



Voluntary Prekindergarten and School Readiness Plus: Application Q & A for Fiscal Year 2021

The fiscal year (FY) 2021 voluntary prekindergarten (VPK) and school readiness plus (SRP) application opens at 9 a.m. on January 3, 2020 and closes at 4 p.m. on January 30, 2020. There is a single application process for all programs including those renewing, expanding, or applying for a new site. Districts and charter schools have been sent the information and links to the FY21 VPK/SRP application.

This question and answer (Q & A) document includes questions historically received by Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) regarding the application process. This document will be updated every Monday with questions received during the application process.

Application guidance and resource materials are posted on the [VPK/SRP webpage](#). Questions about the application process can be emailed to MDE.VPK@state.mn.us.

Questions marked with an asterisk () were added on January 13, 2020.

Questions marked with two asterisks () were added on January 17, 2020.

Questions marked with three asterisks () were added on January 24, 2020.

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Application Process

Guidance on the Application Process

Where do I register for the Application Overview Webinar and Open Office Hours Webinars?

Programs are encouraged to attend any or all of the webinars for support with the application process. Register at the applicable link below.

Application Overview and Demonstration Webinar:

- [Friday, January 3, 2020 from 12-1 p.m.](#)
- [Tuesday, January 7, 2020 from 3-4 p.m.](#)

Open Office Hours:

- [Wednesday, January 15, 2020: 3-4 p.m.](#)
- [Wednesday, January 22, 2020: 12-1 p.m.](#)
- [Monday, January 27, 2020: 3-4 p.m.](#)

Can I add my email address to the VPK/SRP distribution list to receive regular updates?

MDE maintains a contact list with three contacts for each district or charter school: the superintendent, the business manager, and the early childhood contact listed on the application. We ask that districts devise a system that assures distribution of VPK/SRP information to identified staff within their district. If you need to replace one of the contacts on our MDE VPK/SRP Master Contact list, please email MDE.VPK@state.mn.us with the updated contact name, email, and phone number.

Can our application or program plan be revised in any fashion after submission on January 30, 2020?

MDE has a tight timeline to review and approve applications by March 1. It would be very difficult for MDE to accommodate revisions after the due date and still meet the deadline. A district or charter school could reduce the number of requested student seats after the deadline but not increase them.

School districts and charter schools should use their best estimates to fill out their application. If a selected school district or charter school needs to revise their plan after the allocation announcement, they will need to work with MDE to determine the feasibility of any changes. Contact MDE.VPK@state.mn.us if you believe your plan needs to be revised.

When will I find out if our program has been selected to receive VPK/SRP funding?

Funded programs will be notified if they are eligible to be considered for funding by March 1, 2020, and notified if they will receive funding at the end of Spring 2020 legislative session.

Where can I learn more about program implementation and VPK/SRP requirements?

Please view the VPK/SRP implementation webinar series on the [VPK/SRP Resources for Funded Programs Webpage](#). Webinars are available on the following topics:

- Funding Overview
- Program Requirements – Eligibility, Logistics, and Outreach
- Program Requirements for Measuring Impact – Curriculum, Assessment, and Teacher Evaluation
- Program Design and Mixed Delivery
- Meal Service and Breakfast Invoicing Process

Who Should Apply for VPK/SRP?

Do currently funded programs need to submit an application?

All programs must submit an application for FY21, including programs that received VPK funding in FY17 and programs that received VPK/SRP funding in FY18, FY19, and FY20.

How many districts will the funds cover? Should my district even apply?

At this time there is no new FY21 funding for VPK/SRP. All interested districts and charter schools are encouraged to apply. A large number of applications indicates district interest in the program and demonstrates the need for increased and ongoing VPK/SRP funding.

Application Ranking Process

Is there an updated document showing school districts' current ranking by site?

The FY20 spreadsheet is available on the [VPK/SRP webpage](#). It will be updated with FY21 numbers as soon as they become available.

What is the process for ranking applications?

All of the VPK/SRP applications received in January will be combined into a single priority list. The process is described in Minnesota Statutes, section 126C.10, subdivision 28.

Applications meeting the program requirements will be divided into four groups as follows:

1. Minneapolis and St. Paul public school districts
2. Other school districts located in the metropolitan equity region
3. School districts located in the rural equity region
4. Approved charter schools

Within each group, the applications will be ordered by rank based on the following criteria:

1. Concentration of kindergarten students eligible for free or reduced-price meals by school site on October 1 of the previous school year.
2. For school district programs to be operated at locations that do not have free and reduced-price meal concentration data for kindergarten programs for October 1 of the previous school year, including mixed delivery programs, the school district average concentration of kindergarten students eligible for free or reduced-price meals must be used for the rank ordering. The district can use the concentration of a specific school site if it assures it will prioritize service of those students at the alternate site.
3. Presence or absence of a Three- or Four-Star Rated Parent Aware rated child care and Head Start program within the school district or close proximity of the district. (See question to see how points are awarded based on the proximity of school to Parent Aware rated programs.)
4. Whether the district or charter school has implemented a mixed delivery system.

School sites with the highest concentration of kindergarten students eligible for free or reduced-price meals that do not have a Three- or Four-Star Parent Aware Rated child care or Head Start program within the district or in close proximity of the district shall receive the highest priority, and school sites with the lowest concentration of kindergarten students eligible for free or reduced-price lunches that have a Three- or Four-Star Parent Aware Rated child care or Head Start program within the district or in close proximity of the district shall receive the lowest priority.

Our district has a prekindergarten program that is Parent Aware Rated. Does this count in determining eligibility? How will it affect my ranking?

When determining the proximity of school sites to a Three- or Four-Star Parent Aware Rated program, MDE used Head Start and child care programs in the formula but not school-based programs. This is because approximately 90 percent of school districts have a school-based program that is Parent Aware Rated. The intent of the legislation was to increase the access to high-quality programs throughout the state specifically in areas where capacity is limited.

Districts or charter schools with Parent Aware ratings do not lose points. Points will be awarded in the following way for presence or absence of a Three- or Four-Star Parent Aware Rated child care or Head Start (not a school-based) program within the school district or close proximity of the district:

1. Zero points for school sites with a Three- or Four-Star Rated child care or Head Start within their district or within ten miles of the school site.
2. Five points for school sites with no Three- or Four-Star Rated child care or Head Start within the district and ten miles of the school site.
3. Ten points for school sites with no Three- or Four-Star Rated child care or Head Start within the district and twenty miles of school site.
4. Five points will be awarded to districts and charter schools that have implemented a mixed delivery system.

Our district has an early childhood education center without kindergarten enrollment. Does MDE use the district average free and reduced-price lunch for kindergarten students in determining ranking?

If the program is at a site that does not have kindergarten students with prior year free and reduced-price meal data, the school district average for free and reduced-price meal concentration for kindergarten students (or the multi district average if there is a non-K-12 school site where a program designed to serve more than one district is served) will be used.

If a school site contracts form a mixed delivery partnership with a community-based provider or Head Start under Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.151, subdivision 3, or is an established early childhood center, you may use the concentration of kindergarten students eligible for free or reduced-price meals from a specific school site, as long as eligible children from that area are prioritized and guaranteed services at the site. If the site in your application is close to an elementary school and it will be primarily serving children from that elementary attendance area, then that school's free and reduced-price meal numbers may be used, otherwise the district average will be applied to determine ranking.

