New Orleans Early Education Network (NOEEN) City Seats FAQ

If you have any questions that are not answered by this list, please email info@agendaforchildren.org.

What is the NOEEN City Seats Program?

New Orleans City Seats is a program that provides free, high-quality early childhood education to low-income families with young children in Orleans Parish. Since 2018, City Seats has significantly increased access to quality early childhood education for low-income young children and improved the quality of centers participating in the program growing from serving 50 children (2018) to over 400 today. The program serves low-income children ages 6 weeks through 3 years old. The program is operated by Agenda for Children and partners, including 20 programs at 22 early care and education centers across the city.

What are the goals of City Seats?

The NOEEN City Seats Program is driven by three goals:

- To increase access to early learning for those with the greatest need
- To improve the overall quality of participating early learning centers
- To provide wraparound supports to caregivers and families.

Why do we need NOEEN City Seats?

Children in New Orleans will succeed with increased access to early childhood education. New Orleans’ workforce and the economy will thrive with increased access to early childhood education. Currently, less than a quarter of low-income children three and under have access to any publicly funded early childhood education in Orleans Parish. There is a tremendous need for affordable childcare options that serve low-income infants, toddlers, and 3-year-olds in New Orleans. 71% of the parents of young children in New Orleans are working and most of these parents struggle to find affordable, high-quality early childhood programs for their young children. United Way’s recent ALICE report found that childcare is the single largest expense for low-income working families in Orleans Parish.

What Has City Seats Accomplished?

NOEEN City Seats is evaluated by the Louisiana State University (LSU) Health Sciences Center to ensure high-quality programming is delivered. A summary of the evaluation findings is available on our City Seats website. Among many findings, the evaluations to date have found that NOEEN and partners have successfully increased access to early care and education in New Orleans and also increased quality in child care centers.
At what rate(s) do you pay centers for seats? How did you decide the rate(s)?

Scholarships for students are $12,000/seat per year per child and are paid directly to the child care center providing services. The funding rate was established in 2017 for municipal seats using Head Start comparisons for similar services and scale. A Working Group established with NOLA-PS and community partners in 2018 found that high-quality child care should cost at least $18,000 per child.

Why does child care cost so much?

Child care is unaffordable for the vast majority of families in New Orleans, especially single parents and families with multiple children. In contrast to Kindergarten through 12th grade, which is not only free but also permits higher teacher-to-student ratios, quality early care and education require low teacher-to-student ratios. This greatly increases the cost, as early care teachers should be equally trained and well-paid in the workforce. A well-functioning program also requires comprehensive support for kids and families so that all are ready for the child to enter Kindergarten and learn to read, a critical childhood milestone. These include things like professional development and coaching for the educators, parenting support and training, health and developmental screenings, and more. Early childhood education is also a unique opportunity for early intervention through vision and hearing screenings, as well as developmental screenings. These wraparound supports are essential to ensuring children and families are prepared as possible to enter Kindergarten.

How many children are eligible for the City Seats program? How many do you currently serve?

We serve a total of 400 children with this funding: 52 infants, 89 one-year-olds, 112 two-year-olds, and 147 three-year-olds. There are over 8,300 children in Orleans Parish that are eligible for the program but are not currently being served.

Do you prioritize particular demographics--for example, particular age groups, regions, or other characteristics--in enrollment of these seats? How did you identify these particular demographics as high-needs for seats in our community?

The goal of NOEEN’s Coordinated Funding Request which distributes these seats is to ensure that the limited number of publicly-funded early childhood seats are allocated to those programs that are high quality; in high demand by parents; and meet the needs of families. Each year, NOEEN’s independent steering committee determines a protocol to allocate the next year’s City Seats and votes on it in a meeting that complies with Louisiana public meeting laws. The protocol dictates that seats shall be distributed as follows:

- Eligible applicants who received the highest relative scores, per the publicly posted and approved City Seats Evaluation Rubric, shall be considered for seat funding.
- Seats shall be distributed to eligible applicants according to the following priority
criteria: a) Sufficient to meet the needs of rising students, b) Prioritizing current provider programs, c) Responsive to citywide family demand, d) Emphasizing equity and stability across eligible applicants. Our more recent scoring rubric is here.

Seats are distributed via a contracted seat model throughout the City and inclusive of all five council districts, with special emphasis on the West Bank and New Orleans East — regions that typically have more children and fewer publicly available seats. City Seat providers that were approved last year are found online here.

How does your network reach out to families and work to enroll children from these particular demographic groups?

