

VPK Guidance – Required State-Approved GOLD Assessment Items for School Year (SY) 2026–27

Audience: This guidance is for voluntary prekindergarten (VPK) programs using developmentally appropriate state-approved assessments.¹ Other early learning programs may benefit from understanding the assessment requirements for VPK, especially those that partner with VPK or operate within the same district or school. Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) programs that elect to submit assessment data to MDE to obtain Child Outcome Summary (COS) ratings must complete and submit data for all assessment items in all domains of learning for ECSE students, including ECSE students who participate in VPK. Head Start programs must still meet the federal requirements around the use of assessments (Head Start Program Performance Standards 1302.22). Other early learning programs, like parent-aware rated child care programs, may find this guidance valuable.

Purpose: To inform VPK programs of the School Year 2026–27 minimum assessment items that must be completed to support successful learners. For SY 2026–27, Minnesota is requiring items that align to five domains of learning: Approaches to Learning (ATL); Language, Literacy, and Communications (LLC); Mathematics (MATH); Physical and Movement (PHYS); and Social Emotional (S&E). The five domains of learning required by VPK in SY 2026–27 represent a whole child approach to learning and align with (1) the domains that are required to be assessed by School Readiness programs and (2) the domains a Parent Aware-approved assessment must cover.

NOTE 1: This guidance represents the *minimum* number of items that a VPK program must use. Additional domains and items may be advisable based on the needs of your program and students, particularly students with disabilities and students for whom there are developmental concerns. If you have questions, please direct them to dcyf.els@state.mn.us.

NOTE 2: Below are the required items that a VPK program must use out of the total number of items, for the GOLD assessment tool:

- GOLD: 49 items out of 73 items (and two items for English language learners and four items for children with an IEP—that are NOT required)

NOTE 3: DCYF no longer supports paper/pencil data submissions; a VPK program **must** use the online version of their assessment tool of choice to submit assessment data. If you have questions about data submission requirements, please direct them to Alex Verhoye at alex.verhoye@state.mn.us or to dcyf.els@state.mn.us.

¹ VPK programs are required to use commissioner-approved formative, developmentally appropriate assessments, including the use of an approved assessment to collect data when a child enters and again before the child leaves the program (program [Minn. Stat. § 142D.08](#)).

Table 1: GOLD Items Required for VPK Programs in SY 2026–27

The table below includes only the required GOLD items for VPK programs in SY 2026–27. The items that must be completed are aligned to five domains of learning: ATL, LLC, MATH, PHYSICAL, and S&E. Administrators from different early learning programs within a district/school are encouraged to discuss the similarities and differences in which items are used by each program. To support successful learners, it may be beneficial to use additional items and domains for students receiving special education and related services or for whom there are developmental concerns.

GOLD Item	Required SY 2026-27	GOLD Domain and Item Description	ECIP Domain of Learning Alignment[†]
1a	✓	Social Emotional: Regulates own emotions and behaviors - Manages feelings	S&E
1b	✓	Social Emotional: Regulates own emotions and behaviors - Follows limits and expectations	S&E
1c	✓	Social Emotional: Regulates own emotions and behaviors - Takes care of own needs appropriately	S&E
1c1		<i>Only visible if child has IEP selected: Social Emotional: Eating and drinking</i>	--
1c2		<i>Only visible if child has IEP selected: Social Emotional: Toileting and personal hygiene</i>	--
1c3		<i>Only visible if child has IEP selected: Social Emotional: Dressing</i>	--
1c4		<i>Only visible if child has IEP selected: Social Emotional: Personal Safety</i>	--
2a	✓	Social Emotional: Establishes and sustains positive relationships - Forms relationships with adults	S&E
2b	✓	Social Emotional: Establishes and sustains positive relationships - Responds to emotional cues	S&E
2c	✓	Social Emotional: Establishes and sustains positive relationships - Interacts with peers	S&E
2d	✓	Social Emotional: Establishes and sustains positive relationships - Makes friends	S&E
3a	✓	Social Emotional: Participates cooperatively and constructively in group situations - Balances needs and rights of self and others	SS
3b	✓	Social Emotional: Participates cooperatively and constructively in group situations - Solves social problems	S&E
4	✓	Physical: Demonstrates traveling skills	PHYS
5	✓	Physical: Demonstrates balancing skills	PHYS
6	✓	Physical: Demonstrates gross-motor manipulative skills	PHYS
7a	✓	Physical: Demonstrates fine-motor strength and coordination – Uses fingers and hands	PHYS
7b	✓	Physical: Demonstrates fine-motor strength and coordination – Uses writing and drawing tools	PHYS
8a	✓	Language: Listens to and understands increasingly complex language - Comprehends language	LLC
8b	✓	Language: Listens to and understands increasingly complex language - Follows directions	LLC
9a	✓	Language: Uses language to express thoughts and needs - Uses an expanding expressive vocabulary	LLC
9b	✓	Language: Uses language to express thoughts and needs - Speaks clearly	LLC
9c	✓	Language: Uses language to express thoughts and needs - Uses conventional grammar	LLC
9d	✓	Language: Uses language to express thoughts and needs - Tells about another time or place	LLC
10a	✓	Language: Uses appropriate conversational and other communication skills - Engages in conversations	LLC
10b	✓	Language: Uses appropriate conversational and other communication skills - Uses social rules of language	S&E
11a	✓	Cognitive: Demonstrates positive approaches to learning - Attends and engages	ATL
11b	✓	Cognitive: Demonstrates positive approaches to learning - Persists	ATL
11c		Cognitive: Demonstrates positive approaches to learning - Solves problems	SCI