If we have a site with documented 100 percent free or reduced-priced meals, but there is no kindergarten in the building, can we submit documentation of the actual number?

The statute specifies that for sites that do not have free and reduced-price meals concentration data for the previous year, the school district average concentration of kindergarten students eligible for free or reduced-price meals must be used for the priority ranking. Alternatively, if that site will prioritize children from a ranked elementary school, then that school's ranking may be used for that early childhood site.

If we request 40 seats for two classrooms, is there a possibility we would only be funded for 20 seats in one classroom or would we be denied funding for both?

Seats will be allocated based on the ranking criteria by region. A site might be partially funded if the site was the final site on the ranking list to be funded and only 20 seats remained out of the total regional allocation. In that case, only 20 out of the requested 40 seats would be funded. If this would happen, the program could split the allocated seats between the two classrooms and have 10 VPK/SRP seats in each classroom and then fill the additional seats with children funded by Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE), Pathway I or II Scholarships, school readiness funding, etc.

Application Form and Required Attachments

Online Application Form

Does our district need to do a separate VPK/SRP application for each site?

No. If you have multiple sites, you need to submit only one application. However, you need to upload as part of the application, a separate *Prekindergarten Site Worksheet* for each individual site being considered. The formula outlined in statute funds programs at the school site level, but programs will submit all *Prekindergarten Site Worksheets* in one online application form.

I clicked “Save and Continue Later” but I did not receive an email. Should I start a new application?

No, do not start a new application. First, check your spam/junk folder to see if the email was sent there. If you do not see the email, please email MDE.VPK@state.mn.us and we can send you a copy of your link.

I submitted my application, but I cannot find the confirmation email with the link to edit my responses. Do I need to start a new application?

No, do not start a new application. Please contact MDE.VPK@state.mn.us and we can send you a copy of your link.

My district or charter school is not listed on the drop-down menu in the online application.

The application is pre-populated with all school districts and charter schools. If you do not see your program name, please contact MDE.VPK@state.mn.us to have the issue resolved.

We accidentally clicked on the Submit button too early. Should we start a new application?

No. Applications will be available to edit until 4 p.m. on January 30, 2020. After 4 p.m. on January 30, all submitted applications will be considered final.

Applications will not be reviewed before that time. Therefore, even after your program submits an application, you may go back and make revisions via the unique link provided at the end of the application and in your confirmation email until the due date and time. Please work off of your original application and avoid starting new applications.

How can I get confirmation that our submission was accepted by the system?

A confirmation email is automatically generated after your application is initially submitted and sent to the primary contact listed. If you do not receive this email, please check your spam folder. You may also choose to use your unique link to review your application and download your application. What you have downloaded is what MDE receives.

Can I request a PDF copy of the application so that I can work with staff in my district or charter school to assemble the information before we submit?

There is logic built in to the application, so MDE does not have a PDF copy available. But, you can use the application link to begin your application, click through to view the questions, and then click **Submit** to generate a unique link and a PDF with the list of questions. You can use this link to continue to edit your application until the January 30 deadline.

You can also download the *Prekindergarten Site Worksheet* to your computer and use the **Save to Complete Later** button to keep revising the worksheet until you are ready to upload.

Prekindergarten Site Worksheet

Note: Please view the following guidance on the Prekindergarten Worksheet:

- View the **Definitions** tab on the *Prekindergarten Site Worksheet* for descriptions of each line in the form.
- View the following guidance document under the “Application Resources” section of the [VPK/SRP webpage](#):
 - View the *FY21 Prekindergarten Site Worksheet Instructions* document for step-by-step guidance on completing the form.
 - View the recording of the *FY21 Prekindergarten Site Worksheet Demonstration Webinar*.

Using the Excel Form

Where do I find the *Prekindergarten Site Worksheet*?

Programs will download the *Prekindergarten Site Worksheet* Excel document within the online application. Programs will download the spreadsheet, complete one worksheet per site, and upload the completed *Prekindergarten Site Worksheets* to the online application form. Programs must upload the *Prekindergarten Site Worksheet* as an Excel format.

I am having trouble with the macros in the *Prekindergarten Site Worksheet*.

The macros in the forms will only work in Microsoft Excel. Please make sure you are using Excel and not Google Sheets or a similar program. If you are using Excel and still having trouble, visit the [Microsoft Support webpage](#) for help with enabling macros. If you continue to have challenges, please contact MDE.VPK@state.mn.us.

Site Selection and Attendance Boundaries

If we have not been previously funded, would we select New Site or the elementary school that pops up?

If your VPK/SRP will be located at an existing elementary school, select the elementary school. If your VPK/SRP program will be located within the district at a site that is not an elementary school or at a mixed delivery partner site, select **New Site**. If you are funded, MDE will work with you to get a new site number assigned to the site.

We have a school number for the elementary school and a school number for our school readiness program that operates at the same site. Which number should we provide in the application?

Because all these sites are offered in the same location, you should use your elementary school site number because that is the one for which your kindergarten enrollment is generated.

If you intend to offer the program at a different location, such as an early childhood center that is not classified as an elementary school, select **New Site** for the program and the district average concentration of kindergarten students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch will be used for the site rankings. However, if children from one elementary school attendance area at the early childhood site, use that elementary site number so that the site ranking for that school can be used.

Our prekindergarten program is located at our middle school, but the middle school does not show up as a location choice. Should we select a New Site?

If your prekindergarten program serves students at the middle school site from only one elementary school attendance area, enter the elementary school name. MDE will work with you later to amend the location of your program.

If your prekindergarten program serves students from multiple elementary school attendance areas, enter **New Site** and MDE will work with you to create a new site number for your program.

Is it a requirement to house VPK/SRP programs only at sites with kindergarten enrollment?

Programs may be housed at other district facilities, such as an early learning center or in the case of a mixed delivery partnership at a Head Start or child care facility. According to statute, a request for funding at a site that also has a kindergarten enrollment will be ranked using the poverty concentration of the kindergarteners in that elementary building. A request for funding at a site that has no kindergarten enrollment, for example a stand-alone early childhood center, will be ranked based on the school district's average poverty concentration of all kindergarteners or if that site will first serve children from a ranked elementary school, then that school's ranking may be used for that early childhood site.

Can a school district create preschool attendance areas that are different from the established elementary school boundaries?

Yes. Since not all schools in the district may be approved for VPK/SRP, the district may choose to broaden the attendance boundaries for each approved prekindergarten program, so that more eligible students who live in the district have the opportunity to attend the program and receive transportation.

****We are rearranging our district for next year, so schools will be at different locations next year. How does this impact the application process?**

You will complete the FY21 application based on the current school year (FY20) site allocation within your district. The *Prekindergarten Site Worksheet* is auto-populated based on data from the current school year.

Once you have submitted your application, please email MDE.VPK@state.mn.us with an explanation of your anticipated school changes. For example—children at Washington Elementary will be served at Lincoln Elementary school. Once we have received this information, we will contact you to learn more about the change and how it might impact VPK/SRP allocations for FY21. Once your district decisions are finalized and FY21 allocations have been finalized, we will work with you to complete an amendment before the start of the new school year.

