



Minnesota

Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten

and

School Readiness Plus

Program Implementation Manual

2017-18

This guidance is updated as of January 2018.

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Introduction

Voluntary pre-kindergarten was established by Governor Dayton and the 2016 Minnesota Legislature for the purpose of preparing children for success as they enter kindergarten the following year. This funding allows districts, charter schools with recognized early learning programs, or a combination thereof, to incorporate a voluntary pre-K program into their E-12 system.

A new early learning program was created in the 2017 legislative session called school readiness plus. This program is targeted to 4-year-olds demonstrating one or more risk factors. Currently, school readiness plus is only funded for fiscal years 2018 and 2019.

The combination of voluntary pre-kindergarten and school readiness plus funding will provide 6,160 children with access to high-quality early learning programming during 2017-18 school year and 7,160 children for the 2018-19 school year.

Each voluntary pre-K and school readiness plus program should be driven by the research-based best practices offered in this document along with a systematic assessment of the needs of children in that early learning community. With technical assistance from the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) and their partners, school districts can provide high-quality preschool programs via a locally determined mixed delivery system of in-district, private provider, and local Head Start agency classrooms.

Voluntary pre-kindergarten and school readiness plus is funded as part of Minnesota's pre-K through grade 12 education system and as such will be required to meet pre-K through grade 12 program expectations and follow the same general set of rules regarding such items as MARRS reporting, monitoring and compliance, professional development, teacher evaluation, Q Comp, and inclusion of children with disabilities.

Alignment to Current Legislation

It is important to think of voluntary prekindergarten and school readiness plus as a part of your K-12 system and work to align voluntary pre-K/school readiness plus with other state and district programs. Below are several other legislative statutes that need to be considered when planning for the implementation of your voluntary prekindergarten/school readiness plus program.

World's Best Workforce

The World's Best Workforce (WBWF) bill was passed in 2013 to ensure every school district in the state is making strides to increase student performance. Each district must develop a plan that addresses the following five goals:

- All children are ready for school.
- All third-graders can read at grade level.

- All racial and economic achievement gaps between students are closed.
- All students are ready for career and college.
- All students graduate from high school.

Yearly, school districts develop a WBWF Plan and Annual Report. A summary documenting the WBWF student achievement goals is submitted yearly to the Commissioner of Education for review and comment.

English Learner Legislation

The [Learning English for Academic Proficiency and Success \(LEAPS\) Act](#) was passed in Minnesota in 2014. The law revises many state statutes to add an increased emphasis to support English learners, pre-K through grade 12 and beyond. Children receiving voluntary pre-K and school readiness plus funding may be identified as English Learners and receive funding. The law is also embedded into many existing statutes, including early childhood and specifically voluntary pre-kindergarten, school readiness plus, curriculum and instruction, higher education, adult education, and teacher licensing.

The LEAPS Act is regarded as an important piece of legislation to support the academic success of the state's growing English Learner population. It emphasizes bilingualism and multilingualism as an asset and gives a definition for cultural competence and cultural competency for statewide accountability purposes. The LEAPS Act also requires educators to be skilled in developing the English language proficiency of their English Learners, beginning in pre-K.

Read Well by Third Grade Legislation

Reading well by third grade is one of many developmental milestones in a child's educational experience. Minnesota has identified the end of grade 3 as an expectation for proficient beginning reading for all students. Providing quality curriculum, instruction, assessments, and interventions is the foundation for developing comprehensive systems of support for all learners.

Minnesota's early learning standards, the [Early Childhood Indicators of Progress \(ECIPs\)](#) have been recently revised to align with Minnesota's K-12 academic standards. In addition, access information and guidance about K-3 literacy can be found on the [Reading Proficiency](#) and [Academic Standards \(K-12\)](#) pages.

Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE)

ECFE is a program for all Minnesota families with children between the ages of birth to kindergarten entrance. The program is offered through Minnesota public school districts. ECFE is based on the idea that the family provides a child's first and most significant learning environment and parents are a child's first and most important teachers. ECFE works to strengthen families. ECFE's goal is to enhance the ability of all parents and other family members to provide the best possible environment for their child's learning and growth.

School Readiness

School Readiness is a comprehensive program based on early childhood research and professional practice that is focused on children's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical skills and development and prepares children for the transition to kindergarten, including early literacy and language skills.

Most school districts offer half-day preschool programs from one to five days per week. Program supervisors are required to be licensed early childhood teachers or licensed parent educators. School districts may operate their own programs or contract with community early childhood programs or charter schools.

[The School Readiness program requirements](#) include assessing each child's cognitive skills at entrance to and exit from the program and providing a program based on early childhood research and professional practice that prepares children to transition into kindergarten successfully. Program providers are now submitting their biannual School Readiness Plan as part of their annual World's Best Work Force Plan. School Readiness programs must submit an annual report to MDE by July 1 of each year.

Please review the Program Comparison Chart found on the [voluntary pre-kindergarten](#) or [school readiness plus](#) webpages. It is useful in understanding the statutory requirements for school readiness, voluntary-pre-K, and school readiness plus programs.

Head Start

Head Start supports the comprehensive development of children from birth to age 5 to promote school readiness for young children from low-income families. Head Start services include early learning, health, and family well-being. Minnesota has 33 Head Start and Early Head Start Grantees.

Both Head Start and Early Head Start programs offer a variety of service models. Programs may be based in centers, schools, or family child care homes. Services offered by individual programs may be half-day (four hours) or full-day. The [Head Start Locator](#) helps you find Head Start and Early Head Start programs in your area. Useful Head Start resources are listed below. Consider working with local Head Start programs and colleagues as mixed delivery system partners, for sharing professional development resources, or aligning early learning programs.

Head Start Resources:

[Voluntary Pre-K Program Standards and Head Start Federal Regulations Crosswalks](#)

[Federal Head Start Home Page](#)

[Head Start Policy and Regulations](#)

[2017 Minnesota Statutes regarding Head Start](#)

Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten Program Requirements

Voluntary pre-kindergarten program requirements are established in [Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.151](#) subdivision 6 to ensure a high-quality early learning experience for young children. The requirements include:

1. Provide instruction through play-based learning to foster children's social and emotional development, cognitive development, physical and motor development, and language and literacy skills, including the native language and literacy skills of English learners, to the extent practicable.
2. Measure each child's cognitive and social skills using a formative measure aligned to the state's early learning standards (Early Childhood Indicators of Progress) when the child enters and again before the child leaves the program, screening and progress monitoring measures, and others from the state-approved menu of kindergarten entry profile measures.
3. Provide comprehensive program content including the implementation of curriculum, assessment, and instructional strategies aligned with the state early learning standards, and kindergarten through grade 3 academic standards.
4. Provide instructional content and activities that are of sufficient length and intensity to address learning needs including offering a program with at least 350 hours of instruction per school year for a pre-kindergarten student.
5. Provide voluntary pre-K instructional staff salaries comparable to the salaries of local kindergarten through grade 12 instructional staff.
6. Coordinate appropriate kindergarten transition with families, community-based prekindergarten programs, and school district kindergarten programs.
7. Involve parents in program planning and transition planning by implementing parent engagement strategies that include culturally and linguistically responsive activities in pre-K through third grade that are aligned with early childhood family education under section 124D.13.
8. Coordinate with relevant community-based services, including health and social service agencies, to ensure children have access to comprehensive services.
9. Coordinate with all relevant school district programs and services including early childhood special education and those that serve English language learners and students experiencing homelessness.
10. Ensure staff-to-child ratios of one-to-ten and a maximum group size of 20 children.
11. Provide high-quality coordinated professional development, training, and coaching for both school district and community-based early learning providers that is informed by a measure of adult-child interactions and enables teachers to be highly knowledgeable in early childhood curriculum content, assessment, native and English language development programs and instruction.
12. Implement strategies that support the alignment of professional development, instruction, assessments, and pre-K through grade 3 curricula.
 - a. A voluntary pre-K program must have teachers knowledgeable in early childhood curriculum content, assessment, native and English language programs and instruction.
 - b. Districts and charter schools must include their strategy for implementing and measuring the impact of their voluntary pre-K program under section 120B.11 and provide results in their World's Best Workforce annual summary to the commissioner of education.

