

DCYF Publicly Funded Prekindergarten Programs—Program Standards Comparison Chart

Program Elements	School Readiness (ongoing)	Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK)- Beginning in FY26 (School Readiness Plus program ended 6-30-2025)	Head Start
Statute	2024 Minnesota Statute 142D.05 SCHOOL READINESS PROGRAMS	2024 Minnesota Statute 142D.08 VOLUNTARY PREKINDERGARTEN PROGRAM FOR ELIGIBLE FOUR-YEAR-OLD CHILDREN	2024 Minnesota Statute 142D.121 Head Start Program Performance Standards If a Head Start program is licensed by the state, must follow licensing regulations .
Purpose	A district or a group of districts may establish a school readiness program for children age three to kindergarten entrance. The purpose of a school readiness program is to prepare children to enter kindergarten.	A district, a charter school, a group of districts, a group of charter schools, or a group of districts and charter schools may establish a voluntary prekindergarten program for eligible four-year-old children. The purpose of a voluntary prekindergarten program is to support children and their families and prepare them for success in kindergarten and beyond.	The Office of Head Start (OHS) and State of Minnesota Supplemental Head Start funds are allocated to federal Head Start grant recipients to establish programs and partnerships to help young children from low-income families to prepare to succeed in school and life. Head Start programs promote children's development through services that support early learning, health, and family well-being.
Allocation	Program is funded through state aid to school districts using a formula based on 0-4 census. Funding is ongoing.	Program is funded as a grade level through general education 01 funds to school districts and charter schools and includes all formula driven calculations. Funding is ongoing.	Head Start Programs and services are provided by Federal to local grant recipients who also receive an allocation of the Head Start State supplemental funds.
Child Eligibility	A child must be three on September 1, and have one or more of the following risk factors: *Qualifies for free or reduced-price lunch *Is an English language learner *Is homeless	A child who is four on September 1 and meets at least one of the following criteria: *Qualifies for free or reduced-priced meals *Qualifies using state general financial eligibility requirements listed in MN State Statute *Is an English language learner	A child must be at least three years old or, turn three years old by the date used to determine eligibility for public school in the community in which the Head Start Preschool program is located; and, Be no older than the age required to attend school.

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	<p><i>*Has an individualized education program (IEP) or standardized written plan</i></p> <p><i>*Is identified, through health and developmental screenings, with a potential risk factor that may influence learning</i></p> <p><i>*Is defined as at risk by the school district.</i></p>	<p><i>*Is an American Indian</i></p> <p><i>*Has experienced homelessness in the last 24 months</i></p> <p><i>*Is identified through health and developmental screening with a potential risk factor that may influence learning</i></p> <p><i>*Is in foster care, kinship care, or needs child protection services</i></p> <p><i>*Has a parent who is a migrant or seasonal agricultural laborer.</i></p> <p><i>*Has a parent who is incarcerated.</i></p> <p><i>*Is defined as at risk by the school district.</i></p>	<p>The child must also meet at least one Head Start performance standards eligibility criteria.</p> <p>A pregnant woman or a child is eligible if: The family’s income is equal to or below the poverty line; or, The family is eligible for or, in the absence of childcare, would be potentially eligible for public assistance, including TANF child-only payments, SNAP or, The child is homeless, as defined in part 1305; or, The child is in foster care.</p>
Developmental Screening/ Immunizations	Each eligible child must complete a health and developmental screening within 90 days of program enrollment	Each eligible child must complete a health and developmental screening within 90 days of program and provide documentation of required immunizations	<p>Developmental screening is required within 45 days of enrollment.</p> <p>within 30 calendar days after the child first attends the program or, for the home-based program option, receives a home visit, must consult with parents to determine whether each child has ongoing sources of continuous, accessible health care –</p> <p>Within 90 calendar days after the child first attends the program or, for the home-based program option, receives a home visit, with the exceptions noted in paragraph (b)(3) of this section, a program must: obtain determinations from health care and oral health care professionals as to whether or not the child is up-to-date on a schedule of age-appropriate preventive and primary medical, mental health, and oral health care, based on: the well-child visits and dental periodicity schedules as prescribed by the Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment (EPSDT) program</p> <p>If a Head Start program is licensed by the state, must follow licensing regulations.</p>

