DCFS Early Childhood Services

Services for Children from birth to age 3
Children between the ages of birth and 3 years receive a developmental screening within 30 days of entering substitute care to determine if they have a need for early intervention or developmental enrichment services. In Chicago, DCFS has dedicated employees who perform developmental screenings in DCFS offices. Outside the Chicago area, children are referred for developmental screenings to Child and Family Connections offices, local health departments, or other community providers.

When a child is found to have a developmental delay, or to be at risk for a delay, s/he is immediately referred within 2 working days (Procedures 314.40) to the Illinois Early Intervention Program. Participation in early intervention is mandatory for eligible children. When a child is determined not to be eligible for the Illinois Early Intervention Program, but has factors that may put them at risk of delay, they are enrolled in an early childhood enrichment program.

Services for children aged 3 to 5
All children aged 3 – 5 years receive a school readiness screening as part of the Integrated Assessment performed within 30 days of entering substitute care. Additionally, Early Childhood Procedures (Procedures 314.70) now require all foster children aged 3-5 years to be enrolled in an early childhood preschool program.

- **Head Start** is the preferred program for foster children that do not have developmental delays or disabilities, or are not at risk of school failure. Caseworkers are required by DCFS EC Policy (Procedures 314.70) to enroll children in a Head Start program when available. When a Head Start program is not available in the service area or there are no openings available, foster children are to be enrolled in a private accredited early learning center at DCFS expense.

- Per DCFS procedure (Procedures 314.70) foster children who are at risk of school failure are referred to the **Illinois Pre-kindergarten at Risk Program** through the local school district. When a pre-kindergarten at-risk program is not available in the local school district or there are no openings available, foster children are to be enrolled in a private accredited early learning center at DCFS expense.

- Per DCFS Procedures (Procedures 314.70) foster children aged 3-5 years with disabilities are to be referred for **Early Childhood Special Education** through their local school district.

Caseworkers and foster parents may receive assistance with early childhood enrollment requirements from the DCFS Early Childhood Specialist and the DCFS School Readiness Specialist. Problems with the quality of early childhood services may be referred to the appropriate POS Education Liaison or DCFS Education Advisor.