School Readiness Plus Program Requirements

School readiness plus program requirements are established in Minnesota Session Law to prepare children for success as they enter kindergarten in the following year. [Chapter 5-2017 Minnesota Session Laws](#) (NOTE: Article 8 is about 2/3 of the way through this link).

The requirements include:

1. Assess each child's cognitive and social skills with a comprehensive child assessment instrument when the child enters and again before the child leaves the program to improve program planning and implementation, communicate with parents, and promote kindergarten readiness.
2. Provide comprehensive program content and intentional instructional practice aligned with the state early childhood learning guidelines and kindergarten standards and based on early childhood research and professional practice that is focused on children's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical skills and development and prepares children for the transition to kindergarten, including early literacy and language skills.
3. Coordinate appropriate kindergarten transition with parents and kindergarten teachers.
4. Involve parents in program planning and decision-making.
5. Coordinate with relevant community-based services.
6. Cooperate with adult basic education programs and other adult literacy programs.
7. Ensure staff-to-child ratios of one-to-ten and a maximum group size of 20 children with at least one licensed teacher.
8. Have teachers knowledgeable in early childhood curriculum content, assessment, native and English language development programs, and instruction.
9. Provide instructional content and activities that are of sufficient length and intensity to address learning needs including offering a program with at least 350 hours of instruction per school year for a pre-kindergarten student.
10. Use school readiness plus dollars for eligible children. An eligible child:
 - a. Qualifies for free or reduced-price lunch;
 - b. Is an English language learner;
 - c. is homeless;
 - d. has an individualized education program, or individual interagency intervention plan;
 - e. is identified through health and developmental screening under [Minnesota Statutes, sections 121A.16 to 121.19](#), with a potential risk factor that may influence learning; or
 - f. is in foster care.
11. Is four years of age as of September 1 in the calendar year in which the school year commences and has one or more risk factors under paragraph (b) is eligible to participate in a school readiness plus program free of charge.

12. Must complete a health and developmental screening within 90 days of program enrollment under sections 121A.16 to 121A.19, and provide documentation of required immunizations under section 121A.15.
13. Adhere to [Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.8957](#) Prekindergarten through Grade 12 Parental Rights.
14. Maintain current program and student information in applicable MDE reporting systems, including: STARS, MARSS, UFARs, etc. Documentation that supports the School Readiness Plus student data reported in MARSS, e.g., school calendar, attendance, EL status, economic indicator, etc., will be kept on file and available for audit for at least three years after the close of the fiscal year. (NOTE: In the case of a mixed delivery partnership, the district or charter school will be responsible for the input of information provided by the partner.)
15. If contracting with mixed delivery sites, each party must have a signed contract for mixed delivery on file by the start of the program and all mixed delivery sites must be within the school district's boundaries. The signed contract must define roles and responsibilities related to school readiness plus program operations.
16. All revenue received from school readiness plus programming must be used to supplement not supplant existing state, federal, and local revenue for prekindergarten activities.

District and Administrative Oversight

Elementary school principals, charter directors and/or supervisors play an integral role in shaping the quality of each preschool program component, from the recruitment, selection, training and coaching of teachers to sustainability and outreach efforts. Many districts have historically offered preschool programming through their community education programs. This funding allocation places voluntary pre-K/school readiness plus in the pre-K to grade 12 system. Elementary principals, charter directors and community education staff will want to work together to lead the program and make decisions. When working collaboratively, principals and directors can draw upon the early childhood expertise of those in community education programs.

The superintendent or charter director and designated school personnel have ultimate responsibility for the implementation of the preschool program. An elementary principal, director and/or supervisor of early childhood education should lead the implementation of the program. The principal, director or supervisor should ensure professional development is provided, as well as guidance on best program practices, oversee the recruitment/outreach efforts and ensure the coordination and delivery of comprehensive services, including parent and community engagement.

The principal, director and/or supervisor may conduct some of the formal administrative functions, such as evaluations of the classroom teachers in both school district/charter-operated and private provider preschool classrooms. He or she must be well versed in understanding the role of play in an early childhood classroom, strategies designed to help teachers and other professionals optimize young children's learning and development. Regardless of the size of the preschool program, the principal/director/supervisor is responsible for the following:

- Development and implementation of the preschool budget, preschool program plan, annual reports, and professional development plans.

- Contribution to the development of long-range facilities plans.
- Supervision of enrollment, recruitment and outreach efforts.
- Oversight of contractual compliance of mixed delivery sites provided by community provider and/or local Head Start agencies.
- Collaboration and communication with the district's office of special services.
- Facilitation of transition initiatives in collaboration with other pre-K through third grade administrators.
- Meeting regularly with community providers, including local Head Start agencies, to foster collaboration and program implementation including, but not limited to, fiscal and curriculum information.
- Oversight of the implementation of the comprehensive preschool curriculum and assessment.
- Providing assistance to all staff responsible for the implementation of appropriate early childhood practices within the preschool program.
- Administration of strategies designed to help teachers and other professionals optimize children's learning and development in all learning domains.
- Coordination and reporting of annual program evaluation.
- Hiring, supervising and ensuring evaluation of all in-district staff funded by the voluntary pre-K budget.
- Ensuring that each community provider and local Head Start agency involved in mixed delivery implements a system for classroom teacher observations.

Funding

Funding for the voluntary pre-kindergarten/school readiness plus grade level is based on head counts and Average Daily Membership (ADM). Students enrolled in the pre-kindergarten grade level and designated in MARSS to generate funding will generate all pupil-driven formulas including compensatory and sparsity.

Elementary sites have been approved for a capped number of students and their ADM based on the calendar information in the application the school submitted. Schools can only receive funding up to the approved number of students and ADM for each approved site.

- MDE provided funding estimates of what your district will generate based on the number of students and ADM and the demographics of the children submitted on the school's application.
- By law, voluntary pre-kindergarten/school readiness plus students at participating sites can generate up to 0.6 pupil unit. The actual pupil units per student is based on the program's calendar and could be less than 0.6 per student.

Funding flows like other K-12 general education revenue streams. Metered payments begin in September. The additional aid generated by voluntary pre-K/school readiness plus students is included in the regular aid entitlements for each program (e.g., general education, special education), and will not be paid as a separate line item.

New for programs funded for FY2018

Programs must be up and running by October 1 of a given school year to receive compensatory aid. Programs are encouraged to connect with business managers to work through financial considerations.

School districts and charter schools with **renewed** voluntary pre-kindergarten funding are guaranteed to receive continued funding in FY19 and later years provided that all program requirements are met. Programs **newly** funded or expanded for fiscal year 2018 are guaranteed to continue to receive funding in FY18 and FY19 provided that all program requirements are met. Funding received in FY18 for new or expanded programs must supplement not supplant the previous year's pre-K funding.