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<i>Inclusion of children with disabilities & provision of special education services.</i>	<p>Children with disabilities who have active IEPs are eligible to participate in school readiness. Special education services are provided by appropriately credentialed special education staff.</p> <p>The appropriate instructional setting reported in MARSS for children with IEPs in school readiness is determined by considering the program intensity and whether the majority of special education services are provided within the school readiness program.</p>	<p>A child with an individualized education program may not be excluded from participation in a program under this section if all other eligibility requirements are satisfied and the individualized education program team determines that with reasonable accommodations the child can fully participate and make progress toward their goals and objectives.</p> <p>Charter schools with approved applications that receive funding for voluntary prekindergarten are responsible for initial evaluations as appropriate and service for any children with disabilities participating in their approved early learning program.</p>	<p>Children with disabilities may participate in Head Start. Special education services are provided by appropriately credentialed special education staff.</p>
<i>Number of Instructional Hours</i>	<p>No minimum requirement. School districts have the flexibility to offer as few as one day per week, and as many as five days per week.</p>	<p>Minimum of 350 hours per school year. Must 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 prekindergarten student.</p>	<p>Minimum of 1020 hours of planned class operations over the course of at least eight months.</p>
<i>Ratios and Group Size</i>	<p>Staff-child ratios of one-to-ten and maximum group size of 20 children with the first staff required to be a teacher. Children with IEPs are included calculation of staff-to-child ratio and group size count.</p>	<p>Staff-to-child ratios of one-to-ten and a maximum group size of 20 children with at least one licensed teacher. Children with IEPs are included in the calculation of staff-to-child ratio and group size count.</p>	<p>Staff-child ratios and group size maximums must be determined by the age of the majority of children and the needs of children present.</p> <p>Staff-to-child ratios of one-to-ten and a maximum group size of 20 children. Children with IEPs are included in the calculation of staff-to-child ratio and group size count.</p>
<i>Program Fees</i>	<p>A district must adopt a sliding fee schedule based on a family's income but must waive a fee for a participant unable to pay. School districts must use school readiness aid for eligible children.</p> <p>Children who do not meet the eligibility requirements</p>	<p>A child who is funded as a VPK student may not be charged any fee or tuition for the VPK defined instructional part of the day.</p> <p>School districts and charter schools must use state funding for eligible children to the extent it is available.</p>	<p>A program must not charge eligible families a fee to participate in Head Start, including special events such as field trips.</p> <p>A program may accept a fee from families of enrolled children for services that are <i>in addition</i> to services</p>

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	in subdivision 15 may participate on a fee-for-service basis.	A child may participate in a VPK program on a fee-for-service basis if the child does not meet the eligibility criteria listed in <i>Child Eligibility</i> section of this chart or state funding is not available. A school district or charter school must adopt a sliding-fee schedule based upon family income and must waive a fee for a participant unable to pay.	funded by Head Start, such as child care before or after funded Head Start hours. A program may not condition a Head Start child's enrollment on the ability to pay a fee for additional hours. (1302.18)
Program Content	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.	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. Provide comprehensive program content aligned with state early learning standards, including the implementation of curriculum, assessment, and intentional instructional strategies that support transition to kindergarten through grade three academic standards.	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. Provide comprehensive program content including the implementation of curriculum, assessment, and instructional strategies aligned with the state early learning standards, Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework (ELOF), and program school readiness goals.
Assessment and Impact Measure & Reporting of Data	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.	Assess each child's progress toward the state's early learning standards when the child enters and again before the child leaves the program, using a commissioner-approved formative, developmentally appropriate assessment <i>and report results and demographic data to the department in a form and manner prescribed by the commissioner.</i>	Measure each child's overall development using ongoing observation with a valid and reliable assessment tool. (Examples: GOLD, DRDP, etc.) Data will be finalized three times per year.
Teacher Qualifications	Teachers knowledgeable in early childhood curriculum content, assessment, native and English language development programs, and instruction.	A voluntary prekindergarten program must have <i>appropriately licensed</i> teachers who are knowledgeable in early childhood curriculum content,	A program must ensure all center-based teachers have at least an associate degree in child development or early childhood education, equivalent coursework, or

