

Fall 2020 Early Learning Programs Attendance Verification Guide

This document provides supplemental attendance verification information specific to voluntary prekindergarten (VPK) and school readiness plus (SRP). The information will also be useful for determining attendance verification practices for all district and charter school early childhood programs including School Readiness and Early Childhood Family Education as well as for children funded by Early Learning Scholarships.

[The Guidance for Minnesota Public Schools: 2020-21 School Year Planning](#) document posted on the [MDE COVID-19 Updates](#) webpage provides information pertaining to the documentation of student attendance and membership for three anticipated school delivery scenarios: On-site, hybrid, and distance learning. As noted in that document: “During any period of distance learning, VPK/SRP attendance and membership information is generated through parent-verified learning experiences.”¹ The process used to collect attendance verification information from parents should match the scope of the early learning program being offered (e.g., part-day vs. full-day; 2 days/week vs. 5 days/week). The scope of the program can also be considered based on the number of planned instructional hours. Using this approach, the number of planned instructional hours have been broken down into the following categories to help guide attendance verification practices for early childhood programs:

- Lower Verification Rate
 - 349 or fewer hours (does not meet VPK/SRP requirements of at least 350 instructional hours, but may apply to other programs like School Readiness)
 - 350 hours-509 hours is a part-time instructional day
- Higher Verification Rate
 - 510-849 hours is a full-time instructional day
 - 850+ hours is a full-time instructional day + extended day services

As decisions about attendance verification are made, it will be important to communicate the requirements for each possible school delivery scenario with families **before** the school year begins so that they can be familiar with new processes and communicate any barriers that they perceive in the process. Attendance verification of a child’s daily class membership is one way that the state can account for its investment in children. It is also a

¹ Students attending a state-approved VPK or SRP program generate membership and general education funds for their scheduled program based on the number of instructional hours and days planned by the district on the Prekindergarten Site Worksheet that is submitted with the annual application. VPK/SRP programs must provide a minimum of 350 instructional hours annually and verify attendance of each student.

way for a district to understand equity and access issues that impact the successfulness of children during times of alternate learning models. The following information provides guidance that will help verify attendance during the three anticipated school delivery models.

On Site:

Follow procedures that are currently in place when students and teachers participate in classes at the school site for the regular school day. Students who are enrolled generate membership. Attendance is taken daily.

Hybrid:

The core school day may vary among schools within a district/charter school and among grades within a school. Attendance must be taken for both on-site and off-site instructional days. Students without documented participation are reported as absent, this pertains to both on-site and off-site instructional time.

A student could be considered in attendance on off-site instructional days by following the procedures outlined in the next Distance Learning section.

Distance Learning

During any period of distance learning, VPK/SRP attendance and membership information is verified through parent-generated and school-confirmed learning experiences. The following three guiding principles and questions can be used when considering your district's approach:

1. Consider the context of each student's situation.

- a. Have we considered in our plan all of the family variables that will impact the way that early learning activities are planned and offered children (e.g., parent work schedules, number of school age siblings, access to technology and available instructional materials)?
- b. Is the attendance verification submission approach we have chosen accessible and equitable for all families? If not, how might the plan be modified to assure this?
- c. How will the practices that we have chosen help build or strengthen the relationships between families and schools?

2. Leverage technology to understand student participation.

- a. Have we chosen systems and applications that are readily available and easy to use by parents (especially those with multiple-aged children)?
- b. Is the technology chosen able to give us information that will take some communication burden from parents (e.g., read receipts, ability to see app has been opened, early learning system connected to larger district system)?
- c. How is this technology helping us be more responsive to student needs?

3. Keep students engaged.

- a. How are our documentation practices encouraging student and family participation?
- b. How is the requested information helping promote family routines that support learning?
- c. How are we using requested information to understand student progress and design instruction?

The following table provides ways that information can be used to verify attendance and membership when school is being delivered off-site. The suggested activity choices are embedded in routines that support positive student outcomes.