Meal Reimbursement

Participation in the voluntary pre-K or school readiness plus program may include providing one or more school meals to this group of children. Meals served **are not** available to all students free of charge. Voluntary pre-K/school readiness plus students who are eligible for free or reduced-price meals via an application for meal benefits or other categorical means are eligible to receive free lunch and breakfast meals. Students who are eligible for paid meals can receive a **breakfast** meal at no cost. **ALL** families should complete an application for educational and meal benefits.

Students in all-day programs must be provided a lunch time. As such, their lunch time is ineligible to claim as membership. This applies even when licensed staff directly supervises the lunch period. However, lunch time for students in part-time or half-day programs who are provided a lunch and whose lunch time and the voluntary pre-K/school readiness plus teacher is present and providing instruction may be claimed for membership. Snacks are not considered lunch. Time during which students are provided a snack may be included as membership.

Meal options include breakfast, lunch and late afternoon snack. The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) preschool meal pattern must be used. School nutrition program staff maybe consulted to answer USDA meal pattern questions. Schools can also determine the times meals are served (within USDA parameters) and what style of service to use for pre-K students.

Complete guidance for processes available to serve and be reimbursed for meals served to voluntary pre-K/school readiness plus students have been sent to districts and charter schools. Please be sure that food service director/managers are included in all discussions regarding meal service as it may be necessary for them to update the school meals program application/agreement with MDE.

Braiding and Blending

We encourage you to continue providing as many children as possible with high-quality early learning experiences using the flexibility provided within currently existing resources. The program must meet all requirements per funding stream. Potential funding sources that might be braided or blended include:

State Resources:

- General Education Funding
- Literacy Incentive Aid
- State Early Learning Scholarships
- Q-comp
- Professional Development
- Early Childhood Family Education
- School Readiness
- Head Start
- Compensatory Funding
- Integration Funding
- Early Childhood Screening
- Special Education aid
- Learning Scholarships (Pathway II)

Federal Funds

- Title I Part A
- Head Start
- Title II, Part A
- Migrant Education Program
- Special Ed. Part B 619
- Special Ed. Funds for State Personnel Development Grant
- Resources provided through Centers of Excellence

Recruitment, Enrollment and Records

Recruitment and Outreach

One of the goals of the voluntary pre-K/school readiness plus program is to increase access to high-quality early learning programming for children who may not otherwise have an opportunity to attend. Throughout Minnesota there are waiting lists for children to attend various programs. In order to meet this high demand, all types of early learning programs will need to communicate and coordinate with one another to ensure our most at-risk children are served. Voluntary pre-K and school readiness plus sites are strongly encouraged to reach out to their local Head Start programs and community partners, such as social service agencies and groups working

with young families, to coordinate recruitment efforts. Visit the [Minnesota Head Start Association website](#) for a list of Head Start programs by county.

In addition to developing community collaborations for recruitment efforts, there still may be a need to conduct effective outreach in order to reach isolated families as well as those who speak languages other than English. Some tips include:

- Translate advertisement materials into most common languages in your community.
- Advertise in linguistically diverse newspapers and radio or television programming.
- Use existing K-12 materials to advertise to families.
- Advertise through employers.
- Advertise at health care facilities and clinics; places of worship; community centers.
- Work with cultural liaisons.
- Map out all the Early Childhood providers in your district enrollment area and reach out to them to implement transitions strategies.

Mixed Delivery

Mixed delivery means offering voluntary pre-K or school readiness plus programming through a variety of programs, providers and settings (such as Head Start, licensed family and center child care, public schools and community based organizations). In this way a community can increase the number and diversity of programs offering high-quality early learning and care experiences. Mixed delivery allows communities to share resources and professional development, improves alignment and communication among providers, makes use of existing facilities, and requires fewer transitions for children.

As you plan for future years of programming, school districts and charters are encouraged to offer voluntary pre-K or school readiness plus through a mixed delivery system by contracting with a minimum of one site that is a non-school district or charter site, especially if offering the program at more than one site within the district. MDE will work with voluntary pre-K and school readiness plus community education directors, elementary principals, charter school directors and community leaders to identify strategies that will engage all program types in designing a mixed delivery system that provides parental choice and meets the needs of each unique community. A number of mixed delivery models exist. For example,

- Two programs might work together offering voluntary pre-K or school readiness plus in the morning and Head Start in the afternoon for the same group of children, thus creating a full day of program.
- Services might be layered having Head Start staff provide family resource, transition, health, classroom support staff and food services while the district provides developmental screening, qualified teacher, recording the progress of the child, and overseeing curriculum implementation.
- The district or charter school might subcontract with a child care center to offer the program with agreed upon supports provided by the district such as classroom observation, professional learning, screening and family transition.

Community leaders will need to work together to determine the best delivery method to meet the unique needs of their families and communities.

Districts or charter schools choosing to contract with a Head Start, child care center, family child care program or community-based organization that meets programs requirements must have a Statement of Assurances signed by both partners on file with MDE.

If contracting with mixed delivery sites, sites must be within the school district's boundaries. A signed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) must be on file with MDE by the time children begin attending the program. The signed MOU must define all of the following roles and responsibilities related to voluntary pre-K/school readiness plus operation:

- School district or charter school's process to oversee and supervise the program to ensure compliance with state and federal education laws.
- Community provider's process to ensure compliance with the state or federal laws regulating their program.
- Resources provided by each entity necessary for the delivery of the program.
- Financial arrangements which assure the district or charter covers the cost of program instruction.

Transportation

For many families, one of the greatest barriers to attendance is transportation. School districts are required to provide transportation to students enrolled in the voluntary pre-kindergarten/school readiness plus program for whom they receive general education aid if the student resides 2 miles or more from school, the same as for K-12 students. 4.66 percent of the basic revenue and transportation sparsity revenue is generated by these students and will cover part of the transportation cost. This provision will help address the barrier faced by many families. In addition, the district must provide transportation for children with disabilities participating in voluntary pre-kindergarten classrooms regardless of the distance between the child's home and the program site.

When transporting pre-kindergarten children, it is important to keep the developmental and safety needs of the children in mind. Ensuring that children have the appropriate supervision while being transported so that children are safe is essential. [Minnesota Statutes, section 169.685, Subdivision 5](#), requires every motor vehicle operator to use a child passenger restraint system when transporting a child who is both under the age of eight and shorter than four feet nine inches in a "motor vehicle equipped with factory- installed seat belts." Because Types A, B, C and D and multifunction school activity buses are exempt from the seat belt requirement, school districts and contract operators are not required to use an infant seat or child passenger restraint system when transporting a child who is both under the age of eight and shorter than four feet nine inches in Types A, B, C and D and multifunction school activity buses. If a child is being transported in a Type III school bus (passenger cars, station wagons, vans) with factory-installed seat belts, a child passenger restraint system meeting federal motor vehicle safety standards would be required by law.

Finally, it is important to remember that riding a bus is a milestone for children and their families and may be a new experience for many young children. Providing opportunities for children, along with their parents, to get on and off the bus, sit in the bus seats, etc. prior to their enrollment in the voluntary pre-K/school readiness plus program can ease many fears about riding a bus. This simple transition strategy supports the beginning of

positive experiences as children start their new early learning program. Programs should teach bus safety at the beginning as well as offer reminders throughout the school year.

Child Eligibility and Selection

Eligibility

A child who is age four as of September 1 in the calendar year in which the school year commences is eligible to participate in a voluntary pre-K or school readiness plus program free of charge.

