

Allowable Use of Publicly Funded PreK Education Dollars in Response to COVID-19

Purpose

The purpose of this supplemental guidance for reopening of prequalified public and private PreK education programs (PreK) addresses the allowable use of publicly funded prekindergarten education dollars as it pertains to implications of COVID-19.

Background

On August 11, 2020, Vermont Department of Health (VDH) and Agency of Education's (AOE) published joint health guidance for public and independent schools during the COVID-19 emergency (see [A Strong and Healthy Start: Safety and Health Guidance for Reopening Schools, Fall 2020](#)).

[Act 166 of 2014, Vermont's Universal Prekindergarten Education law](#), ensures that each and every child who is 3, 4 or 5 years of age and not enrolled in kindergarten has the opportunity to attend a prequalified prekindergarten education program at public expense. This means that each child is entitled to participate in no fewer than 10 hours a week for 35 weeks per school district academic year operated in a prequalified public school or private program at no cost to the family.

Allowable use of PreK Funding as Related to Strong and Healthy Start School "Step" Status

[Decision Making for School District Operations for the 2020-2021 School Year](#) describes three step levels for health precautions necessary to implement in-person instruction. The [Safety and Health Guidance](#) further describes different scenarios for the provision of learning within a COVID-19 context for each step level. The following guidance describes allowable uses of PreK Funding within each step.

Step I

Step I is described in the Safety and Health Guidance as: *Schools are closed for in-person instruction. Remote learning opportunities should be provided for all students.*

If childcare programs (private PreK programs) are required or decide to close due to increased risk of COVID-19, and if the private PreK program opts to provide remote/distance learning for enrolled PreK students, publicly funded PreK tuition payments will continue without interruption by the school district of residence.

Contact Information:

If you have questions about this document or would like additional information please contact: Early Education Team, Student Support Services, at AOE.UPK@vermont.gov

- As a requirement under Act 166, private PreK programs contract and/or employ licensed Early Childhood Educator (ECE) or Early Childhood Special Educator (ECSE) to be present during PreK hours of instruction. Therefore, if the program chooses to offer remote/distance learning for enrolled PreK students, instruction must be delivered by the program’s employed/contracted licensed ECE/ECSE.
- Remote/Distance learning “hours” to implement weekly PreK education may include a combination of developmentally appropriate remote instruction, educational materials and resources, and accompanying family led activities and resources aligned with the Vermont Early Learning Standards.

If childcare programs (private PreK programs) are required or decide to close due to increased risk of COVID-19, and if the private PreK program does not provide remote/distance learning for enrolled PreK students, publicly funded PreK tuition payments will not be continued through the school district of residence.

If a private PreK program is required or decides to close due to increased risk of COVID-19 and does not provide a remote/distance learning option for enrolled PreK students, then the responsibility for each resident PreK student’s education falls back to the school district of residence. In this case, publicly funded PreK tuition payments will not be continued through the school district of residence.

- Districts can prepare for the possibility that they will have to support remote PreK learning by either working with existing district employees, or partnering with another SU/SD or private program that can provide 10 hours per week of developmentally appropriate remote/distance instruction, educational materials, resources and family-led activities.

Steps II and III

Step II is described in the Safety and Health Guidance as: *Schools are open for in-person instruction with enhanced physical distancing measures and for children who live in counties that are eligible for quarantine-free travel.*

Step III is described in the Safety and Health Guidance as: *Schools are open for in-person instruction with distancing measures. Restrict attendance to those from limited transmission areas (counties eligible for quarantine free travel) only.*

School Districts and private PreK programs have the ability to choose among in-person, remote, and/or hybrid instruction regardless of the step level unless schools are placed on Step I.

- Please note: Private PreK programs that choose to provide remote/distance learning to enrolled PreK students must ensure that instruction is being delivered by an ECE/ECSE with valid AOE educator license.

Due to risk of COVID-19, public and private PreK programs are open for in-person instruction with enhanced physical distancing and/or offers remote/distance learning for enrolled PreK

students, and publicly funded PreK tuition payments will continue without interruption by the school district of residence.

Time Frame for Statewide Move to Step III

After the initial opening of school, the Department of Health will assess the larger public health conditions and consider moving all Vermont schools to Step III. A reasonable time frame for making this decision would likely be after the first two weeks of school.

Resources

[Act 166 2014](#)

[AOE Act 166 Guidance: February 2019 Memo](#)

[Prekindergarten Education and Continuity of Learning](#)

[Allowable use of Publicly Funded Prekindergarten Education Dollars](#)

[UPK Memo: Prekindergarten Eligibility \(May 2019\)](#)