

## **Project UP-START Program Frequently Asked Questions**

### **1. What type of program is Project UP-START?**

Project UP-START is the Homeless Education Program of Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS). The program is designed for students who are living in transition while enrolled in M-DCPS. The Project UP-START Program assists schools with timely identification of students in unstable housing situations, immediate school enrollment, and attendance, in order to help ensure their successful academic achievement.

### **2. Who qualifies for the Project UP-START Program?**

Services are available to all students enrolled in Miami-Dade County Public Schools (including charter and magnet program schools), who are currently experiencing unstable housing, meaning they lack a fixed, regular, adequate nighttime residence. In order to qualify, the student must be residing in one of the following circumstances as described by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) under the McKinney-Vento section:

- Sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason, also known as “doubled-up;”
- Living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations;
- Living in a car, park, public space, abandoned building, substandard housing, train station, or other public or private place that is not designed for ordinary use as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings;
- Living in emergency or transitional shelters; or
- Unaccompanied students living without a parent or legal guardian, and not in foster care who also lack a fixed, regular, adequate nighttime residence.

### **3. How can I apply for services provided by the Project UP-START Program?**

**In order to apply for the Project UP-START Program, a Student Eligibility Questionnaire (FM-7378) must be completed.** As Miami-Dade County Public Schools reopen smart and return safe this 2020-2021 school year, the Project UP-START Program is gearing-up to continue working with schools and community partners to identify eligible students. At the beginning of each school year, schools send the Questionnaire via backpack in the parent’s home language to the homes of all students enrolled in the M-DCPS. However, for the 2020-2021 school year the Questionnaire in English, Spanish and Haitian-Creole will be disseminated electronically by schools, due to the global outbreak of COVID-19. Additionally, the Questionnaire will be posted on the school’s website and the Project UP-START Program’s website (<http://projectupstart.dadeschools.net>).

Parents/guardians are expected to complete FM-7378 by indicating the current living situation and electronically submit the completed Questionnaire to the Project UP-START Program by clicking on the “Submit Form” button, located at the top of the form. Also, a completed, signed and dated hard copy of the

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Questionnaire may be submitted directly to the school. Each school has a designated School UP-START Liaison who provides support in completing the Questionnaire, addressing any other concerns parents/guardians may have, and submitting the completed form to the Project UP-START office. Parents/guardians are encouraged to contact their child's schools and ask to speak with the School UP-START Liaison. Also, parents/guardians in immediate need of services may email Project UP-START at [projectupstart@dadeschools.net](mailto:projectupstart@dadeschools.net) or call the office at 305 995-7558.

#### **4. What type of services can Project UP-START provide for my family if my children are eligible for the program?**

Once identified in the Project UP-START Program, the following services are available:

- Transportation requests to School of Origin if over two (2) miles from current nighttime residence;
- Immediate free lunch;
- Case Management Services;
- Referrals to emergency shelter;
- Referrals to the Shop, operated by the Office of Community Engagement;
- Tutoring and counseling at selected shelter sites;
- Presentations for parents at selected shelter sites;
- Referrals to rental assistance program, HAND, operated by the Citrus Health Network and Camillus House;
- College transitional support; and
- Assistance with senior activities.

#### **5. Does every UP-START student receive transportation services?**

No, Florida Statutes and Rules of the Florida State Board of Education establish when students are eligible for transportation on public school buses. Students only qualify for transportation if they live two (2) or more miles from the School of Origin, the school the child attended before being unstably housed.

#### **6. What are the procedures for transportation?**

Once it is determined that the student lives two (2) or more miles from the School of Origin, the Project UP-START staff members will then begin processing the request. If the school has available bus routes for the student, the Project UP-START staff members will contact the parent/guardian to provide information about the school bus route(s). If the school does not have available bus routes, Project UP-START will instead offer the option of receiving Metro passes for the Metro Transit System. Those students who qualify for Metro passes need to schedule an appointment with a staff member to pick up a Metro pass by calling 305 995-7583.

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**NOTE:** Project UP-START staff members only receive Metro passes for students who are eligible for transportation and there is no school bus route available. **The staff members do not have extra Metro passes for distribution to students who are not eligible.**

### **7. Does Project UP-START offer housing/shelter?**

No, Project UP-START does not offer housing or shelter services. However, verification of homeless status for qualifying families is submitted by the Program to different outside agencies that offer rental assistance (e.g., Citrus Health Network and Camillus House). Also, the Program can submit emergency shelter referrals for a family who is already registered with the Homeless Helpline.

### **8. What type of housing referrals does Project UP-START provide?**

Project UP-START is able to provide a Homeless Verification Letter for families of students enrolled in the Program to the Housing Assistance Network of Dade (HAND), operated by the Citrus Health Network or to Camillus House. These outside agencies offer rental assistance to those who qualify in an effort to prevent homelessness.