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and Compensation		<p>assessment, native and English language programs, and instruction,</p> <p>The program must also provide voluntary prekindergarten instructional staff salaries comparable to the salaries of local kindergarten through grade 12 instructional staff.</p>	<p>otherwise meet requirements.</p> <p>By August 1, 2031, Programs must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Establish or update a pay scale for all positions -Pay Head Start educators comparable to public school preschool teachers (or 90% of kindergarten teachers. -Pay all staff a wage at least sufficient to cover basic costs of living -Pay comparable wages across Head Start Preschool and Early Head Start
Supervision	A program provided by a board must be supervised by a licensed early childhood teacher, a certified early childhood educator, or a licensed parent educator.	No statutory requirement regarding supervision. Follow district requirements.	Education managers must have a BA in early childhood education or a BA + equivalent coursework in early childhood education with early education teaching experience. A program must ensure early childhood coaches have a minimum of a BA in early childhood education or a related field.
Suspension and Expulsion	<p>A pupil enrolled in a preschool or prekindergarten program, including a child participating in an early childhood family education, school readiness, voluntary prekindergarten, Head Start, or other school-based preschool or prekindergarten program are not subject to dismissal.</p> <p>Exclusions and only when specified nonexclusionary discipline strategies (outlined below) are exhausted and there is “an ongoing serious safety threat to the child or others.”</p> <p>Nonexclusionary discipline must include at least one of the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Collaborating with the pupil's family or guardian, child mental health consultant or provider, education specialist, or other community-based support; 2. Creating a plan, written with the parent or guardian, that details the action and support needed for the 	<p>A pupil enrolled in a preschool or prekindergarten program, including a child participating in an early childhood family education, school readiness, voluntary prekindergarten, Head Start, or other school-based preschool or prekindergarten program are not subject to dismissal.</p> <p>Exclusions and only when specified nonexclusionary discipline strategies (outlined below) are exhausted and there is “an ongoing serious safety threat to the child or others.”</p> <p>Nonexclusionary discipline must include at least one of the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Collaborating with the pupil's family or guardian, child mental health consultant or provider, education specialist, or other community-based support; 2. Creating a plan, written with the parent or guardian, that details the action and support needed for the 	<p>As of October 21, 2024: Suspension continues to be a measure of last resort only when there is a serious safety threat. A program must explore all possible steps and document all steps taken to address the behaviors and supports needed to facilitate the child’s safe reentry and continued participation in the program. At a minimum:</p> <p>(i) Engage with the parents, mental health consultant, and other appropriate staff, and continuing to utilize appropriate community resources;</p> <p>(ii) Providing additional program supports and services, including home visits; and,</p> <p>(iii) Determining whether a referral to a local agency responsible for implementing IDEA is appropriate, or if</p>

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	<p>pupil to fully participate in a preschool or prekindergarten program; or</p> <p>3. Providing a referral for needed support services, including parenting education, home visits, other supportive education interventions, or, where appropriate, an evaluation to determine if the pupil is eligible for special education services or section 504 services.</p>	<p>pupil to fully participate in a preschool or prekindergarten program; or</p> <p>3. Providing a referral for needed support services, including parenting education, home visits, other supportive education interventions, or, where appropriate, an evaluation to determine if the pupil is eligible for special education services or section 504 services.</p>	<p>the child has an individualized family service plan (IFSP) or individualized education program (IEP), consulting with the responsible agency to ensure the child receives the needed support services.</p> <p><i>Prohibition on expulsion.</i></p> <p>(1) A program cannot expel or unenroll a child from Head Start because of a child’s behavior.</p> <p>(2) When a child exhibits persistent and serious behavioral concerns, a program must explore all possible steps and document all steps taken to address such problems, and facilitate the child’s safe participation in the program. Such steps must include, at a minimum, engaging a mental health consultant, considering the appropriateness of providing appropriate services and supports under section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 to ensure that the child who satisfies the definition of disability in 29 U.S.C. §705(9)(b) of the Rehabilitation Act is not excluded from the program on the basis of disability, and consulting with the parents and the child’s teacher, and:</p> <p>(i) If the child has an individualized family service plan (IFSP) or individualized education program (IEP), the program must consult with the agency responsible for the IFSP or IEP to ensure the child receives the needed support services; or,</p> <p>(ii) If the child does not have an IFSP or IEP, the program must collaborate, with parental consent, with</p>

