DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND FAMILIES

Eligibility Requirements for Preschool Funding Streams

SR= School Readiness, VPK= Voluntary Prekindergarten, PWII= Pathway II Early Learning Scholarship

Purpose: Voluntary Prekindergarten Programs, School Readiness, and Early Learning Scholarship funds increase access to high quality early childhood programs for children in Minnesota. This document is designed to help districts identify student and family eligibility requirements of each funding stream and answer questions about verifying student eligibility in school-based public prekindergarten programs.

Frequently Asked Questions

Do programs need to verify eligibility for a Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) seat?

Voluntary prekindergarten program requirements are established in Minnesota Statutes, section 142D.08 (2024) to ensure a high-quality early learning experience for eligible four-year-old children. Beginning in 2025, a child must be four years old as of September 1st and meet one of the additional eligibility requirements for voluntary prekindergarten (see list below). Early Childhood Programs are responsible for verifying eligibility of each child enrolled in their program.

How do districts verify that families meet the eligibility requirements for School Readiness, Voluntary Prekindergarten and Pathway II Early Learning Scholarship funds?

School Readiness and Voluntary Prekindergarten programs: The review process, and specific verification documentation requested from families at the time of program application, may vary. School districts determine how their school readiness and VPK programs verify eligibility. Districts should consider including questions within the program application that have families indicate how children meet the age **and** additional eligibility criteria. By completing the questions and signing the program application, applicants attest to their eligibility. When asking families for eligibility verification, considerations should be made regarding district policies related to data retention policies and privacy. DCYF recommends aligning practices with other program requirements such as those outlined on the Educational Benefits Application form. The information provided on the Educational Benefits Application is used by food and nutrition services and school finance for compensatory fund calculations. DCYF encourages districts to collect Educational Benefits applications as a part of the program application process.

Pathway II Early Learning Scholarship funds are awarded to Parent Aware Four-Star Rated programs through a bi-annual funding application process. Pathway II programs receive funding to award scholarships directly to eligible children attending their program. Pathway II programs verify

eligibility, award scholarships, deliver services, and request payment for services. Pathway II implementation requirements and guidance on scholarship documents including eligibility verification can be found on the Pathway II Program Resources for Awardees webpage.

How do charter schools with voluntary prekindergarten meet charter school application and lottery requirements?

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 Statutes, 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 Minnesota Statutes, section 124E.11 must be enrolled in the charter school; however, the charter school will not receive state funds under section 142D.08. Questions about charter school application and lottery requirements should be directed to mde.charterschools@state.mn.us

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 Statutes, 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 Statutes, section 124E.11, paragraph (e).

Should programs prioritize enrollment of children who are eligible for VPK and Early Learning Scholarships?

Eligibility for school readiness, early learning scholarships and voluntary prekindergarten are determined by state statute. Early Learning Scholarships include a prioritization requirement that can be found in Minnesota Statutes, section 142D.25, subdivision 3. In recognition of the fact that districts have limited seat allocations for VPK, it is the recommendation of the Department of Children Youth and Families (DCYF), that programs prioritize high needs populations. School districts could follow the prioritization categories as stated for early learning scholarships, including prioritizing children under the age of 4 who would not meet the age requirement for VPK. The Voluntary Prekindergarten implementation manual also outlines recommendations for enrollment prioritization of eligible children.

What is meant by the eligibility criteria for VPK and SR, "Is defined as at risk through the school district"?

This language was intended to give school districts flexibility in determining how to qualify children for VPK and school readiness funding. Information gathered from families and the district community can be used to determine what additional factors are impacting families and children who are otherwise eligible to attend their program. Examples of circumstances for this category might include:

- Family hardship or extenuating circumstances that make paying for care or accessing other prekindergarten options difficult.
- Community determined risk factors
- Limited access to other care options due to transportation, availability, or distance.
- If the family qualifies for funding under PWII at the 85% State Median Income (SMI) eligibility level- particularly if there are other risk factors present.

Eligibility	SR	VPK	PWII
Child is Age 3 on Sept 1	x		x
Child is age 4 on Sept 1	x	x	x
Has completed health and developmental screening within 90 days of program enrollment	x	x	x
And meets one of the following criteria			
Child qualifies for educational benefits	x	x	x
Child fall under income guidelines designated in MN Statute 142E.10 (47% of State Median income)		x	x
Is in foster care, kinship care or child protective services		x	x
Has experienced homelessness in the past 24 months	x	x	x
Has a parent who is incarcerated		x	x
Has a parent who is seasonal or migrant worker.		x	
Is an English Language Learner	x	x	
Is American Indian		x	
Is identified through health and developmental screening with a potential risk factor that may influence learning	x	x	
Is defined as at risk through the school district	x	x	
Has an individualized education program (IEP) or standardized written plan	x	x	x