

Vermont's Universal Prekindergarten Program

House Committee on Education; 2.12.2025

I. What is prekindergarten?

- Statute defines “prekindergarten education” as “services designed to provide prekindergarten children developmentally appropriate early development and learning experiences based on Vermont’s early learning standards.” (16 V.S.A. § 829(a)(2)).

II. Who receives prekindergarten services under Vermont’s prekindergarten program?

- All prekindergarten children in the State are eligible for Vermont’s prekindergarten program, regardless of socioeconomic status. Statute defines a “prekindergarten child” as “a child who, as of the date established by the district of residence for kindergarten eligibility, is three or four years of age or is five years of age but is not yet enrolled in kindergarten.” (16 V.S.A. § 829(a)(1)).

III. What prekindergarten services are provided under Vermont’s prekindergarten program?

- If a parent or guardian chooses to have their child participate in the State’s prekindergarten program, an enrolled prekindergarten child shall receive publicly-funded prekindergarten services for not fewer than ten hours per week for 35 weeks of the year. (16 V.S.A. § 829(b)(1)). Under Vermont’s prekindergarten program, publicly-funded prekindergarten education hours can only be provided by certain providers.

IV. What providers participate in Vermont’s prekindergarten program?

- If a parent or guardian chooses to have their child participate in the State’s prekindergarten program, prekindergarten education can be provided by the following types of prequalified programs:
 - Prequalified private provider, meaning a private provider of prekindergarten education that meets the qualifications addressed in Sec. V below.
 - Public school options: Students may enroll in the program operated by the student’s district of residence or in a public school program located outside the district that operates a prekindergarten program that has been prequalified.

V. What are the qualifications of a prequalified provider?

- The Agencies of Education and Human Services (AOE and AHS) jointly determine whether a private or public provider of prekindergarten education is qualified to provide publicly-funded prekindergarten services and maintain a database of prequalified providers. (16 V.S.A. § 829(c)). The Agencies’ joint rules must address minimum quality standards to achieve prequalification status, including:
 - A prequalified program must have either:
 - Accreditation from the National Association for the Education of Young Children;
 - At least 4 stars in the Department for Children and Families’ STARS system; OR
 - Three stars in the Department for Children and Families’ STARS system if the provider has developed a plan approved by the Commissioner of DCF and Secretary of Education to achieve additional stars. (16 V.S.A. § 829(c)(1)).
 - A licensed provider must employ or contract for services of at least one teacher who is licensed and endorsed in early childhood education or in early childhood special education. (16 V.S.A. § 829(c)(2)).

- A registered child care home provider that is not licensed and endorsed in early childhood education or in early childhood special education must receive regular, active supervision and training from a teacher who is licensed in early childhood education or in early childhood special education. (16 V.S.A. § 829(c)(3)).
- Other qualifications required by rule, including:
 - Conducting child development assessments using AOE’s assessment tool 2x/annually (Rule 2602(d));
 - Provide parents and guardians a report of the prekindergarten child’s developmental progress 2x/annually (Rule 2602(e));
 - Permit onsite unannounced visits of AOE, DCF, or school district staff (Rule 2602(g)); and
 - Participate in training (Rule 2602 i)).

VI. How does a family opt-in to Vermont’s prekindergarten program?

- If a parent or guardian chooses to have their child participate in the State’s prekindergarten program, then pursuant to the parent or guardian’s choice, the school district of the prekindergarten child’s residence shall:
 - Pay tuition to:
 - A prequalified private provider; or
 - A public school located outside the district that operates a prequalified prekindergarten program; or
 - Enroll the prekindergarten child in the prequalified program it operates. (16 V.S.A. § 829(b)(2)).

VII. What geographic constraints exist in Vermont’s prekindergarten program?

- A school board may choose to limit the geographic boundaries within which the district shall pay to tuition, called the “prekindergarten region”. (16 V.S.A. § 829(h)).
- Prekindergarten region boundaries are determined jointly by AOE and AHS, in consultation with the school board, private prekindergarten providers, parents of prekindergarten children, and other interested parties pursuant to the process contained within the prekindergarten administrative rules.
- The school district has discretion to pay prekindergarten tuition outside the region if a child is unable to access publicly funded prekindergarten education within the region.

VIII. What are the statutory reporting requirements for Vermont’s prekindergarten program?

- 16 V.S.A. § 829 and the prekindergarten rules require the following reports:
 - To AOE: Results of child development assessments for each child enrolled, using the assessment tool approved by AOE, at least two times a year (rule 2606(1)(d) & rule 2611)
 - To AOE: Financial reports on forms provided by AOE, detailing costs for prekindergarten education on an annual basis (rule 2610)
 - To the General Assembly: Annual report regarding the monitoring and evaluation system, jointly managed by AOE and DCF (16 V.S.A. § 829(e)(10))

IX. How does tuitioning work within Vermont's prekindergarten program?

- The term “tuition” is used both in the prekindergarten context and the K-12 context, but the process and considerations for each are different.
 - Prekindergarten tuition is paid according to 16 V.S.A. § 829.
 - K-12 tuition is paid according to 16 V.S.A. §§ 821-828.
 - For example, even if a student chooses to attend a prekindergarten program provided by an approved independent school, in order to qualify for tuition under § 829, the approved independent school would also need to be a prequalified private prekindergarten provider.

X. How does funding work within Vermont's prekindergarten program?

- School districts pay prekindergarten tuition to the program of the parent's choice (see Sec. VI above).
- Prekindergarten education costs, whether it is a district run program or tuition paid out of district, is part of a school district's education spending.
 - Prekindergarten students enrolled in 10 hours or more of prekindergarten education per week (or receiving 10 or more hours of EEE) are counted as one full-time equivalent pupil for the purposes of calculating a district's average daily membership. If a student is enrolled in at least 6 but less than 10 hours of prekindergarten education per week, the student is counted as a percentage of one full-time equivalent pupil ($1 \times \frac{\text{number of hours per week}}{10}$). Students enrolled for fewer than 6 hours per week are not included in a district's average daily membership. (16 V.S.A. § 4001(1)(C)).
 - The prekindergarten student weight is -.054 for the purposes of calculating weighted long-term daily membership (16 V.S.A. § 4010(d)(1)(A)).