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			<p>the local agency responsible for implementing IDEA to determine the child’s eligibility for services.</p> <p>(3) If, after a program has explored all possible steps and documented all steps taken as described in paragraph (b)(2) of this section, a program, in consultation with the parents, the child’s teacher, the agency responsible for implementing IDEA (if applicable), and the mental health consultant, determines that the child’s continued enrollment presents a continued serious safety threat to the child or other enrolled children and determines the program is not the most appropriate placement for the child, the program must work with such entities to directly facilitate the transition of the child to a more appropriate placement.</p> <p><i>Mental health consultants.</i> A program must ensure that mental health consultants provide consultation services that build the capacity of adults in an infant or young child’s life to strengthen and support the mental health and social and emotional development of children, including consultation</p> <p>Programs must use a multidisciplinary approach to mental health and wellness supports. Mental health consultation services must be available at a frequency of at least once a month; if a mental health consultant is not available to provide services at least once a month, programs must use other licensed mental health professionals or behavioral health support specialists who coordinate with a mental health consultant.</p>

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<i>Parent Involvement</i>	Must involve parents in program planning and decision making.	Involve parents in program decision-making and transition planning by implementing parent engagement strategies that include culturally and linguistically responsive activities in prekindergarten through third grade that are aligned with early childhood family education (ECFE).	<p>Involve parents in program planning and transition planning.. A program must promote shared responsibility with parents for children’s early learning and development, and implement family engagement strategies that are designed to foster parental confidence and skills in promoting children’s learning and development. These strategies must include:</p> <p>(1) Offering activities that support parent-child relationships and child development including language, dual language, literacy, and bi-literacy development as appropriate.</p> <p>(2) Providing parents with information about the importance of their child’s regular attendance, and partner with them, as necessary, to promote consistent attendance; and,</p> <p>(3) For dual language learners, information and resources for parents about the benefits of bilingualism and biliteracy.</p> <p>(b) A program must, at a minimum, offer opportunities for parents to participate in a research-based parenting curriculum that builds on parents’ knowledge and offers parents the opportunity to practice parenting skills to promote children’s learning and development.</p> <p><i>Engaging parents and family members.</i></p> <p>A program must offer opportunities for parents and family members to be involved in the program’s education services and implement policies to ensure:</p> <p>(1) The program’s settings are open to parents during all program hours;</p> <p>(2) Teachers regularly communicate with parents to ensure they are well-informed about their child’s routines, activities, and behavior;</p>

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			<p>(3) Teachers hold parent conferences, as needed, but no less than two times per program year, to enhance the knowledge and understanding of both staff and parents of the child’s education and developmental progress and activities in the program;</p> <p>(4) Parents have the opportunity to learn about and to provide feedback on selected curricula and instructional materials used in the program;</p> <p>(5) Parents and family members have opportunities to volunteer in the class and during group activities;</p> <p>(6) Teachers inform parents, about the purposes of and the results from screenings and assessments and discuss their child’s progress;</p> <p>(7) Teachers, except those described in paragraph (b)(8) of this section, conduct at least two home visits per program year for each family, including one before the program year begins, if feasible, to engage the parents in the child’s learning and development, except that such visits may take place at a program site or another safe location that affords privacy at the parent’s request, or if a visit to the home presents significant safety hazards for staff;</p> <p>(8) Teachers that serve migrant or seasonal families make every effort to conduct home visits to engage the family in the child’s learning and development; and</p> <p>(9) The program utilizes accessible communication methods and modalities that meet the needs of the community when engaging with prospective and enrolled families.</p>

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<i>Program Coordination</i>	<p>Coordinate appropriate kindergarten transition with parents and kindergarten teachers.</p> <p>Coordinate with relevant community-based services. Cooperate with adult basic education programs and other adult literacy programs.</p>	<p>Coordinate appropriate kindergarten transition with families, prekindergarten programs offered by Head Start, licensed center and licensed family child care, community-based organizations, and school district kindergarten programs.</p> <p>Coordinate with relevant community-based services, including health and social service agencies, to ensure children have access to comprehensive services; Coordinate with all relevant school district programs and services including early childhood special education, homeless students, and English learners.</p>	<p>Coordinate appropriate kindergarten transition with families, community-based pre-kindergarten programs, and school district kindergarten programs.</p> <p>Coordinate with relevant community-based services, including health and social service agencies, to ensure children have access to comprehensive services; Coordinate with all relevant school district programs and services including early childhood special education, homeless students, and English learners.</p>
<i>Professional Development</i>	<p>No statutory requirements regarding professional development</p>	<p>Provide high-quality coordinated professional development, training, and coaching for staff 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.</p>	<p>A program must implement a research-based, coordinated coaching strategy for education staff. A program must ensure coaches providing services must have a minimum of a baccalaureate degree in early childhood education or a related field. A program must establish and implement a systematic approach to staff training and professional development designed to assist staff in acquiring or increasing the knowledge and skills needed to provide high-quality, comprehensive services within the scope of their job responsibilities, and attached to academic credit as appropriate, and integrated with employee engagement practices.</p> <p>At a minimum, the system must include: Individual professional development plans and 15 clock hours annually of training: including curriculum, assessment, mandatory reporting, positive strategies to support social emotional development, health and safety, family engagement and child development.</p>