Each eligible child must complete a health and developmental screening within 90 days of program enrollment (or between the ages of three and four prior to enrolling in the voluntary pre-K program) and provide documentation of required immunization. It is MDE's position that districts may not require a birth certificate for enrollment if the parent provides alternative documentation of the child's age. For example, most children cannot start school without an immunization record. The required immunization record includes the child's birthday. No further proof should be required if the immunization record is on file. In addition to the previous eligibility requirements, school readiness plus children must also be documented as having one or more identified risk factor. (Note: Voluntary pre-kindergarten programs may develop a procedure using similar criteria to assure that the program seats are made available to children with the highest demonstrated need.) Following is the list of school readiness plus eligibility criteria listed in state statute:

- Qualifies for free or reduced price meals
- Is an English learner
- Is homeless
- Has an individualized education program or interagency intervention plan
- Is identified through health and developmental screening with a potential risk factor that may influence learning
- Is in foster care

If a child who is four years of age as of September 1 and who does not demonstrate any of the listed risk factors is eligible to participate on a fee-for service basis, if capacity allows. Districts or charter schools must also adopt a sliding fee schedule for students not demonstrating risk factors, but must waive the fee for participants unable to pay.

Children with IEPs who participate in voluntary pre-K/school readiness plus are reported in MARSS as grade level EC and do not count against the district or charter's capped voluntary pre-K/school readiness plus participant allocation.

Selection

Since the state aid cap limits the number of participants for the voluntary pre-K/school readiness plus program, some programs may not be able to serve all four-year-olds in their area. A district/charter may develop their own priorities for admission. Open enrollment will also apply for the voluntary pre-K/school readiness plus program.

Mixed age classrooms

Cross-age learning allows for social interaction, modeling, mentoring and leadership among children. A child may accomplish something earlier with support from a more advanced peer while the older child experiences feelings of confidence and compassion (Vygotsky, 1962; Vygotsky, 1978; Slavin, 1987; Katz, 1990). A multi-age setting allows teachers to foster an emotionally secure environment for children to grow, learn, take risks and experience success. While children are developing social skills, learning responsibility and engaging in more complex play, teachers are generally more child-centered, as they must adeptly accommodate individual strengths, interests and needs.

If a district decides to offer mixed age classrooms, all voluntary pre-K/school readiness plus program standards must apply to the entire classroom. In the case of a classroom having both voluntary pre-K and school readiness plus children, the most stringent program requirement must apply. Only children who are four years of age on September 1 will generate voluntary pre-K/school readiness plus funding. Children with disabilities, regardless of age on September 1 will generate general education and associated revenues.

Children who are 5 years old on September 1 are eligible to and encouraged to attend kindergarten which generates a full 1.0 pupil unit of funding and provides children with a full array of comprehensive services to meet their learning needs.

If space permits, programs may charge a fee for any child (including a 4-year-old) who is not generating funding, on a sliding fee scale (see additional information under the *Eligibility* section). A code has been created in MARSS to track children enrolled in voluntary pre-K/school readiness plus who are not generating funding. NOTE: MARSS has a separate sets of codes for voluntary pre-K and school readiness plus children. District/charter school MARSS coordinators have this information.

Open Enrollment

Students may [open enroll](#) in voluntary pre-K/school readiness plus programs like other open enrolled students. No tuition is charged. Since this program is funded like a grade level, once accepted into a district, the student's family does not need to reapply to maintain a seat in the district until high school graduation.

Note that the general open enrollment deadline is January 15 for the upcoming school year. However, deadlines are waived for students who move into a district on or after December 1. Deadlines are also waived for situations where either the sending or receiving district has a MDE-approved Achievement and Integration plan.

As with other open-enrollment situations, districts may cap open-enrollment so as to not crowd out resident students or cause crowding issues. Please note that if more students apply for open enrollment than open enrollment seats are available the district must hold a lottery that gives priority to siblings of currently open-enrolled students, students coming from other districts where the district has an inter-district school choice plan that is part of its MDE-approved Achievement and Integration plan and students whose parents or legal guardians are Minnesota residents and employees of the district. A school board may put caps on open enrollment by grade level as outlined in [Minnesota Statutes, Section 124D.03](#).

A district continues to have an obligation to provide a free and appropriate education to any preschool children with disabilities who reside in the district or who are served by the district through open enrollment provisions. The IEP team must identify goals and objectives that address each child's education needs, determine necessary special education services and identify an appropriate placement. That placement may be in the voluntary pre-K/school readiness plus program or another preschool program in the district if available. The placement and all services must be provided at no cost to parents.

Attendance

There are no compulsory attendance requirements in voluntary pre-kindergarten/school readiness plus. However, it is important for children to attend regularly to gain the maximum benefit from the program. MDE encourages voluntary pre-K/school readiness plus programs to reach out to parents whose child is not attending and identify strategies to support attendance. This is foundational to future school attendance

A child who is absent 15 consecutive days must be dis-enrolled within MARRS. The child will be re-enrolled upon return. During the dis-enrolled period, the child will not generate funds.

Early Childhood Screening

To help ensure the optimal learning, development and health of children participating in the voluntary pre-kindergarten/school readiness plus program, children must receive an Early Childhood Screening (sometimes called "preschool screening") within 90 calendar days of program enrollment. The goal of the Early Childhood Screening program is to identify possible health, development or other problems as early as possible so that children receive the appropriate intervention to meet their needs and help them be successful in their future learning.

Some children may have received an Early Childhood Screening from another district, or a comparable health and developmental screening between the ages of 3 and 4 before enrolling in the voluntary pre-K/ school readiness plus program. This comparable screening may have been provided to the child from a Head Start program or through a health care provider, such as a Child and Teen Check-Up. A comparable health and developmental screening must meet the requirements of the Early Childhood Screening program. Currently approved observational developmental tools include the Bayley III, Battelle 2, Brigance III, Dial-4, ESI-R or the MPSI-R.

Children who received Early Childhood Screening previously may have this documented in MARSS as an established preschool screening record (PS record). A child has met the screening requirement if the child received an Early Childhood Screening between the ages of three and four before enrolling in the voluntary pre-K/school readiness plus program. The MARSS coordinator may run a WES 52 report for children screened elsewhere in a previous year to see if the child was screened. A parent may also bring a copy of a comparable screening to the program. If it meets the same requirements of the Early Childhood Screening (ECS) program, then it may be submitted to the MARSS coordinator with the ECS Registration form in order to have a MARSS PS code assigned.

A parent may conscientiously object to the Early Childhood Screening by submitting written notice to the program. The ECS Registration form would be completed to assign the MARSS PS code reflecting conscientious objection. The ECS Registration form would be completed to assign the MARSS PS code reflecting conscientious objection.

If a child has not met the Early Childhood Screening requirement, a school must provide the screening within 90 calendar days following the requirements of the program in Minnesota Statutes and Rules. School districts receive screening state aid for children who receive Early Childhood Screening while participating in the voluntary pre-K/school readiness plus program.

Charter schools may inform families of the need for screening (if the child has not been previously screened) and refer families to their resident school district, who would provide the screening. Charters who are officially recognized to provide Early Childhood Health and Developmental Screening may also provide the screening for their enrolled students.