Enrollment

Should I only include classrooms to be designated as VPK/SRP on the *Prekindergarten Site Worksheet*?

Programs are encouraged to braid and blend funds. However, the spreadsheet should be filled out only for classrooms for which the school district/charter school are requesting funding and which meet the VPK/SRP statutory requirements.

How should we determine eligible enrollment and the number of seats to request?

In designing your classroom, use the best information that you have regarding the number of children in the eligible population combined with the amount of space you have for a program. As you design your classroom with a maximum group size of 20, remember to plan for a percentage of the children who will be referred and qualify for special education services. Students with individualized education programs (IEPs) cannot be included in the capped student enrollment. In other words, if you have at least 20 age-eligible VPK/SRP children and you have classroom space for 20 children, assume that one to three of the students may be referred during the first months of school and may receive early childhood special education services. Consider requesting 16 to 18 VPK/SRP seats for each classroom on your *Preschool Site Worksheet* so that the classroom can be fully enrolled and inclusive of all children.

If we were previously approved for 30 seats and we would like to add another class with additional seats, do we fill out the FY20 Continuation and FY21 Expansion in Lines 16 and 17?

The *Prekindergarten Site Worksheet* will automatically populate Lines 16 and 17 based on your prior funding and your enrollment request. Enter your requested enrollment in Line 7 (excluding Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) students), and the worksheet will automatically place these numbers in the correct category.

*****If we apply for VPK/SRP expansion seats and receive additional seats but then do not manage to actually expand the program, what would happen?**

Each fall, MDE reviews MARSS enrollment data to compare each district's allocation with the actual enrollment. If enrollment is below the seat allocation, MDE contacts programs to determine if they will return seats temporarily or permanently. If a district or charter returns seats temporarily, it is just for the current school year and the seats will remain as part of the base allocation for the district or charter in the following school year. If a district or charter returns seats permanently, a new site or expansion application would need to be submitted to regain the released seats if funding were to become available in future years.

For Lines 21 and 22, if our sites are designated Community Eligible Provision (CEP) schools, should we enter 100 percent of the students as qualifying for free lunch?

Yes, the number entered in Line 22 should match the total enrollment requested in Line 14.

Please note: Although all students in a CEP site receive a free meal, to be eligible to generate compensatory revenue, the school needs to have a household income certification for each student that is reported in the Minnesota Automated Reporting Student System (MARSS) as eligible for free or reduced-price meals. Certification can be determined by the family completing an Application for Educational Benefits or through Direct Certification. For CEP schools, use the Alternate Application for Educational Benefits. This household income statement collects the same information as the Application for Educational Benefits but excludes free meals as a benefit because the student will get a free meal without completing the application. Without the application or Direct Certification, the student cannot be reported as eligible for the free or reduced-price meal program.

Calendars and Instructional Hours

The question on instructional day allows only whole numbers. One of our programs is 2.5 hours per day. How do we enter this?

Line 11 in the *Prekindergarten Site Worksheet* asks for the average length of instructional day in minutes, not hours. You can enter 2.5 hours into this field by entering 150 minutes. Six hours would be 360 minutes.

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 8. The extra day(s) can be added to the total.

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.

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

No. The 350 hours for the VPK/SRP 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/SRP 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 runs would not be considered VPK/SRP.

Can we include extended-day preschool in our 350-hour minimum as long as it meets the criteria?

No. A VPK/SRP program must have 350 hours in its regular schedule that applies to all students in the program. Extended day is generally defined as a program outside of regular school hours. This would not qualify since it would not be part of the regular prekindergarten schedule for all of the prekindergarten students in the program, and there is no evidence given that the extended-day classroom would meet the requirements for a prekindergarten program.

Does the length of the instructional day exclude a rest/quiet time?

VPK/SRP programs that run for more than four hours in a given day may count up to 30 minutes of rest time toward instructional hours.

We have two classrooms that run five full days. Families choose three, four, or five full days. Do we need to do multiple calendars or just one since both rooms do run five full days?

Yes. By statute, VPK/SRP programs must have a minimum of 350 hours of program delivery. To assure that this is being met in your current system, you should complete one calendar for each of your program options. This would mean one calendar for the three-day, another for the four-day and one more for the five-day program. This would demonstrate accurately the number of hours that each of your program options offer. You will need to estimate the number of children that will be served in each of those calendars on the *Prekindergarten Site Worksheet*.

I currently have 40 VPK/SRP seats. Children attend class three days a week. Am I able to change my calendar on this new application so that the same 40 seats would now meet for five days, or would this be considered an expansion?

VPK/SRP is funded based on an allocated seat-count, in this case 40. Since the VPK/SRP allocation is based on seat count, you may adjust a previously used calendar within the application (number of instructional days and instructional minutes/day). As long as the number of seats remains the same, this would not be considered an expansion. Please note, all calendars must offer at least 350 instructional hours to meet the minimum requirement.

If I have one classroom but three different sessions of preschool that take place throughout the week, could I make only one of the preschool sessions the VPK/SRP program?

Yes. On the application, list the number of scheduled days and instructional hours offered by the classroom designated for VPK/SRP. This classroom must meet the statutory requirements of the program. To help meet capacity issues that sometimes arise in VPK/SRP classrooms when children are referred and receive early childhood special education services, it is desirable to have multiple classrooms meeting VPK/SRP requirements. In this case you could consider spreading your VPK/SRP allocation among the different sessions—if they meet the minimum requirements—so that you can make full use of the allocated VPK/SRP funding.

If our number of instructional days or hours change later, do we need to amend our application?

Please contact MDE.VPK@state.mn.us with all questions pertaining to program calendar modifications.

*****What if I do not know the exact calendar yet? Our district is not going to finalize their calendar until after the application closes, so how should I enter my calendar on the site worksheet?**

Even if you have not finalized the exact calendar, you should calculate an estimated number of instructional days and minutes based on your anticipated program design. For example, if you plan to have four half days per week or five full days per week, calculate the instructional minutes based on your anticipated length of day and the number of instructional days based on the anticipated number of weeks in the year. We encourage you to estimate based on previous school calendars. If needed, you can adjust your calendar during the school year.

Facilities

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/SRP approval via the funding reallocations, are eligible for long-term facilities maintenance (LTFM) remodeling levy authority under current law.

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.

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/SRP 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/SRP 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.

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.

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/SRP program under Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.151 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 *Prekindergarten Site Worksheet*, please email MDE.VPK@state.mn.us and describe your district or charter's specific situation so it can be reviewed with school finance staff.

Statement of Assurances

Where do I find the *Statement of Assurances*?

Programs will download the *Statement of Assurances* document within the online application. Programs will download, print, sign, scan, and upload the document to the online application form.

Who needs to sign the *Statement of Assurances*?

The Superintendent or Executive Director must sign the *Statement of Assurances*. The VPK/SRP Program Coordinator and the Parent Aware Primary Contact (if applicable, for VPK only) must also sign the *Statement of Assurances*.

If you are applying with a mixed delivery partner, the mixed delivery partner must also sign the *Statement of Assurances*. If you have multiple mixed delivery partners, submit one *Statement of Assurances* document for each partner.

Parent Aware Automatic Rating and Participation Agreement

If we are opting for the Automatic Rating for Parent Aware, where do I find the *Parent Aware Participation Agreement*?