A Homeless Verification Letter is only provided to families enrolled in the Project UP-START Program, who have an eviction notice and/or are living in a hotel/motel. Both Citrus Health Network and Camillus House agencies require that the household must also receive a steady monthly income in the form of salary, disability checks, child support, and/or social security checks. This is a mandate from both Citrus Health Network and Camillus House. Project UP-START does not request this information. Citrus Health Network and Camillus House also require a typed, notarized, and signed letter describing the living arrangements. If a family lives in a hotel/motel, the recent receipts of motel stay must be provided to the outside agency.

Parents must call Project UP-START at 305 995-7318 to request a Homeless Verification Letter, and if need be, information can be faxed to 305 579-0370, or information can be sent via email to [projectupstart@dadeschools.net](mailto:projectupstart@dadeschools.net). Parents will need to provide the current address of the nighttime residence, including the zip code, in order for Project UP-START to refer the family to the closest Community Action Agency. Once the Project UP-START office receives this information, a staff member will contact the parent to provide further instructions.

**NOTE: Project UP-START can only provide the initial verification which acts as a referral for services and cannot provide further support in this process as the services are through outside agencies. Once the verification is sent, Citrus Health Network through the Community Action Agency and Camillus House will work with the parent to determine if the family meet the qualification requirements. Also, it is up to the person applying for the services to find housing that accepts the HAND or Camillus program.**

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### **9. What does The Shop provide for M-DCPS Students?**

Available items at The Shop include non-perishable food, toiletries, clothing, shoes, backpacks, and school supplies. The Shop is operated by the District's Office of Community Engagement, and all items are donated. The Shop is opened during certain hours only; to that end, an appointment must be scheduled ahead of time to visit The Shop by contacting the Project UP-START office 305 995-7558. During the mandatory statewide school closure due to COVID-19, the hours are very limited, so please email [projectupstart@dadeschools.net](mailto:projectupstart@dadeschools.net) for further information.

### **10. Is an appointment required to visit the Project UP-START office?**

Yes, an appointment is necessary to visit to the Project UP-START office. Please call 305 995-7558 to schedule an appointment, Mondays through Fridays from 8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. Also, there is a satellite Project UP-START office located in the Homestead area, which provides a limited selection of items, including food, toiletries, clothing, shoes, backpacks, and school supplies. You may call 305 242-8426 to schedule an appointment, Mondays through Fridays from 8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

**NOTE: Please note that during the mandatory statewide school closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Project UP-START staff members are working remotely, and the aforementioned offices are currently closed.**

### **11. What services does the Project UP-START Program offer high school seniors?**

In collaboration with the Office of Community Engagement and the Foundation for New Education Initiatives, Project UP-START is able to assist with the cost of Grad Bash night (no weekend trips), cap and gown, Senior Breakfast/Picnic, and a prom ticket for eligible Project UP-START seniors. In addition, seniors may schedule an appointment to visit the Prom Boutique, operated by the Office of Community Engagement, where they can select a dress, tuxedo, shoes, and accessories for free. All seniors meet with Project UP-START staff, who provide guidance for their post-graduation plans, including college readiness assistance. A Homeless Verification Letter is provided to all seniors in the Project UP-START Program. In the State of Florida, a student may use this verification letter at a state college or university to request a tuition waiver for the first semester following high school graduation. Each institution has different policies regarding the homeless tuition waiver, so please contact the Financial Aid Office at the matriculating college/university for further information.

### **12. Who do I call if I am in an emergency situation?**

If you are currently in a car, in the street, or in a place not meant for human habitation and you need immediate shelter, contact the Homeless Helpline number at 877 994-4357. Please stay at the same location from which you

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requested the shelter placement, as the Homeless Helpline team will pick you up only from that address in order to transport you and your family to shelter. Project UP-START can send a referral to the Helpline after you call the Helpline so that their staff members prioritize shelter placement for a family with children under the age of 18 years old. However, Project UP-START does not know the exact shelter where your family will be placed as that is determined by the Homeless Helpline. If you are fleeing a domestic violence situation, please call 305 285-5900.

### **13. I cannot pay for housing because I lost my job. Does Project UP-START assist with employment?**

No, the Project UP-START Program does not provide employment assistance; however, if you are in need of employment, you may visit the CareerSource South Florida's website for employment and career resources at <http://www.careersourcesfl.com/>.

### **14. How can I volunteer for the Project UP-START Program or donate items?**

If you are interested in volunteering for the Project UP-START Program, please email [projectupstart@dadeschools.net](mailto:projectupstart@dadeschools.net) or call us at 305 995-7558 to inquire about opportunities. If you are interested in donating items to The Shop, please call The Shop at 305 579-0300 or email [TheShop@dadeschools.net](mailto:TheShop@dadeschools.net). The Shop will only accept new items and food that is non-expired. We thank you for your generous contributions!