Detailed information about MARSS PS record is available in the [MARSS Manual in Procedure 26 section](#)

For information about Early Childhood Screening requirements visit the [MDE screening webpage](#)

Immunizations

Ensuring the health of children participating in the voluntary pre-kindergarten program is an essential component. All children participating in the program are subject to meeting the requirements of the Minnesota School Immunization Law and having their immunizations (shots) up-to-date or a plan for getting them current. The only children who are not required to be immunized are those who have medical reasons for not receiving certain shots or who are legally exempt because of their parents' personal beliefs. An early childhood program, including voluntary pre-K program, can refuse to admit a child if he or she doesn't have documentation of either the shots or a legal exemption.

Immunization forms are available on the [Minnesota Department of Health website](#)

The Minnesota Immunization Information Connection (MIIC) helps schools, early learning programs, and child care programs ensure that children/students are up-to-date on their immunizations and that they are in compliance with the Minnesota School Immunization Law in one easy online location. Schools may participate in MIIC. Visit the Minnesota Department of Health website for [additional information about MIIC](#)

There are special considerations regarding immunizations for children who are experiencing homelessness, who are in foster care or are waiting to be placed in foster care. For more information about the circumstances enrolling children may be experiencing, please refer to the [Minnesota Department of Health website](#)

Charter Schools

In order to apply for voluntary pre-K funding, a charter school's pre-kindergarten program or other preschool instructional program must be officially recognized by MDE. A charter school's prekindergarten program or

other preschool instructional program will be officially recognized by MDE after the Commissioner of Education approves an authorizer's supplemental affidavit (Minn. Stat. 124D.10, Subd 4 (j)) that clearly describes the charter school's pre-kindergarten and/or preschool instructional programs(s). To learn more about how to receive official recognition for your early learning program, review the Early Learning Guidance for charter schools on the [Charter School Resources page of the MDE website](#).

A charter school that receives funding for the voluntary pre-K or school readiness plus program must comply with all the requirements of the program described in legislation.

Charter Schools and ECSE

A charter school that has a state-approved voluntary pre-kindergarten/school readiness plus program is responsible for providing the special education evaluation for students enrolled in the charter school's voluntary pre-K/school readiness plus program (i.e., child find) no different than it is responsible for students enrolled in grades K-12. This includes three through five year old children, whether or not the child is generating voluntary pre-K/school readiness plus funding. This does not apply to charter schools that are not state-approved voluntary pre-K/school readiness plus sites because other charter schools are not eligible to have the grade level distinction of voluntary pre-K.

The charter school is responsible for conducting the evaluation, if it has appropriately licensed staff, or it can purchase the service from a school district or a joint powers district. In either case, the evaluation hours are reported on MARSS by the charter school.

- For a charter school student who generates voluntary pre-K/school readiness plus funding, the MARSS evaluation record includes only the evaluation hours provided outside the voluntary pre-K class time. It will generate a bit of additional ADM on top of the voluntary pre-K funding.
- For a student who **does not** generate voluntary pre-K/school readiness plus funding, the MARSS evaluation record includes all of the evaluation hours provided. It will generate a bit of additional ADM but no voluntary pre-K/school readiness plus funding.

If the student qualifies for special education, the charter school is responsible for writing the IEP. Once the IEP is written, signed and services started the student's grade level changes from voluntary pre-K/school readiness plus to EC. If the IEP requires the voluntary pre-K/school readiness plus time, it is included in the student's membership hours and ADM. The ADM that the student had generated in voluntary pre-K/school readiness plus prior to ECSE will be used to calculate the EC's guarantee of 0.28 ADM.

The charter school could also refer the student to the resident district for the evaluation as opposed to purchasing the service from the resident district. In this case, the resident district reports the evaluation hours on MARSS and is responsible for writing the IEP, if the student qualifies. The IEP determines the student's educational program. Once the student qualifies for special education, the student can choose to:

- Enroll in the resident district and withdraw from the charter school, or
- Open enroll to another independent district, or

- Remain enrolled in (or transfer to) the charter school and the charter school is responsible for the implementation of the IEP.

Except for the evaluation time period, a student can be enrolled in only one district or charter school at a time. The enrolling district or charter school is responsible for special education services for students with an IEP.

Children with Disabilities

Referrals

If a voluntary pre-kindergarten/school readiness plus program identifies concerns about a child's development through the required screening or through teacher observation the program must work with its Early Childhood Special Education team to determine appropriate next steps. Please refer to the MARSS manual for specific guidance on how to record the enrollment of children referred for evaluation.

Alignment with Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE)

It is important that leaders in implementing districts and charters understand how ECSE and voluntary pre-K/school readiness plus can work together to provide a high-quality early learning opportunity for participating children.

Classrooms implementing the quality requirements of voluntary pre-K/school readiness plus should include children with and without disabilities. Children may be placed into a voluntary pre-K/school readiness plus classroom by the IEP team or a child funded with voluntary pre-K/school readiness plus dollars may be identified as being a child with a disability during the school year. Children with IEPs who participate in voluntary pre-K/school readiness plus are reported in MARSS as grade level EC and do not count against the district or charters capped voluntary pre-K/school readiness plus appropriation.

Children with IEPs who participate in voluntary pre-K/school readiness plus must continue in the voluntary pre-K/school readiness plus setting unless the IEP Team makes a determination that the voluntary pre-K/school readiness plus setting is not the child's least restrictive environment because their educational needs cannot be met even with the use of supplementary aids and services.

Special education staff may co-teach with a voluntary pre-K/school readiness plus teacher or may provide direct instruction and consultation as necessary to meet the needs of enrolled children. Special education paraprofessionals may work in a voluntary pre-K/school readiness plus program to meet the needs of an individual student or to support the active engagement and emerging independence of many students with IEPs.

If the voluntary pre-K/school readiness plus program is the only preschool program and has 20 enrolled children, and a new child is identified as being a child with a disability, your district could consider one of these options to maintain full enrollment of allocated voluntary pre-K/school readiness plus seats:

- Divide your existing class into two sections, an AM section and a PM section—each receiving at least 350 hours of instruction or the amount applied for in the initial application. A group of 10 children or fewer must be instructed by an individual serving as the teacher. The slightly larger group of 11 or more—up to a maximum of 20—must be instructed by an individual serving as a teacher and also employ a paraprofessional.
- Add a second session—assuming available classroom space—that operates parallel to your initial class and is staffed according to the staffing requirements in the first option.
- There may also be a case that a newly identified child has such significant educational needs that the most appropriate placement is a setting developed solely for young children with disabilities. This is much less likely but may happen. Any change in the child’s placement must be made by the child’s IEP Team.

School districts are also responsible to measure and report the developmental status of young children with disabilities. Where voluntary pre-K/school readiness plus programs will collect and report assessment data at the item level in the fall and spring, providers of services for young children with disabilities must report child outcome summary ratings (COSF ratings) as they enter services under Part B and as they transition to kindergarten. For the 2017-18 school year, a child with a disability participating in a voluntary pre-K/school readiness plus program will have data reported through both reporting conventions. MDE will align reporting requirements as much as possible for future years.

Early Learning Environment

Physical Environment

The physical environment of a preschool classroom has an impact on both the behavior and learning of the children and adults working in that space. Adequate physical space affects children’s levels of involvement and the types of interactions with their teachers and peers. Classrooms for preschool children must be designed specifically to meet the needs of three- and four-year-old children.

