth to kindergarten entry must have a program assessment conducted and meet the Contract Minimum Threshold to be eligible to participate in the School Readiness program. School Readiness providers must receive a minimum Composite Program Assessment Score of 4.00 (rounding two decimals) to participate in the School Readiness program.

(a) A coalition shall waive the Contract Minimum Threshold if the coalition determines that a provider is essential to meet local child care capacity needs, as defined in the coalition’s School Readiness Plan required by Section 1002.85, F.S., and Rule 6M-9.115, F.A.C. Providers that have had the Contract Minimum Threshold waived must be on a Quality Improvement Plan.

(b) Form DEL-SR 740, Program Assessment Requirements Handbook, dated (November 2022), is hereby incorporated by reference and may be obtained at the Division website at www.floridaearlylearning.com or by contacting the Division of Early Learning, Department of Education, 325 West Gaines Street, Tallahassee, FL 32399. The incorporated form is also available at:

<https://www.flrules.org/Gateway/reference.asp?No=Ref-14924>.

(c) Providers must electronically report in the DEL-defined system a director, the number of classrooms, and teachers and care levels assigned to those classrooms, as outlined in Form DEL-SR 740, Program Assessment Requirements Handbook. Non-exempt providers, or exempt providers that have opted to participate in program assessment requirements pursuant to paragraph (3)(d) of this rule, must submit an updated monthly roster in the DEL-defined system.

(d) Providers must give consent in the DEL-defined system to coalition staff or a third-party contractor to administer a program assessment for each selected classroom.

(e) Providers that fail to comply with paragraphs (2)(c) and (d) of this rule will not have a program assessment conducted and will not be eligible for a contract to provide School Readiness services.

(f) Program assessments will be provided by the coalition annually.

1. Providers that have been determined ineligible to contract based on program assessment scores may request a second assessment that follow the guidelines in Form DEL-SR 740 and subparagraphs (2)(f)3. and 4. of this rule, and is conducted at the provider's expense by an observer. The new Composite Program Assessment Score must meet the Contract Minimum Threshold for the provider to be eligible for a School Readiness Contract.

2. Providers currently on a Quality Improvement Plan who wish to have a program assessment to conclude their Quality Improvement Plan early may request a second assessment that follows the guidelines in Form DEL-SR 740 and subparagraphs (2)(f)3. and 4. of this rule. The assessment must be conducted at the provider's expense by an observer to satisfy the requirements of the Quality Improvement Plan prior to the end of the twelve (12) month Quality Improvement Plan.

3. A single classroom will be reassessed and its classroom score will replace the previous classroom score to calculate a new Composite Program Assessment Score, if the teacher previously assessed is still actively teaching in the classroom being reassessed. If the previously assessed teacher is not active in the classroom and the newly assigned teacher is hired after the previous assessment was completed, the single classroom will be reassessed and its classroom score will replace the previous classroom score to calculate a new Composite Program Assessment Score. If the previously assessed teacher is not active in the classroom and the newly assigned teacher was moved from a different classroom, every classroom will be reassessed for the new classroom scores to replace the previous classroom scores.

4. If at the time of the provider's request for a second program assessment there are less than 50% of the original classrooms in the program assessment baseline or teachers remaining active, new observations shall be made on the randomly selected rooms identified by the DEL-defined system. If the provider adds any new classrooms when its registration is reset, all classrooms selected by the DEL-defined system (50% by care level) must be observed for the second assessment.

(g) Coalitions shall notify providers of their Composite Program Assessment Score within fourteen (14) calendar days after the score is generated. Individual classroom scores and notes shall be provided to providers within fourteen (14) calendar days upon written request by the provider.

(h) Providers currently on a Quality Improvement Plan will have a program assessment completed within sixty (60) calendar days prior to the end of the twelve (12) month Quality Improvement Plan.

(i) For contracted School Readiness providers that score below the Contract Minimum Threshold, the coalition shall terminate the current contract and may revoke the provider's eligibility for up to five (5) years pursuant to Section 1002.88(2)(a), F.S. The coalition will send written notice of termination to the provider at least thirty (30) calendar days before the termination date. If a current contract is set to expire less than thirty (30) calendar days from the termination date, the coalition shall provide immediate written notification to the provider. Written notification must include a reason and identify the contract revocation period.

(j) At the time of contracting, the coalition shall use a provider's most recent Composite Program Assessment Score.

(3) Exemptions.

(a) Providers meeting one of the following shall be exempt from the annual program assessment requirement:

1. A provider has not been cited for one (1) Class I or more than three (3) of the same Class II School Readiness health and safety violations, as defined by rule of the Department of Children and Families or local licensing agency, as applicable, in the two-year period prior to contract execution and is a:

a. Child care center with 20 percent or less of all paid School Readiness child care slots out of the maximum capacity as defined in Forms OEL-SR-6202, OEL-SR-6204, and OEL-SR-6206, incorporated by reference in Rule 6M-4.620, F.A.C., or

b. Family child care homes with two or fewer of paid School Readiness child care slots out of the maximum capacity, as defined in Forms OEL-SR-6202, OEL-SR-6204, and OEL-SR-6206, incorporated by reference in Rule 6M-4.620, F.A.C.