Programs will download the *Parent Aware Participation Agreement* within the online application. Programs will download, print, sign, scan, and upload the document to the online application form.

Do I need to submit a Site List?

No, you will not upload a separate Site List to the application; if funded, MDE will contact you in February or March to confirm your sites.

On the *Parent Aware Participation Agreement*, who should be listed as the Early Childhood Parent Aware Contact?

The Parent Aware contact should be the staff member from the district or charter school that 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.

If we are applying as a new program and our current prekindergarten program already has a Parent Aware rating, should we opt in to the VPK Parent Aware Automatic Rating process in the application or just plan to complete the Parent Aware renewal separately?

To help districts streamline processes and reduce paperwork, we encourage districts receiving VPK funding to consider opting into the VPK Parent Aware Automatic Rating process. This may change the timeline of your current rating, but would reduce the future need to go through the Accelerated Pathway to Rating (APR) process. Please be aware that the Automatic Rating is only applicable to a district or charter school that receives VPK funding. If not yet VPK funded, you may still choose to opt in for future consideration for a Parent Aware Automatic Rating should you receive funding.

Note: If your program has not previously received VPK funding and your current Parent Aware rating is scheduled for renewal prior to April 1, 2020 you will need to renew that rating through the standard process while your new Automatic Rating is being processed so that there is not a lapse in your rating.

***What are the benefits to opting in to the Automatic Parent Aware Rating?**

The primary benefits of the automatic rating are that you do not have to go through the Parent Aware [Accelerated Pathway to Rating \(APR\) process](#) to receive a Parent Aware rating. In the APR process, all sites that a district or charter wishes to be included in their rating must have submitted required documentation and go through a review process.

Districts and charters with VPK-funded programs only need to submit the Parent Aware Participation Agreement to opt in. For sites not specifically operating as VPK but still meeting school readiness requirements, the district maintains documentation on file at their program as evidence that Parent Aware requirements are being met. We highly encourage all programs that receive VPK funding to opt in to the automatic rating process, since you are already meeting all of the Parent Aware standards by meeting VPK standards.

Programs that have a Parent Aware rating are eligible to receive [Early Learning Scholarships](#), and Four Star-rated programs are eligible to apply for Pathway II scholarship funding. Pathway II funding for FY20 and FY21 has already been allocated, but the next Pathway II application period is anticipated for winter/spring 2021 for FY22 and FY23.

***What happens if a program does not opt in to the Automatic Parent Aware Rating?**

If a program is not rated through the Automatic rating process, then they must go through the [Accelerated Pathway to Rating \(APR\) process](#) if they would like to earn a Parent Aware Rating. Only Parent Aware rated programs may accept early learning scholarship funding.

****Does my program need to be Parent Aware Rated to apply for VPK/SRP?**

No, districts and charter school do not need to be Parent Aware Rated to apply. Programs that receive funding can opt into the Parent Aware Automatic Rating process to receive a Four-Star Rating if they are funded, but do not need to be rated to apply or to receive funding.

Funding

Funding Process and Structure

How long is my program funded?

Funding for VPK programs initially funded in FY17 will be renewed for their original number of seats (74 districts and charter schools at 104 sites for 3,160 seats).

Funding for VPK/SRP programs initially funded in FY18, FY19 and FY20 will be renewed for FY21. The funding is scheduled to sunset at the end of FY21 without changes to current legislation.

All districts and charter schools, regardless of previous funding status, must file an application to be considered for funding should funds become available during the spring 2020 legislative session.

*****My district received SRP funding in FY20. Do we have the option to switch to VPK for FY21?**

Yes, programs may switch from SRP to VPK or vice versa. You will select which type of funding you are applying for in the online application. Then, you will sign the *Statement of Assurances* for the correct program. For the upcoming school year, your district or charter will be required to meet the statutory requirements for the program you select for FY21.

*****If we apply for VPK and do not get funding, is there an opportunity to apply for SRP funding?**

There is just one application process for both VPK and SRP. Funding for these two preschool programs are allocated from the same source of legislative funding. We are able to allocate a total of 7,160 seats which will be designated as VPK or SRP by the district on their application. Districts and charter schools will indicate which set of statutory requirements (VPK or SRP) they will meet. All districts and charter schools must complete the VPK/SRP application by January 30 to be considered for funding; there will not be another application after this process.

What is the funding amount per student for VPK/SRP?

Funding for the VPK/SRP grade level is based on ADM. Students enrolled in the prekindergarten grade level and designated in MARSS to generate formula will generate all pupil-driven formulas including compensatory and sparsity.

- Due to the capped number of students statewide, elementary sites have been approved for a capped number of students and ADM based on the application the school submitted which included calendar information.
- MDE will provide funding estimates of what your district will generate based on the ADM and the demographics of the children submitted on the school's application.
- MDE will provide an estimated enrollment number that is the maximum number of children the school can generate revenue for based on the pupil unit that the approved school calendar generates.
- By law, VPK/SRP students at participating sites can generate up to 0.6 pupil unit.

Funding flows like other K-12 general education revenue streams. Metered payments begin every August 30. The additional aid generated by VPK/SRP students is included in the regular aid entitlements for each program (e.g., general education, special education), and will not be paid as a separate line item.

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 .49 ADM and pupil units; students receiving 510 or more hours of instruction will generate 0.6 ADM and pupil units.

Does VPK/SRP funding go to General Fund 01 or Fund 04?

VPK/SRP students generate general education revenue just like kindergarten students. The revenue will be General Fund 01.

What is meant by: all revenue received must be used to supplement not supplant existing state, federal and local revenue for prekindergarten activities?

Programs are encouraged to braid and blend funds. It is not necessary to differentiate classrooms based on funding streams. School readiness, early childhood special education and Title I can be used to supplement the cost of the VPK/SRP program, but the program must meet the VPK/SRP requirements. General education revenue generated by VPK/SRP students must be used to supplement not supplant (replace) existing state, federal and local revenue for prekindergarten activities.

An example of this would be if a district/charter spent \$1,000,000 on prekindergarten activities in FY20, and receives new VPK/SRP funding in FY21 of \$200,000, it will need to document that it spent at least \$1.2 million on these activities in FY20. In other words, that it did not use the \$200,000 to reduce the \$1 million of funding from other sources, but instead increased its spending by at least the \$200,000.

The increase in expenditures over the prior year could include the cost of more intensive or higher cost services for existing students as well as adding new students. Examples include:

- Expanding the number of 4-year-olds served.
- Increasing the time that children were able to spend in school (e.g., increasing instructional hours from 350 to 510 per year, or moving from half-time programs to full-time programs).
- Reducing child to staff ratios below the maximum.
- Increasing the expertise of staff working with the children (e.g., higher proportion of licensed teachers).
- Covering inflationary cost increases (e.g., salaries, fringe benefits, other costs).

Does the funding include only the general fund formula allowance, or do we also receive funding from other ADM-driven funding, such as operating levy?

The ADM is used to calculate pupil units which drives various funding formulas, such as basic general education revenue, operating capital revenue and referendum revenue. The pupil units generated by VPK/SRP students who are eligible to generate funding are used in all funding formulas that are driven by ADM or pupil units. The October 1 enrollment of VPK/SRP students who are eligible for funding is used in the compensatory revenue formulas.