GOLD Item	Required SY 2026-27	GOLD Domain and Item Description	ECIP Domain of Learning Alignment [†]
11d	✓	Cognitive: Demonstrates positive approaches to learning - Shows curiosity and motivation	ATL
11e	✓	Cognitive: Demonstrates positive approaches to learning - Shows flexibility and inventiveness in thinking	ATL
12a		Cognitive: Remembers and connects experiences - Recognizes and recalls	SS
12b		Cognitive: Remembers and connects experiences - Makes connections	SS
13	✓	Cognitive: Uses classification skills	MATH
14a	✓	Cognitive: Uses symbols and images to represent something not present - Thinks symbolically	ATL
14b	✓	Cognitive: Uses symbols and images to represent something not present - Engages in sociodramatic play	ATL
15a	✓	Literacy: Demonstrates phonological awareness, phonics skills, and word recognition - Notices and discriminates rhyme	LLC
15b	✓	Literacy: Demonstrates phonological awareness, phonics skills, and word recognition - Notices and discriminates alliteration	LLC
15c	✓	Literacy: Demonstrates phonological awareness, phonics skills, and word recognition - Notices and discriminates discrete units of sound	LLC
15d	✓	Literacy: Demonstrates phonological awareness, phonics skills, and word recognition - Applies phonics concepts and knowledge of word structure to decode text	LLC
16a	✓	Literacy: Demonstrates knowledge of the alphabet - Identifies and names letters	LLC
16b		Literacy: Demonstrates knowledge of the alphabet - Identifies letter-sound correspondences	--
17a	✓	Literacy: Demonstrates knowledge of print and its uses - Uses and appreciates books and other texts	LLC
17b	✓	Literacy: Demonstrates knowledge of print and its uses - Uses print concepts	LLC
18a	✓	Literacy: Comprehends and responds to books and other texts - Interacts during reading experiences, book conversations, and text reflections	LLC
18b	✓	Literacy: Comprehends and responds to books and other texts - Uses emergent reading skills	LLC
18c	✓	Literacy: Comprehends and responds to books and other texts - Retells stories and recounts details from informational texts	LLC
18d		Literacy: Comprehends and responds to books and other texts - Uses context clues to read and comprehend texts	--
18e		Literacy: Comprehends and responds to books and other texts - Reads fluently	--
19a	✓	Literacy: Demonstrates writing skills - Writes name	LLC
19b	✓	Literacy: Demonstrates writing skills - Writes to convey meaning	LLC
19c		Literacy: Demonstrates writing skills - Writes using conventions	--
20a	✓	Mathematics: Uses number concepts and operations – Counts	MATH
20b	✓	Mathematics: Uses number concepts and operations – Quantifies	MATH
20c	✓	Mathematics: Uses number concepts and operations - Connects numerals with their quantities	MATH
20d		Mathematics: Uses number concepts and operations - Understands and uses place value and base ten	--
20e		Mathematics: Uses number concepts and operations - Applies properties of mathematical operations and relationships	--
20f		Mathematics: Uses number concepts and operations - Applies number combinations and mental number strategies in mathematical operations	--
21a	✓	Mathematics: Explores and describes spatial relationships and shapes - Understands spatial relationships	MATH
21b	✓	Mathematics: Explores and describes spatial relationships and shapes - Understands shapes	MATH
22a	✓	Mathematics: Compares and measures - Measures objects	MATH
22b		Mathematics: Compares and measures - Measures time and money	--
22c	✓	Mathematics: Compares and measures - Represents and analyzes data	MATH
23	✓	Mathematics: Demonstrates knowledge of patterns	MATH

GOLD Item	Required SY 2026-27	GOLD Domain and Item Description	ECIP Domain of Learning Alignment [†]
24		Science and Technology: Uses scientific inquiry skills	SCI
25		Science and Technology: Demonstrates knowledge of the characteristics of living things	SCI
26		Science and Technology: Demonstrates knowledge of the physical properties of objects and materials	SCI
27		Science and Technology: Demonstrates knowledge of Earth's environment	SS
28		Science and Technology: Uses tools and other technology to perform tasks	SS
29		Social Studies: Demonstrates knowledge about self	SS
30		Social Studies: Shows basic understanding of people and how they live	SS
31		Social Studies: Explores change related to familiar people or places	SS
32		Social Studies: Demonstrates simple geographic knowledge	SS
33		The Arts: Explores the visual arts	ARTS
34		The Arts: Explores musical concepts and expression	ARTS
35		The Arts: Explores dance and movement concepts	ARTS
36		The Arts: Explores drama through actions and language	ARTS
37		<i>English Language Learners Only: English Language Acquisition: Demonstrates progress in listening to and understanding English</i>	*
38		<i>English Language Learners Only: English Language Acquisition: Demonstrates progress in speaking English</i>	*

†: The following are acronyms for the [ECIP](#) Domains of Learning and symbols for alignment or lack of alignment with the ECIPs:

✓ : Item is required for SY 2026–27.

-- : Not aligned to any of the ECIP domains of learning.

* : Not aligned to any of the ECIP domains of learning as this item is specific to English language learners; there are no ECIPs specific to English Language Learners. Programs may find using these items beneficial to use with English language learners—please refer to the publisher for specific guidance on when and how to use these items.