

## FY27 Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) Program Verification Process – Administrator FAQ

Note: This document was updated on 2-9-2026. Additional questions appear at the end of the original section (yellow highlighted).

### VPK Program Verification Process Overview

The Department of Children Youth and Families (DCYF) has developed a process that will require currently funded programs to verify the site allocation (seats) and instructional calendar information to confirm school year 2026-27 use of VPK seats.

**Verification Process:** The FY2027 VPK Verification Process Survey **will open on January 23, 2026 at 9:00 AM, and close on February 20, 2026 at 4:00 PM.**

**Who Must Complete the Verification Survey:** All districts and charter schools that applied in January 2025 as part of the FY26-FY29 funding cycle are required to complete the verification survey to maintain current funding or qualify for funding as additional funds become available.

- **All currently funded** districts and charter schools interested in continued or expansion funding for FY27 are required to complete the verification survey to receive ongoing funding.
- **Currently unfunded** districts who applied for SFY26 are required to complete the Verification survey to be considered for available or new funding that may be made available by the legislature for FY27 or beyond.

All districts and charter schools were sent the information and links to the FY27 VPK Verification Process on January 22, 2026.

This question and answer (Q & A) document include questions anticipated or received by Minnesota Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) regarding the VPK verification process. This document will be updated every Monday with questions received during the verification process.

Guidance and resource materials are posted within the **VPK FY27 Verification Process Survey** Questions about the Verification Process can be emailed to [DCYF.VPK@state.mn.us](mailto:DCYF.VPK@state.mn.us).

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## General Program Verification Process Questions

**Q: My district is not currently a VPK funded site, can my district participate in the Annual Verification process during the 4-year cycle?**

Since your district didn't apply for VPK funding last January 2025, your district will not be able to participate in the FY27 VPK Program Verification Survey.

The next VPK application period will be in January 2029 for fiscal years FY30-33.

## Eligibility and Sliding Fee Scale Requirements

**Q. What legislative changes should early learning administrators be aware of for FY27?**

During the 2024 legislative session, changes were made to voluntary prekindergarten [Minnesota Statute 2024 section 142D. 08](#). Changes that will impact, **Fiscal Year (FY) 27** are:

- VPK applications now follow a four-year cycle. The FY26 application period ran January 3–30, 2025.
- Students must meet eligibility requirements

### **New 2-9-2026**

**Q. I'm unable to locate the Statement of Assurance?**

During the Verification Process, there is not a separate Statement of Assurance (this was included in the January 2025 VPK application). Instead, there is a section at the end of the online Verification Survey for Superintendents and Program lead signatures.

**Q: What are the VPK student eligibility requirements?**

To be eligible for free VPK, a child must be 4 years old on or before September 1 of the program year and meet at least one additional criterion, including:

- Eligibility for free/reduced-price meals.
- Meeting financial criteria per MN Statute 142E.10.
- American Indian status.
- English language learner status (MN Statute 124D.59).
- Homelessness within the last 24 months.
- Developmental screening risk factors (MN Statutes 142D.09–142D.093).
- Foster care, kinship care (Northstar), or child protection involvement.
- Parent incarcerated or a migrant/seasonal agricultural worker.
- Being identified as “at-risk” by the school district.

**Q: What does “at-risk” as determined by district mean, and how can districts define it?**

**Enrollment Eligibility:** VPK enrolled students need to meet [age and eligibility requirements](#) as listed on the signed Statement of Assurance document submitted with your application. **Eligibility must be determined individually for each student.** Eligibility cannot be determined at a whole school/site level (including established attendance boundaries for that site). District [open enrollment](#) policies apply.

**Risk as determined by district:** Can be determined individually based on family circumstance such as divorce, death of parent, loss of employment, or loss of transportation. Community circumstance may apply such as closure of major employer resulting in job loss, child care desert, etc.

**Income Eligibility:** As you prepare program enrollment forms for 2026-27 school year, please note that income levels were updated in October. This [chart](#) gives updated information. Some districts include this information in their parent applications. Districts may consider and elect to use the higher income range (85% State Median Income and/or up to 130% FPG for reduced price lunch) as a district determined risk factor.

**Q: Are children with IEPs eligible for VPK?**

Yes. A child with an IEP cannot be excluded from participation if all other eligibility criteria are met and the IEP team determines the child can benefit from the program with reasonable accommodations.