The EnrollNola team at New Orleans Public Schools is responsible for developing and implementing a coordinated enrollment process so that families can use a single online application to apply for most publicly funded seats in an early childhood education program, whether that program is located in a school, early learning center or Head Start. You can find a list of programs that have openings, check eligibility, and apply on the EnrollNOLA website. EnrollNOLA uses the Common Application System (formerly known as OneApp) to distribute these seats. Seats are advertised with all publicly funded seats via the Main Round and are also advertised again throughout the year.

For the 2020-2021 seats, we also launched an enrollment campaign that featured these seats on bus stops, billboards, and radio and media ads throughout the city.

What families are eligible for the seats?

The City Seats program is intended for low-income families in Orleans Parish. Students must be a resident of Orleans Parish; be under age four, and have incomes that fall within 0-200% of the poverty level.

How do families prove eligibility and apply for the seats?

First, families apply to the programs in which they are interested in enrolling, including any publicly funded seats for which they may qualify. EnrollNOLA reviews all applications to ensure that they meet the eligibility requirements of those seats. Once eligibility has been confirmed, families are formally entered into the common enrollment system application process. A random lottery occurs in spring and generates a school placement. EnrollNOLA sends a confirmation email and communication for acceptance. Parents then go to their placement site and formally register. Once children are enrolled in the program, they remain in the program until they age out.

What additional needs, if any, will you support with City Seats Program funding? (e.g., professional development, teacher stipends, etc.)

Our program provides a set of wraparound supports valued at $3,000 per child to help ensure that the child, the center, and their family will be successful in the program. NOEEN provides comprehensive services, including mental health consultation, teacher professional development, and educational coaching to support quality child-teacher relationship.
interactions in each classroom, and staff to manage other program components, including administrative data systems, monitoring, and an independent program evaluation conducted by a flagship university.

What requirements do providers have to agree to?

The most recent City Seats Partnership MOU is available on our website here.

What criteria must participating centers meet to be recipients of these seats?

Children enrolled in the program receive the highest quality early care and education available in the city of New Orleans. Centers interested in applying for the seats must meet the following requirements:

- Only Type III early learning centers with a Performance Profile overall rating of Proficient or Excellent for the 2019-2020 school year are eligible to apply for these seats for prospective families. Priority points are given to centers with the highest overall scores.
- The program must have a demonstrated track record of high-quality performance on the Classroom Assessment Scoring System, or CLASS, over the past two years and must agree to allow classroom teachers to receive ongoing coaching and participate in other professional development activities offered through the Child Care Resource & Referral Agency and other sources as opportunities become available. CLASS is an assessment tool that measures the quality of teacher-child interactions in Louisiana’s publicly funded early learning classrooms. Assessments are conducted on each teacher at a center two times a year.
- Centers must also have a demonstrated track record as active participants in all required NOEEN network activities, including CLASS observations, child count, GOLD checkpoints, EnrollNOLA where applicable, etc.
- Centers must already be using Tier 1 high-quality curricula with qualified staff.
- Centers must have at least one classroom with children aged 15 months or younger.

What process do you utilize to select participating centers, and how will you communicate that process to potential program partners?

Our local City Seats program uses the same Coordinated Funding Process as all publicly funded seats in Orleans Parish. These details are outlined on our website. The protocol dictates that seats shall be distributed as follows:

- Eligible applicants who received the highest relative scores, per the publicly posted and approved City Seats Evaluation Rubric, shall be considered for seat funding.
- Seats shall be distributed to eligible applicants according to the following priority criteria: a) Sufficient to meet the needs of rising students, b) Prioritizing current provider programs, c) Responsive to citywide family demand, d) Emphasizing equity and stability across eligible applicants.
NOEEN staff reviews applications using the assigned rubric. Once approved by staff, they are brought to the NOEEN Steering Committee for review and approval. City Seats recommendations are open to public comment. Public comments regarding allocation protocol and recommended sites were welcomed during the comment period. Once approved and final, they were provided to NOLA Public Schools for inclusion in the main round of EnrollNOLA’s One App application process. Because seats run through the EnrollNOLA process, they follow the same process as all publicly funded seats and are advertised to families for Open Enrollment. Open Enrollment begins in the preceding fall and remains open through a discrete date that is widely publicized, typically the end of January. The matching of families to available centers and seats is completed in the early Spring and families are notified of their placement by April.

Which Organizations Does City Seats Work With?

NOEEN is thankful to partner with many wonderful organizations, including 22 high quality early learning centers, the Louisiana Department of Education, NOLA Public Schools, LSU Health Sciences Center, Tulane University, the City of New Orleans, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, TrainingGrounds, Early Steps and Early Head Start.