

Florida Adoption Benefit Program

Palm Beach County School District is printing this to provide information on a state program newly available to School District employees.

What Law Authorizes the Adoption Benefit?

Section 409.1663, Florida Statutes, authorizes monetary benefits to certain employees who adopt a child for whom permanent custody was awarded to the Florida Department of Children and Family Services or a Florida licensed child-placing agency prior to adoption. In addition, Florida Administrative Code outlines the application process and payment disbursement procedures for eligible applicants who are awarded benefits. The administrative rule will be available through the Department of Children and Family Services Web site as soon as the new rule is promulgated.

Who Administers the Adoption Benefit?

The Department of Children and Family Services, Office of Family Safety, administers the program by providing information on program policies and procedures, benefit criteria and the application process. The Adoption Unit of the Office of Family Safety is responsible for accepting applications, verifying applicant eligibility and determining the benefit award for each eligible applicant. Call (850)488-8762 or check the Web site below for an application.

Who is an Eligible Applicant?

A full-time or part-time employee of the State (Executive, Legislative, and Judicial Branches, including the Department of Lottery), the State Universities, Community Colleges, School Board Districts, Water Management Districts and instructional personnel employed by the Florida School for the Deaf and Blind, provided the employee is paid from regular salary appropriations (not OPS or otherwise "temporary" or casual labor).

What Types of Adoption are Eligible for the Adoption Benefit?

If, prior to the adoption, the child was in the permanent custody of the Florida Department of Children and Family Services or a Florida licensed child-placing agency, and the final order of adoption was granted on or after October 1, 2000 (inception date of program), the following may be payable:

- **Adoption of a Special Needs Child:**
A monetary benefit in the amount of \$10,000 per child.
(Pro-rated for part-time employees)
- **Adoption of a Non-Special Needs Child:**
A monetary benefit in the amount of \$5,000 per child.
(Pro-rated for part-time employee)

Who is Considered a Special Needs Child?

A child whose permanent custody has been awarded to the Florida Department of Children and Family Services or to a Florida licensed child-placing agency and who meets one or more of the following criteria:

- Has established significant emotional ties with his or her foster parents
- Is eight years of age or older;
- Has a developmental disability;
- Has a physical or emotional handicap;
- Is of a black or racially mixed heritage; or
- Is a member of a sibling group of any age, provided that two or more members of a sibling group remain together for purposes of adoption.

When Are Applications Accepted for Adoption Benefits?

The Department of Children and Family Services will only accept benefit applications during the annual open enrollment period, which will begin each year on the first business day of August and conclude on the last business day of September. To be considered for benefits, applicants must submit an Application for Adoption Benefits along with a certified copy of the final order of adoption. The benefit application is available through the Department of Children and Families Web site. **Employees who applied in previous years and were not awarded a benefit must re-apply in order to be considered for the adoption benefit.**

What Else Should I Know About These Monetary Benefits?

All benefits are subject to funding by the Legislature each year and will only be awarded if appropriations are made. The amount of the annual appropriation affects how many awards are granted each year. By law, payments must be made in a lump sum. These awards are considered a supplemental wage and applicable payroll taxes will be deducted.

Go to www.dcf.state.fl.us/adoption/adoptbenefitsprogram.shtml.