See the following resources for more information about enrolling students with IEPs in VPK classrooms:

- [Concurrent Enrollment VPK/EC Flow Chart](#)
- [Procedure 06 - EC - Reporting Early Childhood Special Education Students](#)

**Q: Should we prioritize certain children when seats are limited?**

Yes. DCYF recommends prioritizing high-need populations, including those eligible for:

- VPK
- Early Learning Scholarships (per MN Statute 142D.25, subd. 3)
- School Readiness services

Programs may use [Early Learning Scholarship](#) prioritization guidelines to rank applications.

**Q: How are districts being asked to document/verify the risk criteria listed for VPK eligibility?**

Generally speaking, the risk factors in statute [Minnesota Statute 2024 section 142D. 08](#) can be verified by the parent providing information and a signature that assures the accuracy of the information. This is similar to the language used on the Education Benefits Application that families must fill out annually, unless they are directly certified through the state-described process.

**Q: What is required under the sliding fee scale statute?**

- School districts and charter schools must use state funding for eligible children to the extent it is available.
- A child may participate in a voluntary prekindergarten program on a fee-for-service basis if the child does not meet the eligibility criteria listed on the previous slide 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.
- No fees may be charged for eligible VPK children during instructional hours claimed in ADM (up to 510 hours or 0.6 ADM).

**Q: How should we structure a sliding fee scale?**

Best practices include:

- Align with Free/Reduced-Price Meal guidelines or State Median Income thresholds.
- Check with neighboring districts to see how they have designed their sliding fee scale.
- Work with your ECFE advisory council to create or revise your sliding fee scale.
- Develop 3–6 tiered levels, such as:
  - 100% subsidized at ≤47% SMI
  - 75% subsidized at ~52% SMI
  - 50% subsidized at ~57% SMI
  - 25% subsidized at ~62% SMI
  - 0% subsidy (full pay) at ≥67% SMI

**Q: Do we need a sliding fee scale if we don't charge tuition?**

No. If your district does not charge preschool fees, a sliding fee scale is not required.

**Q: How should charter schools manage eligibility and enrollment?**

Charter schools may only seek basic information about applicants seeking admission, such as the student's name, name of parent or guardian, contact information, and the grade or program for which the student is applying, and information related to possible enrollment preferences for which the prospective student may qualify. Additional information such as race, age, ethnicity, and disability status can be collected on enrollment forms once a student has been admitted to the school. This includes information to determine whether an admitted student meets the eligibility criteria under [Minnesota Statute 2024, section 142D.08, subdivision 4\(a\)\(2\)](#) in order for the school's voluntary prekindergarten program to be eligible to receive state funding for the

child. An admitted student who does not meet the eligibility criteria under section [142D.08](#), subdivision 4(a)(2) and who is otherwise eligible to enroll under section [Minnesota Statute 2024, section 124E.11](#) must be enrolled in the charter school; however, the charter school will not receive state funds under section 142D.08

**Q: How do charter schools with VPK programs meet charter school application and lottery requirements?**

A charter school may notify families that in order for the school to be eligible to receive state funding, their child must meet the eligibility criteria under section [Minnesota Statute 2024, section 142D.08, subdivision 4\(a\)\(2\)](#). A charter school may also notify families that, per section [142D.08](#), subdivision 4(b), “A child may participate in a voluntary prekindergarten program on a fee-for-service basis if the child does not meet the eligibility criteria in paragraph (a) 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.” A charter school may not establish the eligibility criteria under section 142D.08, subdivision 4(a)(2) as criteria or requirements for admission to the school’s voluntary prekindergarten program, per [Minnesota Statute 2024, section 124E.11, paragraph \(e\)](#).

## Site and Allocation Questions

**Q: When will I find out if our program has been selected to receive VPK funding?**

Currently funded programs can anticipate renewal of currently funded seats. Final Confirmation Notifications will be sent after the spring legislative session concludes.

**Q: Can we move some of our VPK seats to the early learning site operated by our district?**

Yes, we will work with you after allocations are made to amend the location of your seats. At that time we will determine with MDE if a new site number is needed for the early learning site so that VPK general education funding will be generated by that site. Please add a note to your Verification Site Survey so that DCYF staff can follow-up and help you initiate this process.