Essential elements to consider for early childhood program spaces include:

- Square footage: 1000-1400 square feet, including bathroom(s) and clothing storage areas, for 15-20 children. Provide additional spaces for eating and indoor and outdoor large-muscle activities.
- Located on first floor, convenient to outdoor exit and play areas, and bus/parent drop-off and pick-up zones.
- Classrooms should contain or be readily accessible to space for clothing storage, age appropriate bathroom(s), a hand washing area, and a drinking fountain.
- Clustering early childhood classrooms with common spaces for student activities, teacher planning and parent volunteers.
- Learning aids, equipment, technology: age-appropriate toys, portable tables and stackable chairs, portable equipment with wheels, adjustable shelving and bookcases, easels, counter workspace, a sink with hot and cold running water, a carpeted storytelling/ reading area, electronic interactive

white board capability, ceiling or wall-hung video monitors, and the ability to easily darken the room.

- Adequate display/bulletin board, AC power, and voice, video, and computer connections with high-speed Internet access.
- Storage spaces for food preparation, equipment and eating facilities, and supplies, toys and equipment, including large muscle equipment.
- Workspace(s) for teachers to prepare and store teaching materials and access a phone, computer with high-speed Internet access, printer, and copy machine.

View additional information on the [school construction webpage](#).

Classroom Environment

An optimal classroom environment allows children to have independent access to materials and activities. The classroom environment should have learning centers that encourage children's experiences with blocks, books, dramatic play, creative arts, writing, manipulatives, math, science, sand, water, and computers. Space should accommodate both active and quiet activities. Soft furnishings and spaces for privacy should be available for children who need a quiet place to rest.

Outdoor Requirements

Preschool children must have daily access to a developmentally appropriate playground learning and play space. Outdoor curricular spaces should offer a variety of surfaces (such as sand, woodchips, grass, and black top) and learning opportunities (such as dramatic play, problem solving and sensory materials). Gross motor equipment, both stationary and portable, should be available. Outdoor areas should also have some protection from the sun, such as trees for shade.

Staff-to-Child Ratios

Class sizes of fewer than 20 and child-to-staff ratios less than 10-to-1 are associated with greater learning gains. This allows staff to meet the instructional needs of children, individualize learning as well as address the physical needs of children of this age group. All children, including those with disabilities, are counted as part of the 20 maximum group size. Group size and ratio requirements must be maintained during all program activities including meal times and rest. Children with disabilities who participate in voluntary pre-K/school readiness plus are included in the count of children for group size but are not counted as part of the approved voluntary pre-K/school readiness plus seat allocation.

Duration and Intensity of Programming

The number of hours a child attends a well-planned and implemented early learning programming makes a difference in the child's learning and development. The instructional content and activities need to be of

sufficient length and intensity to adequately address learning needs. How a teacher organizes the program hours and uses the time matters.

Program hours are locally determined but a minimum of 350 hours each school year must be provided. A school year is funded for July 1 to June 30. Any program after June 30 is funded in the next school year.

In Minnesota, the school year generally cannot start before Labor Day.

Meals as Instructional Time

Meals and snack times offer numerous learning opportunities. Conversation can be rich and engaging as well as address many early learning standards. Class size and ratios must be maintained during meals. Appropriate learning goals for meals and snack time should be included in the daily lesson plan. Meals and snack times should be relaxed and offer enough time for young children to finish eating. Diverse family food preferences and eating styles need to be recognized and addressed. All staff working with a group of children needs to be aware of food allergies of children with which they work. For further information relating to food service processes and reimbursement, please see page 10. For further questions related to methods of service, counting and meal reimbursement management contact MDE.VPK@state.mn.us.

Rest Time

Young children need time to relax, calm down and replenish their energy. Voluntary pre-K/school readiness plus programs that run for more than 4 hours in a given day should offer 30 minutes of regularly scheduled time for rest or quiet activities. Programs will need to be flexible in order to meet individual needs for sleep. Children may require more rest at the beginning of the year and taper off over the course of the year. Those who do not fall asleep should be offered an alternative quiet activity. Children should not be expected to remain quiet without anything to do.

Programs can create an environment conducive to resting by dimming the lights while still allowing for adequate supervision and safe evacuation in case of emergency. Offer a transitional activity to help children settle and/or play soft background music during rest.

Programs are encouraged to work with appropriate health consultants to establish guidelines, procedures and identify equipment needed to create healthy environments and help stop the spread of disease.

Up to 30 minutes of rest time may count toward instructional hours in programs offering more than 4 hours. Adult-child ratios must be maintained during rest hours. Children attending voluntary pre-K/school readiness plus for fewer than 4 hours per day should rest outside of program hours.

Standards, Curriculum and Assessment

In order to provide high quality learning experiences for young children, teaching must address educational goals and support children as they work toward fulfilling them. Minnesota's early learning standards are known

as the Early Childhood Indicators of Progress (ECIPs). The ECIPs describe the expectations of what children should know and be able to do prior to kindergarten. The ECIPs and supporting documents may be found at [Early Childhood Indicators of Progress](#).

The ECIPs and the K-12 academic standards have been aligned to provide a continuum of goals for children. Strategies that support this work include:

- Ensuring pre-K through third grade teachers have the opportunity to understand the standards for the grade in which they teach as well as in the grade immediately prior and subsequent to that year.
- Creating the opportunity for all teachers within a grade as well as for teachers throughout the pre-k to grade three continuum to plan together for aligned instructional strategies and curriculum/assessment selection.
- Regularly using aligned formative assessment(s) to inform lesson planning for individual children, small groups and the entire class.
- Providing professional development for pre-k through third grade teachers that improves their teaching, including professional development that brings teachers in all of these grades together to intentionally align curriculum, assessments and instruction. As well as identifying the needs or opportunities for growth of teachers through the review of assessment results, feedback collected from teachers and classroom observations. If a voluntary pre-K/school readiness plus program is subcontracting with a community program for services, the teachers in the community program(s) should be included in professional learning opportunities and alignment work.

Alignment to Early Learning and K-3 Standards

When planning the voluntary pre-K/school readiness plus program, administrators and teachers should use the Early Childhood Indicators of Progress (ECIPs). The ECIPs are used as the basis for decisions on curriculum content, instruction, assessment, and the physical design of the classroom and outdoor space. By aligning all the program elements with the indicators in all eight of the ECIP domains, the child experiences rigorous content and has a consistent and coherent, play-based learning experience. Using the standards as the foundation for planning is a key to ensuring equitable experiences for all young children. Strategies that help achieve improved child outcomes includes using the ECIPs in lesson planning, ensuring the formative assessment used by teachers captures the indicators in the ECIPs and K-3 standards and that the information from these assessments is used to inform planning and instruction for individual children.

Curriculum

The ECIPs describe what children are expected to know and be able to do prior to kindergarten entry. The curriculum outlines what children are to learn based on the ECIPs, how they will achieve the goals, the methods of instruction and interactions teachers will use to ensure children obtain the desired skills. Programs must provide instruction through play-based learning to foster children's social and emotional development, cognitive development, physical and motor development, and language and literacy skills, including the native language and literacy skills of English learners.

Programs are also required to provide comprehensive program content including the implementation of curriculum, assessment, and instructional strategies aligned with the ECIPs, and kindergarten through grade 3 academic standards.

A number of curricula already determined to be aligned with the ECIPs can be found on the [Parent Aware website](#).

Play-Based Learning

Play-based learning is child-selected/directed activities that are enjoyable to the child and are challenging or involve experimentation or consolidation of cognitive or social skills. In an early childhood program, instruction through play-based learning happens within a developmentally appropriate environment, which reflects the teacher's plan for scaffolding learning for individuals. Instructional strategies include opportunities for individual, small and full group learning opportunities. Instruction is manifested in the teacher's classroom set-up, the materials and learning spaces available, as well as in the planned/spontaneous adult-child and child-child conversations, questions, and comments that flow throughout the experience.