Frequency and Type of Submission	Parent-Teacher Communication (Interaction)	Teacher-Child Interaction	Family-Child Activity Documentation
<p>Frequency of Submission</p> <p>(The definition of Daily will vary by program schedule.)</p>	<p>Daily Variable=</p> <p>The frequency is determined by the # of planned instructional days/week (2-5 days/week).</p> <p>Who is responsible—School verifies the agreed upon parent submission action.</p>	<p>Weekly Variable=</p> <p>Lower Verification range =1 Higher Verification range =2</p> <p>Who is responsible—Teacher verifies agreed upon parent submission action.</p>	<p>Submitted weekly for all instructional schedules.</p> <p>Who is responsible—Parent submits and teacher verifies.</p>
<p>Type of Submission: Virtual Communication</p>	<p>Parent acknowledges daily participation by opening school communication sent by email, text, or other apps being used by the school. This method requires no parent response as the virtual method used indicates that the message has been accessed (e.g., read receipt, or triggers an auto-response to school).</p> <p>Schools should consider a single acknowledgement method for families with more than one child in the system.</p>	<p>Child participates in scheduled interactive event(s) with teacher. Technology is supported by supervising adult.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole group time with class • Small group time arranged by teacher • Email or text exchange (supported by adult) that is open ended, but must be accomplished weekly. 	<p>Weekly documentation should help encourage a child’s learning, a parent’s engagement and a teacher’s understanding of instructional opportunities and progress.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit documentation using the communication app used by school • Submit an electronic checklist, bingo card, and/or work samples from specified activities. • Office hours: See description in next box below.

Frequency and Type of Submission	Parent-Teacher Communication (Interaction)	Teacher-Child Interaction	Family-Child Activity Documentation
<p>Type of Submission: Telephone</p>	<p>Parent makes phone call to school only if child is UNABLE to participate in daily activities.</p> <p>If the school notices the child has not participate in other scheduled interactions and has not received a phone call, the school will follow-up with the family.</p>	<p>Child participates in scheduled interactive event with teacher.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conference call with teacher and classmates • Individual phone call 	<p>If families are unable to submit documentation electronically, a paper communication format should be selected.</p> <p>Telephone “office hours” conversation with parents are a good way for personalized conversation with families. They may be an important weekly occurrence for some families and an intermittent opportunity for others.</p>
<p>Type of Submission: Paper Communication (Mail Delivery, Dropbox, Bus Stop Drop-off)</p>	<p>Recommended that parents use telephone submission practice. If this is not possible, the school should devise an individual method so that daily attendance information can be verified.</p> <p>Consider coordinating verification with other school personnel or services. (e.g., food service)—verify attendance at meal pick-up or delivery.</p>	<p>If a telephone is not available, the teacher and family should devise an individual method so that the child has an opportunity to interact with the teacher (and possibly other classmates).</p> <p>Teacher and parent may arrange a visit in an agreed upon setting (school, child care, library, outside, etc.).</p>	<p>If families are receiving weekly activity packets, include a document that can be returned at the end of each week that verifies the completion of activities. The type of document used should mirror the format being used for virtual submissions. It can be returned using the same method used to pick-up the week’s activities.</p>

Additional MDE Fall Planning Resources:

The following resources will soon be available on the [MDE COVID-19 Updates](#) webpage:

- [Early Learning Scholarships updates](#)
- [Importance of Relationships in Infancy and Early Childhood during Challenging Times](#)
- [Early Childhood Programs: Building Relationships That Support Consistent Attendance](#)

Head Start programs should follow guidance from the Office of Head Start and continue to track and analyze the causes of absences for children. Current requirements for attendance and attendance tracking in the [Head Start Program Performance Standards](#) remain the same as they were prior to COVID-19.

MARSS Procedures for VPK/SRP: [Appendix 6 – Report Voluntary Prekindergarten Students](#) and [Appendix 6 – Reporting School Readiness Plus Students](#).