**Q: Can we move some of our FY26 allocated seats to another currently funded site?**

Yes, we are allowing districts and charter schools to move seats between currently funded sites during the Verification Process to support your program planning as you determine classroom space and enrollment numbers for FY27. Please add a note to your Verification Site Survey so that DCYF staff is aware of the number of seats that you are shifting from one site to another.

**Q: Is the number of students with each calendar only the VPK seats? Or all students at that site?**

The number of students that you will work with for the site will match the number of seats that you requested last year for that site. The information will be listed in the email that you receive from DCYF.

**Q: Enrollment numbers for next year are an estimation or do we use actual 2026 numbers?**

You will work with the numbers that were submitted with your application last year and listed in the letter you received from DCYF (both funded and unfunded seats). If you need to adjust the location so that you can best use the funded seats, you can adjust numbers between funded sites and add a note so that we understand that you want to make that change. You may want to request these changes if you've had a shift in enrollment attending a given site or the number of classrooms that are available at a site has changed.

**Q: We have a site that will be closing for the 2026-27 school year and an elementary site that we will no longer have a classroom at for the 2026-27 school year. Column I asks for site details as of 4/30/26. On that date, the sites will still be offering preschool/VPK. After this school year, we will no longer have preschool in these locations. How should I complete the spreadsheet for these locations?**

**Also, we have a site that will have additional classrooms for the 2026-27 school year, should I put the current number of classrooms or the number of classrooms for the 2026-27 school year in column O?**

Please use your current information/programs to reflect as of 4/30/2026 in the Parent Aware Rating sheet. You may make adjustments later. If you are adding new classrooms for the 2026–27 school year, ensure that lead teachers meet VPK requirements, or for non-VPK classrooms, that lead teachers meet Parent Aware requirements.

**Q: One more question, if we have classes that are under 350 hours per year, but we still employ licensed teachers, use Creative Curriculum, has GOLD, etc., do we need to place those classes in column Q on the Parent Aware spreadsheet. What standard specifically are we answering for in column P?**

Column P is for classrooms that meet VPK requirements. Column Q is for classrooms that do not meet VPK requirements but do meet School Readiness requirements. VPK requires a minimum of 350 instructional hours, so in this case it should be included in Column Q.

## Instructional Calendars

**Q: Are students funded based on the number of instructional hours for each student?**

Yes. Funding for each student is based on the instructional hours for that student, up to a maximum of 510 hours for a student. For example, students receiving 415 hours of instruction for the year will generate 0.49 ADM and pupil units; students receiving 510 or more hours of instruction will generate 0.6 ADM and pupil units.

If your program offers more than 510 hours of instruction, other funds (school readiness, Pathway II, other general education or local funds including parent paid fees) may be braided and blended with VPK funds to equal 1.0 ADM.

**Q: What activities count as instructional time?**

Instructional time is defined as guided learning time for children. The following activities beyond planned classroom instructional activities may be considered instructional time:

- Meals for part- or half-day programs may be counted as instructional time when teachers eat with their children and take advantage of the numerous learning opportunities provided when seated together. Lunch time for full-day programs may not be counted as instructional time, even when a teacher eats with the children.
- Rest time of up to 30 minutes may count as instructional time for programs offering more than four hours. Adult-child ratios must be maintained during rest hours.
- Outdoor learning or recess can be counted as instructional time if children are engaged with planned activities that are led by the teacher before being given some free play and exploration time. If children are not involved in guided activities, outdoor play is not considered instructional time.

**Q: One of our weeks is longer than the rest. How do we represent that, so it calculates correctly?**

The sheet is just looking for total number of scheduled instructional days on Line 7. The extra day(s) can be added to the total.

**Q: Can instructional days include parent days such as conferences?**

No, children must be present and engaged in classroom learning with a classroom teacher for a day to be counted as an instructional day. Parent days and parent-teacher conference days are not counted as instructional days.

**Q: Can summer programming be counted as part of the 350-hour program requirement?**

No. The 350 hours for the VPK program is the number of hours the program runs for all children enrolled in the program during the school calendar for that grade. The VPK hours must be reported during the fiscal year it is funded. A school year is funded from July 1 to June 30. Any program after June 30 is funded in the next school year.

The general rule for E-12 school districts is that the school year cannot start before Labor Day. The only exceptions would be if the district is on an approved learning year program, or the district has a construction project of \$400,000 or more that requires a change in the school calendar to accommodate the construction. The same rule would apply to prekindergarten programs operated by a school district. Charter schools are not bound by the Labor Day start rule.