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<i>PreK-3rd Grade Alignment</i>	No statutory requirement regarding pre-kindergarten through grade three alignment. However, programs are required to coordinate appropriate kindergarten transition with parents and kindergarten teachers.	Implement strategies that support the alignment of professional development, instruction, assessments, and pre-kindergarten through grade three curricula.	Head Start supports alignment.
<i>Mixed Delivery</i>	<p>A district may contract with a charter school or community-based organization to provide services for eligible children. In the alternative, a district may pay tuition or fees to place an eligible child in an existing program. A district may establish a new program where none existed. Services may be provided in a site-based program or in the home of the child or a combination of both. The district may not restrict participation to district residents.</p> <p>School Readiness programs must also coordinate with relevant community-based services.</p>	<p>A district or charter school may contract with a charter school, Head Start program, licensed center & licensed family child care, or a community-based organization to provide eligible children with developmentally appropriate services that meet the program requirements.</p> <p>Components of a mixed-delivery plan include strategies for recruitment, contracting, and monitoring of fiscal compliances and program quality. A copy of the signed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) must be on file with DCYF prior to the first day of program services. It is collected through the required <i>Beginning of the Year</i> program survey administered August-September.</p>	<p>The Office of Head Start supports and encourages mixed delivery and community partnerships. Head Start Programs are required to have a Memo of Understanding (MOU) with their local LEA's. At a minimum, such strategies and activities must include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Coordination with schools or other appropriate agencies to ensure children’s relevant records are transferred to the school or next placement in which a child will enroll, consistent with privacy requirements in subpart C of part 1303 of this chapter; (ii) Communication between appropriate staff and their counterparts in the schools to facilitate continuity of learning and development, consistent with privacy requirements in subpart C of part 1303 of this chapter; and, (iii) Participation, as possible, for joint training and professional development activities for Head Start and kindergarten teachers and staff.
<i>Use of Other Funds</i>	No statutory requirement regarding use of other funds.	No statutory requirement regarding use of other funds.	Federal Head Start funds may be supplemented but not supplanted. This means when programs have

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			multiple funding sources, they are required to have a cost allocation plan.
<i>Application, Participation Limit and Reporting</i>	<p>School Readiness Funding is allocated directly into a districts budget. It is calculated based on the number of 0-4 children, as well as the percent of the district population that qualifies for educational benefits. Once a district declares that they will run a program, no further application is required.</p> <p>A school readiness program provider must include a biennial plan in the district's "Striving for Comprehensive Achievement and Civic Readiness" describing how the school readiness program meets the program requirements.</p>	<p>To qualify for program approval for fiscal year 2026, a district or charter school must submit an application to the commissioner by January 30, 2025. Thereafter, the commissioner must accept applications and approve programs every four years.</p> <p>To qualify for program approval after fiscal year 2026, a school district or charter school must submit an application to the commissioner by January 30 of the fiscal year prior to the fiscal year in which the program will be implemented. <i>The application must be renewed every 4 years.</i>* Programs will be notified by March 1 of their eligibility to receive funds. Final seat allocations are sent after the legislative session is completed (April-July).</p> <p>The application must include a Statement of Assurances signed by the Superintendent or the charter school Director.</p> <p>Participation is limited to 60 percent of the kindergarten pupil units for the district or charter school.</p> <p>*Details are available on the VPK website</p>	<p>Head Start programs must complete state and federal application processes.</p> <p>Head Start programs must provide services to 100 percent of the children they are funded to serve. Section 642(g) of the Head Start Act requires each Head Start agency to enroll 100 percent of its funded enrollment and maintain an active waiting list at all times with ongoing outreach to the community and activities to identify underserved populations.</p> <p>Head Start programs are required to report enrollment monthly, federal and state.</p>