Environments in which play-based learning is most successful demonstrate intentional design by the teacher, knowledge of challenges and opportunities for individual children, an understanding of typical child development as well as an appreciation for the role of pleasure and gratification in learning. These environments must be constructed thoughtfully to include opportunities for children of all abilities and reflect the cultural background of all children in the classroom.

Assessment of Cognitive and Social Skills

According to voluntary pre-kindergarten statute, each program must "measure each child's cognitive and social skills using a formative measure aligned to the state's early learning standards when the child enters and again before the child leaves the program, screening and progress monitoring measures, and others from the state-approved menu of kindergarten entry profile measures."

School readiness plus statute requires each program to, "assess each child's cognitive and language skills with a comprehensive child assessment instrument when the child enters and again before the child leaves the program to improve program planning and implementation, communicate with parents, and promote kindergarten readiness."

Regardless of program funding, in order to identify a child's learning needs and individualize instruction, initial assessment should take place within the first six to ten weeks of a child's enrollment and final assessment in late spring. A formal winter collection cycle is also encouraged to best understand a child's developmental progress. This schedule allows programs to progress monitor using data collected in the fall, winter and spring. The chosen tool allows programs to collect both formative and summative information that helps guide decisions about curriculum, lesson planning and shape interactions that ensure continued individual growth. Information about the child's growth and development can be summarized and used in conversation and goal setting with the

child's family. In addition, the information provided by the tool can be used to plan meaningful professional development opportunities.

Training on authentic assessment using observation and information from sampling collecting methods, is an integral component to ensuring confidence in data and results for your program. If your lead teachers need assessment training on the tool chosen, please complete a request form by clicking [here](#) and someone from MDE will work with you to coordinate trainings in your area. Assessment data must be collected across all domains and all indicators of the chosen assessment tool. The tool must be used in its entirety to yield comprehensive outcomes that should inform your World's Best Work Force plans.

The following are tools approved for use by the Kindergarten Entry Profile (KEP):

- Teaching Strategies Gold (GOLD), produced by Teaching Strategies
- Work Sampling System (WSS), produced by Pearson
- Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP), produced by WestEd
- DevMilestones, produced by FastBridge (available for use by districts/charters participating in the KEP)

Information on these tools and state negotiated rates can be found on the MDE KEP [website](#). The tools listed on the menu have undergone extensive alignment testing including alignment to the early learning standards, kindergarten academic standards and early childhood outcomes required by the Office of Special Education Programs.

Coordination of Services

A voluntary pre-K/school readiness plus program must coordinate with community-based services, including health and social service agencies, to ensure children have access to comprehensive services.

A voluntary pre-K/school readiness plus program must also coordinate with all relevant school district programs and services including early childhood special education, adult basic education, adult literacy, English language learners, and programs serving homeless students.

Resources:

- [Referrals for Early Childhood Special Education](#): If you have concerns about a child's development and think a child might need extra help to learn and grow, work with the family to refer a child.
- [Homelessness - McKinney Vento](#): Children and youth who experience homelessness have the right to receive a free, appropriate public education ensured by The McKinney-Vento Act. The law requires schools to remove barriers to enrollment, attendance and success for homeless students. Work with your district's McKinney-Vento liaison.
- [English language learners](#): MDE works to ensure that students learning English have equal rights and access to a high-quality education. MDE supports school districts and charter schools to offer research-based programs to help English Learners (EL) become proficient in English and to meet Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies learning standards. Programs should work with the English Language specialists in their district to determine the best instructional materials and practices to use with English Learners. People with knowledge of early childhood teaching strategies and pedagogy should work with EL specialists who do not have experience working with

young children to ensure lessons are developmentally appropriate. EL services are best provided within the regular classroom setting for this age group.

Voluntary pre-K/school readiness plus sites should follow the same EL evaluation and identification process for pre-K students as they do for older students. Those who qualify for EL services and are receiving those services would be reported on MARSS with an EL Start Date. If they are eligible for general education revenue, they will generate EL state aid.

- Programs will also want to partner and link to community and regional services to provide comprehensive services to families who need them. Community services to enhance family well-being, might include income supports, food pantries, housing, social services, and other services relating to health/mental health, domestic violence, substance abuse, adult literacy, education and training, and financial asset building.

Transitions

Coordinating Transition to Kindergarten

According to statute, all voluntary pre-kindergarten and school readiness plus programs must, “coordinate appropriate kindergarten transition with families and kindergarten teachers.” Additionally voluntary pre-K programs must include “community-based pre-kindergarten programs and school district kindergarten programs.”

Comprehensive transition planning helps families and pre-k students better adapt to their kindergarten surroundings and eases anxiety about the next steps in school. A parent or family member of each pre-kindergartner should be involved in the transition to kindergarten. Including community partners, teachers and parents in the planning process will support alignment across settings for children. Establishing best practices for transitions requires administrative support designing policies and procedures that welcome families with pre-k students to kindergarten. Resources for best practice in transition planning can be found at the following websites:

- Transition planning [resources](#) from Head Start.
- Transition planning [strategies](#) from the National Early Childhood Transition Center (technical report #3).
- Practical transition strategies to share with [families](#) from Harvard Medical School staff.

Parent and Family Engagement

Involve parents in program planning and transition planning

A voluntary pre-kindergarten/school readiness plus program must involve parents in program planning and decision making. This includes: transition planning by implementing family engagement strategies that include culturally and linguistically responsive activities in pre-kindergarten through third grade that align with early childhood family education under [Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.13](#). It is especially important that voluntary pre-K/school

readiness plus sites work closely with their Early Childhood Family Education and School Readiness programs to ensure both children and the adults in their lives have the best possible skill set to ensure a positive start in school.

At a minimum programs should:

- Collaborate with their ECFE program to plan and implement these strategies.
- Involve parents in program planning and decision-making
- Involve a parent or family member of each pre-kindergartner in the transition to kindergarten

Staffing

Teacher Qualifications

In the past several years, there has been a growing base of research and information regarding how children learn and the importance of their growth and development as a foundation for school and life success. Much is now known about what people who work with young children need to know and be able to do to enhance their development. Pre-kindergarten programs are most effective when they employ teachers with deep knowledge, understanding and experience in how to provide high-quality learning experiences and support individual progress.

Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten Statute requires that a voluntary pre-K program must have teachers knowledgeable in early childhood curriculum content, assessment, native and English language programs, and instruction. They must be provided salaries comparable to the salaries of local kindergarten through grade 12 instructional staff.

School Readiness Plus Statute requires that teachers be knowledgeable in early childhood curriculum content, assessment, native and English language development programs, and in instruction. There must be at least one licensed teacher (in the classroom).

With these different statutory requirements for teachers, MDE recommends that school districts strategically consider aligning requirements and policies, not only horizontally across your early childhood programs, but also vertically with your K-12 system. One method for achieving this is basing your district policy on the highest minimum early childhood program requirement. An example of this would be seen in ECFE and school readiness plus as both programs require licensed teachers. If taking the highest minimum requirement, districts would then require licensed lead teachers throughout their early childhood programs. The preferred licensure would be in Early Childhood Education (Birth-Grade 3) or have a Pre-Primary endorsement (Age 3-Pre-K) or the older Pre-kindergarten (Pre-K) license.