Historically, summer programs are usually run for a couple of weeks in the summer for a set number of children who have limited early childhood education experiences and will be entering kindergarten in the fall. The hours this type of program would not be considered VPK.

**Q: For the calendar day/hours provided- what if it has not been set yet? If we say the same as this year can it be changed later?**

Yes, we will be able to adjust calendar numbers once they have been confirmed by your district later this spring. Please add a note in that section of the survey that will let us know to watch for the change.

**Q: Is the number of students listed in each calendar only the VPK seats? Or all students in the site?**

The number of students that you will work with for the site will match the number of seats that you requested last year for that site. The information will be listed in the email that you receive from DCYF.

**Q: Our calendar 1 is a 2.5-hour-per-day half-day program. So this is 170 instructional days 150 minutes of instruction per day and 425 instructional minutes per year.**

A half-day program with 170 instructional days @ 150 minutes/day=425 instructional hours/year. This will equate to .5 ADM/student.

**Q: Our new calendar will be a bell-to-bell program at our elementary sites for 6.25 hours. I am trying to understand the maximum value of .6 ADM for VPK. Can my total instructional hours per day be 375?**

Calendar 2: A full-day program with 170 instructional days @ 375 minutes/day=1,062.5 instructional hours/year. This will equate to .6 ADM/student or pay for 510 of the total instructional hours. This means that you can braid/blend other funding sources with VPK to pay for the 552.5 hours beyond the 510 hours that VPK will fund the total 1,062.5 hour program that you are offering. This means that your entry in the screenshot below is correct. We want to know the full scope of the program that you will be offering. It helps us better understand and document what is being offered to 4-year olds

## **Maintenance and Facility**

**Q: Can all applicants request money for renovation or construction? What are the guidelines?**

Districts that had an approved VPK application under the original statute, or received VPK approval via the funding reallocations, are eligible for long-term facilities maintenance (LTFM) remodeling levy authority under current law.

**Q: Does applying for remodeling or lease funding help or harm your application consideration in any way?**

No, this is not a factor in the scoring and ranking criteria and will not impact your application.

**Q: What portion of the total amount has been allotted for construction costs?**

No specific portion has been allotted specifically for construction costs. School districts approved for VPK may request an increase in LTFM revenue for the cost of remodeling existing instructional space to accommodate prekindergarten instruction. LTFM revenue is funded partly with state aid and partly with local property tax levies. The aid portion will go against the aid limit; the levy portion will not. School districts may also levy for building lease costs; since that is a local levy, it will also not count against the aid limit for the program. Charter school building lease aid may also increase due to added pupil units and/or added space needed by charter schools. The increase in charter school lease aid will count against the aid limit for the program.

While the increases in LTFM and school building lease levies will not directly count against the aid limit for the program, an increase in operating capital aid (offset by an equal decrease in the operating capital levy) was

enacted as part of the VPK legislation to neutralize the estimated overall effect of the program on school levies. This aid increase will occur regardless of the actual increases that occur in LTFM and school building lease levies. Therefore, the cost of neutralizing the levy impact of the prekindergarten program will count against the aid limit for the program.

**Q: Will there be funds to help equip new classrooms from existing instructional rooms?**

There is no additional funding specifically for equipment costs. Districts can use part of the general education aid and levy revenue generated by the prekindergarten pupil units to purchase equipment for the program like tables and chairs.

**Q: If we are unsure if there are any short- or long-term plans to remodel, how should we respond?**

School districts with an approved VPK program under Minnesota Statutes 2024, section 142D.08 are eligible to increase Longer-Term Facilities Maintenance (LTFM) revenue for the cost approved by the commissioner for remodeling existing instructional space to accommodate prekindergarten instruction. A narrative is required describing the scope and cost of the project to remodel existing instructional space to accommodate prekindergarten instruction.

If you are unsure how to report remodeling plans in the *VPK Program Verification Process Survey*, please email [DCYF.VPK@state.mn.us](mailto:DCYF.VPK@state.mn.us) and describe your district or charter's specific situation so it can be reviewed with school finance staff.

## Parent Aware Automatic Rating

**Q: Who is eligible for the VPK Automatic Rating?**

FY 26 VPK-funded programs and their partners are eligible for an Automatic Four-Star Parent Aware Rating because VPK statute requirements meet or exceed the Parent Aware Indicators.