What happens if we are too high/low on our estimated predictions? (For example, if one student leaves, it is a two to four percent increase or decrease).

Sites approved for funding will be funded based on the lesser of the number of ADM estimated in the application or the actual ADM as calculated at the end of the school year. If actual ADM is less than the estimate in the application, funding will be reduced accordingly. If the actual ADM is greater than requested in the application, the funding will be based on the number of ADM in the application, unless additional funds become available, allowing additional students to be funded. Districts may use other funding sources, such as school readiness, general education aid generated by K-12 students or Pathway II scholarships to fund additional students not covered in the application or additional time over and above the maximum 510 funded hours per student for the school year.

Can a district or charter school roll over VPK/SRP funds year to year if all funds are not expended by the end of the fiscal year?

VPK/SRP students who are eligible to generate funding generate general education revenue and all other related revenue based on actual pupil units served, like general education funding generated by kindergarten students; it is not an expenditure reimbursement formula. There is no separate accounting to track revenues versus expenditures or fund balances for the program. If a district has fewer participants and ADM in the program than expected when the application is made, the aid will be adjusted downward to reflect the actual ADM. If a district's expenditures for the program are less than the revenue generated by the pupil-driven formulas, the district can retain any unspent funds. However, for new VPK/SRP programs beginning in FY18, there is a requirement that the new revenue be used to supplement and not supplant existing expenditures for prekindergarten activities. Therefore, it is expected that the funds generated for the program will be spent for the program in the year they are earned. It is not the intention of the department that there will be excess funds to carryover.

What is the cutoff date for enrollment for the ADM?

The program must be in operation for at least 350 hours during the school year. There is no cutoff for individual student enrollment; for example, if a student moves into the district after the school year starts, the student could be enrolled at that time. If some students enroll after the school year begins, they would generate less than the full ADM and pupil units generated by students who enroll at the beginning of the school year, as with K-12 students. Students must be enrolled by October 1 to be included in the compensatory revenue calculations for FY19 and FY20.

Do we have the option of passing on the English learning (EL) revenue, as we do our assessment in kindergarten?

Children enrolled in VPK/SRP should have access to comprehensive services. Statute indicates that programs are to coordinate with relevant school district programs and services including those for English learners. VPK/SRP programs are expected to support the growth and development of the whole child. Programs should work with the English language specialists in their district to determine the best instructional materials and practices to use. If VPK/SRP students are not identified as EL and not served, then they would not generate EL revenue for that year.

Under Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.59, subdivision 2, seven years of EL funding eligibility is based on total ADM in Minnesota (including VPK/SRP), whether the student was served in an EL program in VPK/SRP or not. Since VPK/SRP students will generate a maximum of 0.6 ADM, serving them in VPK/SRP (and collecting EL revenue while they are in VPK/SRP) will not cut off funding for the seven-year cap any sooner than if the students are not served until kindergarten – they will have 6.6 years of ADM after grade five if counted for VPK/SRP, so they will still be under the seven-year cap at the start of grade six. Eligibility will not be cut off in the middle of a year.

Are we required to provide transportation with VPK/SRP funds?

School districts are required to provide transportation to students enrolled in the VPK/SRP program for whom they receive general education aid if the student resides two miles or more from school, the same as for K-12 students; 4.66 percent of the basic revenue and transportation sparsity revenue is generated by these students and will cover part of the transportation cost.

Are VPK/SRP dollars tied to specific children like Pathway II scholarships?

The allocated seat given to a child is similar to the way the Pathway II scholarship is awarded. If that child leaves the program, the seat may be awarded to another child who meets VPK/SRP eligibility criteria.

However, unlike Pathway II scholarships, the funding for VPK/SRP is based on the characteristics of specific children: ADM is calculated based on the enrollment days/hours for specific children who are reported as prekindergarten students in MARSS. The ADM is used to calculate pupil units which drives various funding formulas, such as basic general education revenue, operating capital revenue and referendum revenue. The free and reduced-price lunch eligibility for these specific students as of October 1 determines the compensatory revenue, the race of students' impacts achievement and integration revenue, and the English learner (EL) status of the students determines the EL revenue.

The students generate additional revenue in various funding categories, and the general requirements of those funding categories apply. So basic general education revenue and referendum revenue are part of the district's unrestricted general fund revenue; achievement and integration revenue must be used for the purposes in the district's achievement and integration plan; operating capital revenue has specific uses in law; and the compensatory revenue and EL revenue must be used for the purposes specified for basic skills revenue.

Are we disqualified from VPK/SRP funding if we are not currently using one of the approved assessment tools?

Programs are required to use an assessment tool from the state-approved menu of [Kindergarten Entry Profile](#) (KEP) measures. If you are not currently using one of these tools, MDE will work with you to develop a plan to support the transition to choosing and using a new tool.

Parent Fees

Can you please verify that we are not allowed to charge tuition in order to be eligible for this funding?

Parent fees may not be collected for any age eligible 4-year-olds enrolled in a VPK classroom. Fees may be collected for age ineligible 3- and 5-year-old students attending VPK classrooms. In SRP classrooms the same policies are in place with one difference: fees may be collected for age eligible 4-year-olds if they do not exhibit any of the risk factors noted in statute.

A child who is generating general education revenue as a VPK/SRP student may not be charged any fee or tuition. Since the student seats for the VPK/SRP programs are capped, some programs may not be able to serve all 4-year-olds in their area. Funds from school readiness, Pathway I or II, Head Start, child care assistance (where applicable), Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE), or other local funds may be used to support additional prekindergarten children enrolled in VPK/SRP designated classrooms. MARSS state aid category 29 is used to report resident children enrolled in VPK/SRP who are not generating general education revenue.

We have a half-day program. Can we offer parents the opportunity to have paid childcare through our Community Education program for hours that we do not hold voluntary prekindergarten? Essentially, can parents be charged tuition for the .4 ADM that extends beyond the 0.6 ADM funded by voluntary prekindergarten?

Yes, programs may charge a fee or use Pathway I or II or other local dollars for extended or wraparound care that occurs outside of the voluntary prekindergarten schedule. Please note: No parent fees should be collected for an age eligible 4-year-old child enrolled in a classroom that generates VPK/SRP funding during the hours of the day designated as VPK/SRP.

If our program is free, can we still charge a registration fee?

Four-year-olds who are generating general education revenue as VPK/SRP students may not be charged a fee, including registration fees, for the VPK/SRP program.

Braiding and Blending

Is it possible to have some children within the same classroom who are funded through other sources?

Programs are encouraged to braid and blend funds. It is not necessary to differentiate classrooms based on funding streams. The designation follows the child.

School readiness, early childhood special education and Title I funds can be used to supplement the cost of VPK/SRP, but the program must meet the statutory requirements for funded programs within that classroom.

A child enrolled in VPK/SRP may not access school readiness or Pathway I or Pathway II scholarship money for the same hours that the child is enrolled in the VPK/SRP program. A Pathway I or Pathway II scholarship may be used for additional hours beyond the VPK/SRP schedule.

Only children who are 4 years old on September 1 will generate general education revenue as VPK/SRP students. Since the student seat numbers for the VPK/SRP program is capped, some programs may not be able to serve all 4-year-olds in their area. A district/charter may locally develop their own admission criteria.