2. Providers that offer only overnight School Readiness services.

(b) Providers will no longer be exempt under this paragraph if the provider is cited for disqualifying health and safety violations or if the provider's paid School Readiness child care slots meet or exceed the enrollment threshold in paragraph (3)(a) of this rule, during the operating hours of 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., per its provider type. The coalition shall monitor a provider's health and safety violations and paid School Readiness child care slots monthly, and, if the provider fails to meet the exemption requirements in paragraph (3)(a) of this rule, the coalition shall notify the provider of the loss of its exempt status within thirty (30) calendar days. To continue contracting for School Readiness services, the provider must receive a program assessment pursuant to subsection (2) of this rule within thirty (30) calendar days of notification.

(c) Providers that are determined to be no longer exempt under subsection (3) of this rule will permanently remain non-exempt and shall have a program assessment conducted annually.

(d) Exempt providers may opt to participate in program assessment requirements by submitting a request in writing to the coalition prior to contracting for the School Readiness program and after registering within the DEL-defined system, as outlined in Form DEL-SR 740. The coalition shall coordinate and complete a program assessment within sixty (60) calendar days of receipt of the request and provider registration within the DEL-defined system. A provider's request to participate in a program assessment shall constitute a waiver of the exemption and subject the provider to all the requirements of this rule.

(e) If a school-age-only provider changes the current care levels served to include any children ages birth-kindergarten entry and does not require a new contract to be executed, that provider is exempt from program assessment requirements until the provider meets or exceeds the enrollment threshold in paragraph (3)(a) of this rule. Once this threshold is met or exceeded, the program assessment must be conducted in accordance with subsection (2) of this rule.

(4) Frequency.

(a) All School Readiness program providers shall receive an annual program assessment prior to executing a School Readiness Contract, unless the provider is determined exempt in accordance with this rule.

(b) In the event of a change where the provider is considered a new provider and must execute a new School Readiness Contract per subsection 6M-4.610(4), F.A.C., the provider may, within thirty (30) calendar days of contract execution, request to retain the most recent Composite Program Assessment Score without having to conduct a new assessment, if the provider can provide documentation to the coalition showing it has retained 80% of personnel listed in the DEL-defined system and there is no change in capacity or classrooms from when the previous assessment was conducted for the remainder of the contract term. Examples of acceptable documentation include current payroll time sheets and evidence in CARES of monitored personnel during the pre-contractual health and safety inspection, classroom rosters, or attendance documentation. The coalition shall determine if the provider meets the requirements of this paragraph.

(c) Providers that achieve a Composite Program Assessment Score of 5.00 or higher (rounded by two decimals) shall have the option for a program assessment to be conducted biennially. To continue to have assessments conducted biennially, providers shall not be cited for one (1) Class I or more than three (3) of the same Class II School Readiness health and safety violations, as defined by rule of the Department of Children and Families or local licensing agency, as applicable, during the biennial period and must retain 80% of personnel listed in the DEL-defined system for the remainder of the contract term.

(d) Beginning with the 2023-24 School Readiness Contract year, the biennial program assessment designation shall be discontinued. All eligible School Readiness providers that held a biennial program assessment designation prior to the 2023-24 School Readiness Contract year will be subject to annual program assessment requirements in accordance with this rule and must have an annual program assessment conducted prior to executing a 2024-25 School Readiness Contract.

(e) Program assessments conducted during participation in other quality initiatives that meet requirements defined in Form DEL-SR 740, Program Assessment Requirements Handbook, may be used for meeting Contract Minimum Threshold requirements, provided the assessment was conducted for the purpose of overall teacher/child interaction, the most recent Composite Program Assessment Score is used, and the assessment was conducted within the fiscal year applicable for contracting.

(5) Composite Program Assessment Score Calculation.

(a) 50% of the classrooms in every care level (ages infant-Pre-K) served by a provider must be assessed to determine the Composite Program Assessment Score.

1. If there is an odd number of classrooms in a care level, the required number of classrooms shall be rounded up.

(b) Composite Program Assessment Scores shall be calculated using the combined average of the dimension scores, excluding negative climate scores, from each selected composite classroom's assessment.

1. All composite classrooms must be assessed before a calculation can be made to determine the final Composite Program Assessment Score.

2. After the dimension scores have been averaged, final Composite Program Assessment Scores will be rounded to two decimal places.

(6) Quality Improvement Plans. The Quality Improvement Plan will include performance goals and quality improvement strategies as provided for in Form DEL-SR 20, incorporated by reference in Rule 6M-4.610, F.A.C. Coalitions may choose quality improvement strategies as indicated in the coalition's approved School Readiness Plan required by Section 1002.85, F.S., and Rule 6M-9.115, F.A.C., to develop Quality Improvement Plans for providers that need to increase program assessment scores.

(a) Providers that have not been determined essential to meeting child care capacity needs per subsection (2) of this rule and that have been on a Quality Improvement Plan for twelve (12) months and do not meet the Contract Minimum Threshold at the next annual program assessment will have their School Readiness Contract terminated and may have their eligibility revoked for up to five (5) years by the coalition.

(b) The twelve (12) month Quality Improvement Plan period may extend beyond the contract year depending on its start date and is applied for purposes of executing a new contract.

(c) Providers that have been determined to be essential to meeting child care capacity needs per subsection (2) of this rule and have an active Quality Improvement Plan shall not have a Quality Improvement Plan for more than three (3) consecutive years. Providers that surpass this number will not be eligible to contract for the School Readiness program for a period of up to five (5) years as determined by the coalition.

Rulemaking Authority 1001.02(2)(n), 1002.82(2)(n) FS. Law Implemented 1002.82(2)(n) FS. History--New 11-29-18, Amended 5-5-20, 4-15-21, 11-22-22.