Programs that were not VPK funded in the FY 2026 cannot apply to the Automatic Parent Aware Rating.

**Q: What Parent Aware rating will programs receive, and for what period, if they apply during the FY27 VPK Verification Survey?**

Programs applying for the Automatic Parent Aware Rating during the FY27 VPK Verification Survey will receive a **Four-Star Parent Aware Rating** for a two-year period, from **April 30, 2026, through April 30, 2028**.

**Q: Who should be listed as the Parent Aware Primary Contact?**

The Parent Aware contact should be the staff member from the district or charter school who currently works with or will work with Parent Aware implementation. For some districts or charter schools, the VPK program coordinator and the Parent Aware contact may be the same person. This individual will be contacted if there are questions about your sites or Rating.

**Q: Where do I find the *Parent Aware Participation Agreement*?**

Programs will sign the *Parent Aware Participation Agreement* within the online application.

**Q: Who needs to sign the *Parent Aware Participation Agreement*?**

The *Parent Aware Participation Agreement* must be signed by the Superintendent of your school district or Executive Director of your charter school.

**Q: Do I need to submit a site list within the application?**

Yes, you will upload the complete '2026 VPK Rating Site List' to the FY27 VPK Verification Survey **by February 20 at 4:00 p.m.** DCYF will review the information and will contact you if there are any questions. Once finalized, DCYF will submit your program and site details to the Parent Aware rating team to complete the re-rating process.

**Q: What do I do if sites or partnerships have changed since my program was rated in April 2024?**

If sites or partnerships change during the two-year rating period (e.g., a site closes or opens, or a site's name or address changes), update those changes on the "2026 VPK Rating Site List" file and upload it to the FY27 VPK Verification survey.

**Q: What do I do if sites or partnerships change after my program is rated in April 2026?**

If sites or partnerships change during the two-year rating (i.e., closing or opening a site, changing the address or name of a site), please contact [ParentAware.DCYF@state.mn.us](mailto:ParentAware.DCYF@state.mn.us) to request an addendum.

Please note: It is important to request an addendum so that your Parent Aware rating accurately reflects your current sites. If sites are not included in your rating, they are not eligible for Early Learning Scholarships (Pathway I or Pathway II).

**Q: Does my program need to be Parent Aware Rated to receive VPK funding?**

No, districts and charter schools do not need to be Parent Aware Rated to receive VPK funding. However, your program must be rated to receive Pathway II funding, your program should have and maintain a Four-Star Parent Aware Rating. Additionally, to receive Pathway I scholarships, your program must participate in Parent Aware.

**New 2-9-26**

**Q: We have a site that will be closing for the 2026-27 school year and an elementary site that we will no longer have a classroom at for the 2026-27 school year. Column I asks for site details as of 4/30/26. On that date, the sites will still be offering preschool/VPK. After this school year, we will no longer have preschool in these locations. How should I complete the spreadsheet for these locations? Also, we have a site that will have additional classrooms for the 2026-27 school year, should I put the current number of classrooms or the number of classrooms for the 2026-27 school year in column O?**

Please include the sites as of 4/30/26. You may submit a [Parent Aware Addendum Form](#) later if you are adding or closing sites. Please use your current information.