MARSS state aid category 29 is used to report resident children enrolled in VPK/SRP who are not generating funding.

Mixed-age classrooms are also permissible. Although children who are not 4 years of age do not generate general education revenue as VPK/SRP students, VPK/SRP standards must apply to the entire classroom including staff-to-child ratios of 1-to-10 and a maximum group size of 20 children. All children, including those with disabilities, are counted as part of the 20 maximum group size.

No parent fees should be collected for any age eligible 4-year-old child enrolled in a funded VPK classroom. Parent fees may be collected in a SRP classroom for an age eligible 4-year-old child that does not have any of the risk factors required to receive SRP funding.

Are districts allowed to utilize Pathway I and/or Pathway II funding with VPK/SRP funding?

A district may receive both types of funds. However, early learning scholarships cannot be used for the hours determined to be VPK/SRP instructional hours for a 4-year-old. Scholarships can be used to provide children with additional hours beyond the VPK/SRP program, for 3-year-old children, or to fund children not funded by VPK/SRP funding during program hours. For example, if the class size is 20, 15 students could be funded by VPK/SRP, two funded by Pathway II and three funded by Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE).

Can you give examples of how Pathway II and VPK/SRP dollars can be used in the same classroom?

Pathway II scholarships can only be used in VPK/SRP classrooms for children who are not generating VPK/SRP funds or to extend the day of children receiving services beyond the designated VPK/SRP instructional time.

- For children in a VPK/SRP-funded seat:
 - A Pathway II scholarship could be used for a 4-year-old generating VPK/SRP funding if it is used to provide additional programming to a child beyond VPK/SRP hours of the day. For example, if VPK/SRP is offered in the morning and the child needs afternoon services as well, the scholarship could be used to cover the costs of the additional hours beyond the VPK/SRP hours. Programs would set the scholarship amount by taking the total program hours minus the VPK/SRP hours, and awarding based on the remaining hours not funded by VPK/SRP.
 - Also, VPK/SRP funds a maximum of 510 hours (0.6 ADM), so any hours above 510 can be funded with Pathway II scholarships. In this case, programs would take the total hours minus 510 VPK/SRP hours and award based on the remaining hours not funded by VPK/SRP.

- For children not generating VPK/SRP funds:
 - If a school offers a mixed-age classroom and has 3-year-old children enrolled in the class, a Pathway I or Pathway II scholarship could be used to cover the costs for serving the 3-year-old.
 - 4-year-olds who are in a VPK/SRP classroom but are not funded by VPK/SRP can also receive a scholarship. For example, if a district has 15 funded VPK/SRP seats: if the class size is 20, 15 students could be funded by VPK/SRP, two funded by Pathway II and three funded by ECSE.

Can we continue to use scholarship funds to pay for busing?

School districts are required to provide transportation to students enrolled in the VPK/SRP program for whom they receive general education aid if the student resides two miles or more from school, the same as for K-12 students; 4.66 percent of the basic revenue and transportation sparsity revenue is generated by these students and will cover part of the transportation cost.

If some students attend a scholarship or fee-based program on days not covered by VPK/SRP or before/after the VPK/SRP program and the district has to run an extra bus to accommodate those students, then they could use the scholarship money to cover transportation costs for the added transportation, but not for basic to and from transportation provided to all prekindergarten students in the VPK/SRP program.

If 3-year-old students have been awarded Pathway II dollars, are we required to renew their scholarship?

If a child was using a scholarship at the program prior to the age of 4, and is now enrolled in the VPK/SRP and generating VPK/SRP funding, the Early Learning Scholarship (Pathway I or Pathway II) cannot be used for the hours determined to be VPK/SRP instructional hours. Scholarships can be used to provide children with additional hours beyond the VPK/SRP program.

If the child was previously receiving a Pathway II scholarship to cover the cost to attend the program but now generates VPK/SRP funding, the child could continue using Pathway II funds for hours beyond the funded VPK/SRP hours. The Pathway II funding no longer being used can also be made available for another child meeting eligibility requirements.

You will not be punished for cancelling a child's scholarship if they move to VPK/SRP and do not meet one of the above criteria. You will simply cancel the child's the scholarship award.

Charter Schools and Educational Cooperatives

Is my charter school eligible to apply?

In order to be eligible for FY21 funding, a charter school needs to have a state-recognized early learning program. Charter schools seeking state recognition of an early learning program needed to complete and submit their recognition paperwork by October 1, 2019.

What steps do I need to take to get my charter school preschool recognized by MDE?

The first step to obtaining official recognition of your charter preschool program is to contact your authorizer and complete their process for adding a preschool to your program. Once the charter has satisfactorily

addressed the authorizer's requirements, the charter will then submit an Officially Recognized Charter School Early Learning Program Request form found on the [MDE Charter School webpage](#).

A charter school's prekindergarten program or other preschool instructional program will be officially recognized by MDE only after the commissioner of education approves an authorizer's supplemental affidavit (pursuant to Minn. Stat. § 124E.07, subd. 8(b)) that clearly describes the charter school's prekindergarten and/or preschool instructional program(s). To learn more about how to receive official recognition for your early learning program, review the Early Learning Guidance for charter schools on the [MDE Charter School Resources webpage](#).

How is the geographic area defined for a charter school when calculating the number of Three- and Four-Star Parent Aware Rated programs in the area?

The boundaries for a charter school are the boundaries for the school district in which the charter resides. This is similar to transportation statutes for charter schools that require them to provide transportation to children living within the boundaries of the district in which they are located.

We are a co-op with member districts. Can we apply for VPK/SRP on their behalf?

A co-op can certainly assist member districts in completing the application process, but the application must be signed by the district superintendent, or superintendents, if it is a multi-district site. The student seats and funding will be claimed by the individual districts involved in the program and cannot be claimed by a cooperative.

The application and approval are on a site-by-site basis. A separate *Prekindergarten Site Worksheet* must be submitted for each site proposed to have a program. Recent changes by the Legislature include awarding five additional points to applications that deliver programs through a mixed delivery system. Kindergarten free and reduced-price meals concentration for the site and proximity to other Three- or Four-Star Rated Parent Aware programs will be used to rank the applications. If the program is at a site that does not have kindergarten students with prior year free and reduced-price meals data, the school district average free and reduced-price meals concentration for kindergarten students (or the multi district average if there is a non-K-12 school site where a program designed to serve more than one district is served) will be used.

If a school site contracts to partner with a community-based provider or Head Start under Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.151, subdivision 3, or is an established early childhood center, you may use the concentration of kindergarten students eligible for free or reduced-price meals from a specific school site, as long as eligible children from that area are prioritized and guaranteed services at the site. If the site in your application is close to an elementary school and it will be primarily serving children from that elementary attendance area, then that school's free and reduced-price meals numbers may be used.

Mixed Delivery

What does mixed delivery mean?

A mixed delivery system of services is defined as a district or charter school contracting with a Head Start, child care center, family child care program or community-based organization for delivery of VPK/SRP. It is the district or charter school's responsibility to ensure that all program and statutory requirements are met by the mixed delivery partner. Districts and charters coordinate how services will be delivered, and the details must be included in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) before programming starts.