Districts/charters will need to determine if a candidate with an elementary teaching licensure has the background and experience appropriate for this age group. If a district/charter school has advertised and could not find a licensed teacher that met the requirements of the position, districts/charter schools may also request a variance for another fully licensed teacher to teach outside of their licensure area. A teacher can get up to three variances in a lifetime. After three, the district needs to appeal to the [Minnesota Professional Educator](#)

[Licensing and Standards Board \(PELSB\)](#) for additional variances. Identifying professional development and coaching/mentoring activities will offer support to teachers working outside of their licensure areas.

On June 16, 2017, the Minnesota Board of Teaching (which is now PELSB) also passed a resolution which allows teachers who are licensed K-12 in the areas of English as a Second Language (ESL), Vocal and Instrumental Music, Physical Education and Visual Art and are assigned to teacher in K-6 grade settings, to be permitted to also provide subject specific instruction to students in pre-kindergarten assignments.

Staff Salaries

The science of child development indicates the high level of knowledge and competence that is needed by those who educate young children in order to obtain desired outcomes. This level of competence is the same as that of other instructional staff throughout a district/charter. Those working at all age levels (Pre-K-12) and subject areas are expected to be compensated at a level commensurate with their educational attainment and the responsibilities of their position.

Voluntary pre-kindergarten/school readiness plus is funded through general education funds and is considered a grade level. Voluntary pre-K statute requires staff salaries that are comparable to local K-12 instructional staff. School districts/charter schools contracting with other entities for a voluntary pre-K program need to ensure the salaries paid to the teachers for the hours deemed as voluntary pre-K are comparable to district K-12 instructional staff. It is strongly recommended that school readiness plus salaries follow this same alignment as they are required to be licensed teachers.

Teacher Evaluation

Teacher evaluation requirements, as stated in [Minnesota Statutes, section 122A.40, subdivision 8](#), apply to school readiness plus programs. However, if a school district enacts a policy where early childhood and K-12 teachers participate in the same evaluation process, then a potentially complicated process becomes aligned and consistent.

Most importantly, in order to improve their instructional practice, every teacher deserves constructive feedback on their performance. In this area, voluntary pre-K can be used as a highest minimum requirement. Voluntary pre-K programs are expected to use a measure of adult-child interaction as a tool to provide formative feedback. Stated below are the four accepted teacher observation tools.

- Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)
- Danielson Framework for Teaching Evaluation Instrument
- Marzano Teacher Evaluation Model
- Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool (TPOT) (Only for schools that have completed Pyramid Model training)

MDE encourages programs use the tools listed. Some tools are more general to teaching at all grade levels and content areas. When using a tool such as this, it is imperative that the person conducting the observation, use an age level version of the tool when available and discussing what has been seen, with an understanding of the

unique aspects of the way young children learn and best/promising practices in early childhood to enhance learning.

Regardless of the tool used, evaluation is intended to provide opportunities for discussion and as a guide in developing an individualized professional development plan.

Professional Development

Knowledge and Competency Framework

[Minnesota's Knowledge and Competency Framework for Early Childhood Professionals](#) describes the skills needed to work effectively with young children and their families. The framework combines what an early childhood educator needs to know about research and theory, with the skills and abilities needed to work successfully in the field. The framework:

- Articulates knowledge and skills needed to teach in early childhood programs.
- Aligns vertically to the Board of Teaching Standards and horizontally to show a progression of skill development.

The competencies are arranged in eight broad content areas, including: child development and learning, developmentally appropriate learning experiences, and assessment, evaluation and individualization. There are three levels of competency: 1) Explores, 2) Implements and 3) Designs and Leads. Each level includes and builds on the competencies of the level before it.

Use the Knowledge and Competency Framework to:

- Assist in goal writing with staff.
- Create job descriptions.
- Orient new teachers.
- Identify professional development needs and plan training for staff.
- Communicate the professionalism of staff within your program and district.

Coordinated Professional Development

According to statute, all voluntary pre-kindergarten programs must “provide high quality coordinated professional development, training and coaching for both school district and community-based early learning providers that is informed by a measure of adult-child interactions...” Four measures of adult-child interactions have been recommended and are listed in the Teacher Evaluation section of this document. School readiness plus programs are encouraged to use the same approach for improving the alignment and comprehensiveness of professional development opportunities available for early childhood staff and community partners.

Work with your staff to determine their professional development needs and an appropriate plan. Staff from mixed delivery partnership sites should be included in professional development offerings. As space permits,

invite other providers in your community offering early childhood programming to attend. [Certified early childhood curriculum and assessment trainers are listed on the MDE website.](#)

Measuring Impact

Voluntary pre-K statute is clear regarding the responsibility of sites to evaluate their implementation and measure the impact of their programs on participating children so that the results may be provided in their World's Best Workforce annual summary to the Commissioner of Education. MDE offers sites an opportunity to participate in an evaluation plan developed by MDE using information already reported through existing data sources or to develop and implement a site-specific plan. MDE will contact voluntary pre-kindergarten sites prior to the start of the school year to confirm the Measuring Impact option that will be used. Those sites indicating the use of a site-specific plan must develop and submit their plans to MDE on or before October 1. Sites choosing a site-specific plan may amend their choice of Measuring Impact at any time by contacting MDE.VPK@state.mn.us.

School readiness plus sites are also encouraged to use the MDE Measuring Impact Plan so that the submitted program data can be returned to the district/charter for use in completing their World's Best Workforce plan.

MDE's implementation and impact measurement plan is built upon Mark Friedman's Results-Based Accountability (RBA) framework. The plan uses existing data to the extent possible to answer three categories of critical questions:

1. How much did we do?
2. How well did we do it?
3. Is anyone better off?

Data reported through MARSS, Minnesota Common Course Catalog, EE Student, STAR, and the statutorily required measurement of each child's development at program entry and exit will be used to address questions in categories 1 and 3. Stakeholder surveys that address required aspects of implementation will address questions in category 2. All questions will guide MDE's future efforts to effectively support early learning programs.

Specific guidance on MDE's implementation and impact measurement plan is available by emailing MDE.VPK@state.mn.us

Contacts

If you have questions about specific programs and data, please contact the following MDE staff to assist you:

Charter Schools

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Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) and School Readiness

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Early Education Student and MDE-ORG

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Head Start

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Kindergarten Entry Profile

Jon Vaupel: jon.vaupel@state.mn.us

Voluntary Pre-K or School Readiness Plus

June Reineke: june.reineke@state.mn.us

Additional Resources:

[Transportation to Early Childhood Family Education and School Readiness Programs](#)

[Lease Levy for Space](#)

Information about the MDE process for Lease Levy for Space for ECFE Programs updated 2013.

[Guidelines for Early Childhood Family Education Sliding Fee Scale](#)

Suggestions for implementing guidelines as required by Minnesota Statute

[Home Visiting in Early childhood Family Education—Fact Sheet](#)

[Program Outreach in Early Childhood Family Education Programs](#)

[Timeline History of Early Childhood Family Education](#)

[Curriculum in Early Childhood Family Education: Philosophy and Implementation](#)

[Types of Direct Service in Early Childhood Family Education](#)

Classification of ECFE services for planning and communication purposes

[School Readiness Program page](#)

Other resources to support effective implementation of voluntary pre-K/school readiness plus include: [professional development](#), [early learning standards](#) and [assessment](#), [professional knowledge and competencies](#), [program quality improvements](#), [scholarships](#) and [PreK-3 alignment](#).