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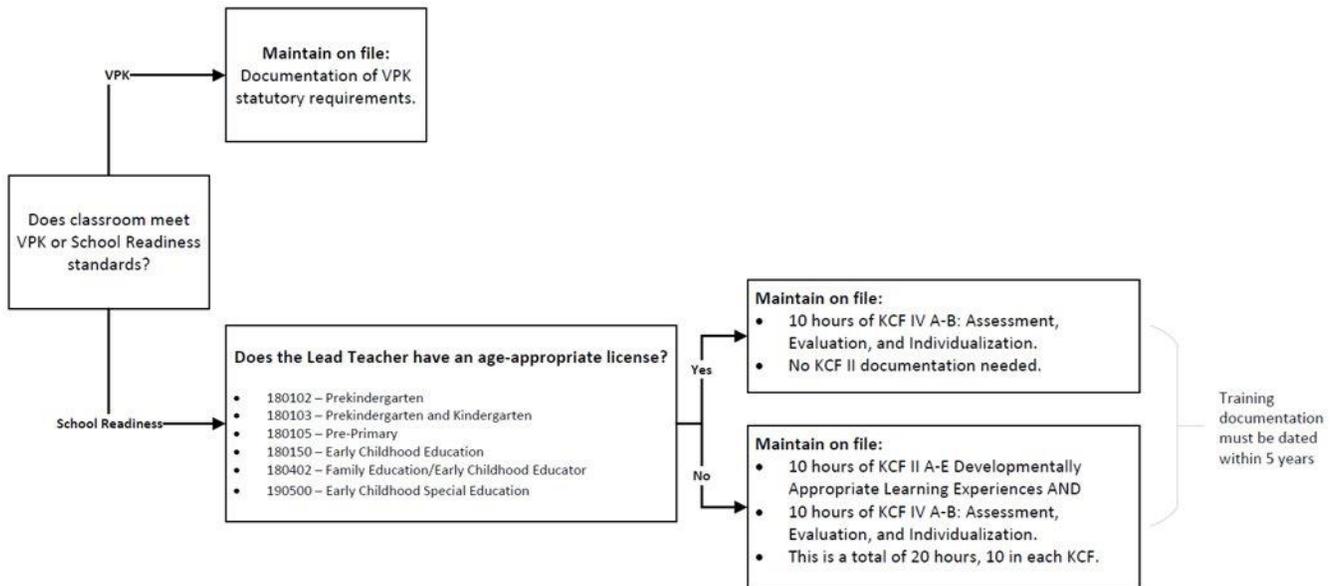
If you are adding new classrooms for the 2026–27 school year, ensure that the new sites meet VPK or School Readiness requirements, and that lead teachers meet VPK requirements for VPK classrooms or Parent Aware training requirements for non-VPK classrooms.

**New 2-9-26**

**Q: Are lead teachers in non-VPK classrooms that meet School Readiness requirements required to complete Parent Aware training? If most lead teachers in a classroom meet the Parent Aware training requirements but one does not, should the classroom still be listed in Column Q, and what should be recorded in Column R?**

If a classroom meets the School Readiness requirements, it should be included in Column Q. Lead teachers in School Readiness classrooms are expected to follow the Parent Aware training requirements outlined in the Decision Tree below.

If a lead teacher in the classroom has not met the Parent Aware training requirements at the time your program submits the Parent Aware Automatic Rating application, enter “No” in Column R. DCYF will work with your program to help meet the Parent Aware training requirements. The site will still be included in your program's Parent Aware Rating, even if not all lead teachers at that site have completed the Parent Aware trainings.



As shown in the Decision Tree, if the lead teacher in a School Readiness classroom has an age-appropriate license, the program should maintain on file:

- 10 hours of KCF IV A-B: Assessment, Evaluation, and Individualization
- No KCF II documentation needed

If the lead teacher does not have an age-appropriate license, the program should maintain on file:

- 10 hours of KCF II A-E Developmentally Appropriate Learning Experiences AND
- 10 hours of KCF IV A-B: Assessment, Evaluation, and Individualization

- This is a total of 20 hours, 10 in each KCF

For both license situations, training documentation must be dated within 5 years.

#### **New 2-9-26**

**Q: What should I do if I recently renewed my Parent Aware rating and it doesn't expire until 12/11/2027? Should I select "No" for question #18, or is there another recommended option?**

If your program is on the Parent Aware Accelerated Pathway, you have the option to apply through the Parent Aware Automatic Pathway. This option is available because your program is currently VPK-funded, and VPK requirements exceed Parent Aware requirements. Choosing the Automatic Pathway aligns your Parent Aware rating process with your annual VPK survey and streamlines the process.

If you choose to apply through the Automatic Pathway, you will continue to hold your current Parent Aware rating through 12/11/2027 while also receiving an Automatic Pathway rating. After 12/11/2027, your program will continue under the Automatic Pathway rating until 4/30/2028, when your next rating will align with your annual VPK survey. Your re-rating process will be simpler and follow the VPK schedule as long as your program continues to receive VPK funding.

Participation in the Automatic Pathway is voluntary. If you choose not to participate, you should select "No" and will re-rate through the Accelerated Pathway, submitting all required supporting documentation.

#### **Remember:**

- Programs must participate in Parent Aware to receive Pathway I scholarships.
- Programs must hold a Four-Star Parent Aware rating to receive a Pathway II scholarships allocation.