Here are some examples of types of mixed delivery program models:

- Mixed Delivery at a School Site: the VPK/SRP program will be offered through a contract with a mixed delivery partner and located at an existing elementary school.
- Mixed Delivery at Partner Site: the VPK/SRP program will be offered through a contract with a mixed delivery partner and located at the partner's site such as Head Start, child care center, or a family child care site.

Districts or charter schools choosing to contract with a Head Start, child care center, family child care program or community-based organization must have a signed *Statement of Assurances* with their partner site who has agreed to meet all program requirements to be submitted by January 30, 2020, along with the district or charter school's application.

What are the advantages or reasons for a mixed delivery model?

Mixed delivery systems offer parents options in choosing a setting that offers a high-quality early learning environment for their child and meets their needs as parents. Community-based mixed delivery sites can also address district/charter school facilities issues as they often have space customized for early education and care. Mixed delivery sites located in the community also offer greater opportunity to coordinate transitions between various program types. This system also encourages the alignment of curriculum, assessment and instructional practices that can generate data for continuous improvement of early learning opportunities for children.

Can Head Start or child care programs apply directly or should the district apply on their behalf as a partner?

Districts and charter schools with recognized early learning programs are the only entities eligible to apply. Community programs interested in partnering with their local school district to offer VPK/SRP programming through a mixed delivery system are encouraged to contact their local school district administration as soon as possible.

Can you please describe how a district would supervise a mixed delivery partner?

The roles and responsibilities for each partner will need to be agreed upon during the negotiation process. A useful tool for doing this is the *Statement of Assurances* that is signed by each partner. Using the program requirements that are listed on the *Statement of Assurances* is a good starting place for thinking through roles and responsibilities of each partner. Examples of this include: identification and enrollment procedures for eligible children, determining curriculum and assessment tools, reviewing instructional practices, meeting data

reporting requirements, professional development planning based on information from the teacher-child interaction tool, etc. The determination of roles and responsibilities will largely depend on the program practices that are implemented by the mixed delivery partner. Contact MDE.VPK@state.mn.us to discuss specific questions about mixed delivery program design.

***Does a VPK mixed delivery site need to provide a salary for prekindergarten teachers that is comparable to K-12?**

VPK/SRP is funded through general education funds and is considered a grade level. VPK statute requires staff salaries that are comparable to local K-12 instructional staff. School districts and charter schools contracting with other entities for a VPK program need to ensure the salaries paid to the teachers for the hours deemed as VPK are comparable to district K-12 instructional staff. Comparable salary may be calculated by determining an hourly rate of pay based off of the salary paid to a teacher in the district. This is a similar strategy to that used for districts when early childhood teachers are part-time or funded through Community Education rather than the K-12 master agreement. Please contact MDE.VPK@state.mn.us if you would like to discuss specific scenarios in your district.

If we are partnering with a Head Start program for mixed delivery, how do we ensure comparable pay to K-12 teachers if the teacher is a Head Start teacher and paid for by Head Start?

Comparable pay for VPK/SRP teachers can be demonstrated by showing a comparison between an hourly and a salaried teacher: by showing a salary conversion that calculates an hourly rate of pay (e.g., salary amount divided by the number of duty days divided by 8 hours equals the hourly rate of pay). There may be other considerations to calculate if the preschool teacher works fewer hours per day or fewer duty days per year. Contact MDE.VPK@state.mn.us if you have additional questions about salary calculations and comparable pay.

How do VPK/SRP standards compare to federal Head Start standards?

A crosswalk demonstrating the alignment of the Head Start federal performance standards with the statutory requirements of VPK/SRP is available on the [VPK/SRP webpage](#).

Can districts require mixed delivery community providers to use the same curriculum that the district uses?

School districts or charter schools are encouraged to create coherence in programming for students. Agreed-upon curriculum and assessment tools should be a part of any negotiated contract with a mixed delivery site.

Can a district require a mixed delivery community partner to follow the same admission criteria for VPK/SRP students?

Since the number of students for the funded preschool programs is capped, some programs may not be able to serve all of the 4-year-olds in the district. A district may develop admission criteria. The established criteria for admission would be used regardless of whether the program is offered at a school building or a community location.

How do we meet teacher qualification/compensation requirements if the potential partners do not have qualified teaching staff?

Service and funding roles and responsibilities for each organization are outlined in the contract established between the district/charter and community partner. There are two ways that a site can ensure having a qualified teacher for the mixed delivery site. The community partner could be responsible for hiring the qualified teacher and arranging in the contract to be reimbursed by the district/charter for the wages and benefits of that teacher. The district/charter could also be named responsible in the contract for hiring and providing the qualified teacher.

VPK/SRP statute requires a highly qualified teacher knowledgeable in early childhood curriculum content, assessment, native and English language programs, and instruction and paid comparably to local K-12 instructional staff.

On June 16, 2017, the Minnesota Board of Teaching (now known as the Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board or PELSB) also passed a resolution which allows teachers who are licensed K-12 in the areas of English as a second language (ESL), vocal and instrumental music, physical education and visual art and are assigned to teachers in K-6 grade settings, to also be permitted to also provide subject-specific instruction to students in prekindergarten assignments.

A district may also request a variance for another fully licensed teacher to teach outside of their licensure area if they have advertised and could not find a licensed teacher that met the requirements of the position. A teacher can get up to three variances in a lifetime. After three, the district needs to appeal to the Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board for additional variances.

Do we need to have a contract in place with our mixed delivery partners at the time of application, or can we develop these over the summer?

At the time of application, districts or charter schools choosing to contract with a Head Start, child care center, family child care program or community-based organization must submit a *Statement of Assurances* that has also been signed by the partner site agreeing to meet all program requirements. If using more than one mixed delivery site, each site will need its own signed *Statement of Assurances* uploaded with the VPK/SRP application. By the first day of contact with children, a contract must be on file between the district/charter school and the mixed delivery site partner.

Mixed Delivery Scenarios

Can a mixed delivery partner be a child care program where the staff are funded by the school district?

If the child care program is funded and operated as a district program, it cannot be considered a mixed delivery program. If the child care program is operated by a non-district sponsored organization and uses district staff to support instructional programming, this could be considered a shared resource and would be listed as a provided resource by the district in the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that is required between mixed delivery partners. The MOU outlines each partner’s roles and responsibilities so that all VPK/SRP statutory requirements are met.

Could a program have a mixed delivery classroom and a VPK/SRP classroom at the same site?

Yes, this could be possible if one classroom is operated by the school district using all school district staff and resources. The second classroom would need to be operated by the mixed delivery partner such as Head Start or a child care organization. Each classroom must meet all VPK/SRP statutory requirements. It would be encouraged that staff from these classrooms work together to devise cohesive transition and community interaction practices as well as share professional development activities.

I have a preschool program where the district hires all of the staff, but Head Start buys slots. We have a contract covering our arrangement, but it is held at the district schools, taught by district teachers and we bill Head Start for some costs for the slots for Head Start students. Is this a mixed delivery situation?

A mixed delivery site is when school districts and charters offer VPK/SRP by contracting with a Head Start, child care center, family child care program or a community-based organization that meet program requirements. The description provided would not be considered mixed delivery, but if the district was purchasing seats, sharing resources or dividing responsibilities with the partner, it would be considered mixed delivery. Some examples of this include: purchasing slots from Head Start, providing professional development training or coaching, sharing/splitting staff costs and responsibilities; it could be considered mixed delivery.

For mixed delivery, are we able to partner with Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE)?

Since ECSE is a district program, they do not qualify as a mixed delivery partner. Mixed delivery partners include Head Start, child care center, family child care or community organization early childhood program providers. The mixed delivery program may be held at the partner site or at a district facility. The key is that the partner program is not already operated as a district or charter school program.

We offer community education preschool classes for 3-year-olds located in the same school buildings as our VPK/SRP. Is this considered a mixed delivery site?

It would be considered a school site. A mixed delivery site is when school districts and charters offer VPK/SRP by contracting with a Head Start, child care center, family child care program or a community-based organization that meet program requirements. When a school district offers preschool or child care through the district's community education, this is considered as the braiding or blending of district or charter school resources.

Can districts partner with community preschool programs that have a church affiliation?

A school district may contract with a community preschool program with a church affiliation for a VPK/SRP site as long as the program meets the requirements listed on the signed *Statement of Assurances* and that only eligible 4-year-old children enrolled in and generating funds through VPK/SRP may not be charged for the time they are enrolled in the program. It is the responsibility of the school district to ensure the program meets the requirements including transportation, meals and funding.

If a VPK/SRP program is offered in a sectarian building, the school district or charter school must take steps to maintain nonsectarian school facilities in compliance with Minnesota Statutes, section 124E.06, subdivision 3(b), such that there are no religious texts, symbols, quotations or subjects displayed in facilities on school days.

Additionally, the VPK/SRP program must be available to any 4-year-old meeting eligibility requirements and must not discriminate.

If a district is currently collaborating with a Head Start program or child care center, can the district still apply for the new preschool funding?

Yes. A school may apply for funding and designate a mixed delivery partnership with the Head Start program or child care center they are working with. The district or charter school will need to ensure they have a signed *Statement of Assurances* signed by the director/designated official of the partner agency. The signed document must be uploaded with the application and a signed contract must be in place before the first day of program implementation. The Head Start grantee or child care center and the school will be responsible for ensuring the requirements listed on the *Statement of Assurances*, including transportation, meals and funding are met.

Children who are 4 years of age as of September 1, and meet the VPK/SRP eligibility requirements are eligible to participate free of charge.

Our elementary school doesn't have enough space to add preschool. If we partner with a nearby child care center, will we be ranked using the elementary school free and reduced-price lunch average or the district average?

A school site may contract to partner with a community based provider or Head Start, or establish an early childhood center, and use the free and reduced-price meal concentration of students in kindergarten at the school site, as long as those eligible children are prioritized and guaranteed services at the mixed delivery site or early education center.

If there is a new child care center opening in our district this next fall but they are not yet licensed or operating, can we apply with them now as a mixed delivery program? We are already working with them to plan wrap around care, trainings and curriculum support.

Yes, you may apply and list the new program as your mixed delivery partner. Children will not be allowed to inhabit the new site until the Department of Human Services child care licensing start-up review process has been completed.

Child Eligibility

Are VPK/SRP classes open to any students attending the school? Is it free?

Once awarded, VPK/SRP is free of charge to families of students who are enrolled in the program and meet specific eligibility requirements (see below). Since the enrollment for the VPK/SRP program is capped, some programs may not be able to serve all 4-year-olds in their area. A district or charter school may develop their own admission criteria protocol to best meet the need of families or the capacity of the facility. There is more information provided in this document about open enrollment procedures.

According to statute, a child who is 4 years of age as of September 1, in the calendar year in which the school year commences, is eligible to participate in a VPK/SRP program free of charge at an eligible site.

Each eligible child must complete a health and developmental screening within 90 days of program enrollment under sections 121A.16 to 121A.19, and provide documentation of required immunizations under section 121A.15.

To be eligible for a SRP program, children must also meet one of the following risk factors:

1. Qualifies for free or reduced-price lunch;
2. Is an English language learner;
3. Is homeless;
4. Has an individualized education program, or individual interagency intervention plan;
5. Is identified through health and developmental screening under [Minnesota Statutes, sections 121A.16 to 121.19](#), with a potential risk factor that may influence learning; or
6. Is in foster care.

Additionally, school districts and charter schools are capped at 60 percent of their kindergarten adjusted pupil units. Depending on the number of instructional hours, not all children may be served depending on space and capacity of the program.

Do students need to live in the district in order to participate in VPK/SRP?

Students may open enroll in VPK/SRP -funded programs through this initiative, like other open enrolled students. No tuition is charged. The student does not need to reapply to maintain a seat in the district until high school graduation.

Note that the general open enrollment deadline is January 15 for the upcoming school year. However, deadlines are waived for students who move into a district on or after December 1. Deadlines are also waived for situations where either the sending or receiving district has a Minnesota Department of Education-approved Achievement and Integration plan.

As with other open-enrollment situations, districts may cap open enrollment so as to not crowd out resident students or cause crowding issues as the open-enrolled student matriculates. Please note that if more students apply for open enrollment than open enrollment seats are available, the district must hold a lottery that gives priority to siblings of currently open-enrolled students, students coming from other districts where the district has an inter-district school choice plan that is part of its MDE-approved achievement and integration plan and students whose parents or legal guardians are Minnesota residents and employees of your district. Your school board may put caps on open enrollment by grade level as outlined in Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.03.

Please note that the continuance of enrollment applies to VPK/SRP, but does not apply to other preschool options districts operate that welcome out-of-district residents.

Is it permissible to have 5-year-old children participate in the program?

Mixed-age classrooms are permissible. VPK/SRP program standards must apply to the entire classroom including staff-to-child ratios of 1-to-10 and a maximum group size of 20 children. All children, including those with disabilities, are counted as part of the 20 maximum group size. Only children who are 4-years of age on September 1 and meet the eligibility requirements will generate general education revenue as VPK/SRP students.

Children who are 5 years old on September 1 are eligible to and encouraged to attend kindergarten which generates a full 1.0 pupil unit of funding and provides children with a full array of comprehensive services to meet their learning needs.

MARSS state aid category 29 is used to report resident children enrolled in voluntary prekindergarten who are not generating funding.

If programs are given limited funds and cannot possibly serve all of the eligible 4-year-olds in the district, how will entrance be determined?

Funding for approved sites will be limited to the number of participants for whom funding is requested in the application. Since the enrollment for the VPK/SRP program is capped, a district may develop their own admission criteria for eligible children.

Four-year-old children who are generating general education revenue as VPK/SRP students may not be charged for the time they are enrolled. MARSS state aid category 29 is used to report resident children enrolled in VPK/SRP who are not generating funding.

What is the attendance policy; how many days can a child miss before they are dropped from the program?

Statute requires students be dropped after 15 consecutive absences. Each week of absence would count as five days toward the 15. If the school has been notified by the family that the student will no longer be attending, the student should be dropped immediately. This is the same process and statute that is used for K-12. The school should attempt to reach the family to understand the situation and offer support where appropriate.

Does every child have to participate in the 350 hours a year or can they choose to come to the program as many days as they want?

The VPK/SRP program needs to provide a minimum of 350 hours, and students need to be enrolled in the full program to be counted as VPK/SRP program pupil units. Children in the shorter length program or whose family chooses to attend only part-time would not qualify for VPK/SRP funding.