



VERMONT

**DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
AGENCY OF EDUCATION**

LEGISLATIVE REPORT

ANNUAL EVALUATION OF PRE- KINDERGARTEN EDUCATION PROGRAMS

16 VSA Sec 829(e)(10)

May 4, 2026

**Issued by the Vermont Agency of Education
and the Vermont Agency of Human Services**

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	3
Legislative Summary	4
Legislative Developments and Reports	5
Key Takeaways – PreK Education in the 2024-25 School Year	7
Enrollment	7
PreK Quality	10
PreK Expenditures	14
Joint Administration and Oversight of UPK	14
Appendix A: Maps	18
Appendix B: STep Ahead Recognition System (STARS)	20
Appendix C: Teaching Strategies GOLD (GOLD)	23
Appendix D: Ready for Kindergarten Survey in Vermont Early Learning	26



Executive Summary

Act 166, enacted in 2014, established Vermont's Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) program. As part of Vermont's cradle-to-career vision, this program is jointly overseen by the Agency of Education (AOE) and the Department for Children and Families (DCF) to make available high-quality pre-kindergarten education for every PreK aged child in Vermont. The Early Education team works in conjunction with the Department for Children and Family's Child Development Division (CDD) to implement and monitor all aspects of the program. Since the [last report](#), both AOE and CDD have made organizational changes to strengthen work in early childhood education.

As part of a strategic planning process, AOE boosted its instructional leadership capacity and elevated early childhood education as a clear area of leadership focus. A new academics area was created with divisions specifically aligned to curriculum and instruction, education programs, and special education. Within that structure, AOE elevated leadership of early education through the upgrade of a management position to a State Director of Pre-Kindergarten Education. Early education is within the academic area of AOE, aligned within a coherent prekindergarten through 12th grade continuum.

The Agency of Human Services (AHS) completed an assessment of its needs in accordance with Act 119 (2024) and proposed the creation of an additional deputy-level role to manage administrative and operational functions in the Department of Children and Families. This will allow the DCF commissioner and DCF Deputy Commissioner overseeing CDD to prioritize focus on strategic priorities, including early childhood education.

These actions reflect a shared commitment to build the organizational infrastructure necessary to align a statewide system to best serve Vermont children and families with a quality, coherent and equitable system for early childhood education.

As required under 16 VSA Sec 829 (e)(10), this report provides data on enrollment, access, quality, and expenditures in a broad review of the performance of the PreK system. AOE utilizes the EdFi data platform to collect much of the data represented in this report. This system enables the daily exchange of data between the Local Education Agency (LEA) and the agency which enables AOE to clarify and confirm data as it is received. The EdFi data provides information on enrollment, student demographics, and student outcomes. The certification of the data occurs throughout the year. The report will also highlight key new legislative and program developments outside of the core early education operational structure that will have an impact on Vermont's PreK system. What follows in this executive summary is a review of the enabling legislation and report requirements. This report builds from the jointly submitted [Legislative Report Universal Prekindergarten 2024](#).



Legislative Summary

[Act 166 of 2014](#). *An act relating to providing access to publicly funded PreK education.*

1. Since fall 2016, all school districts are mandated to offer publicly funded PreK to resident families who voluntarily enroll their child in an available prequalified public or private PreK program.
2. All Vermont children who are 3, 4, and 5 years old by the date established by the district of residence for kindergarten eligibility and who are not yet enrolled in kindergarten are eligible for PreK education.
3. PreK education is defined in this legislation as at least 10 program hours per week, 35 weeks per year (during the school year).
4. Publicly funded PreK can be provided in prequalified public school-operated PreK programs or prequalified community-based private programs (registered or licensed family child care homes and licensed center-based childcare).
5. The Agency of Education and the Department for Children and Families are charged with joint oversight of prekindergarten education including approval of prequalified programs, ongoing monitoring, and support for implementation.

Reference: [Vermont State Board of Education Rule Series 2600 Prekindergarten Education](#)

Act 166 Report Requirements

Act 166 requires the establishment of a system by which the AOE and the AHS/CDD shall jointly monitor and evaluate publicly funded PreK education programs to promote optimal outcomes for children and to collect data that will inform future decisions. The agencies are required to report annually to the General Assembly in January. At a minimum, a system shall monitor and evaluate:

- A. programmatic details, including the number of children served, the number of private and public programs operated, and the public financial investment made to ensure access to quality PreK education;
- B. the quality of public and private PreK education programs and efforts to ensure continuous quality improvements through mentoring, training, technical assistance, and otherwise; and
- C. the outcomes for children, including school readiness and proficiency in numeracy and literacy.

This report builds on the jointly submitted legislative 2025 report on Universal Prekindergarten.



Legislative Developments and Reports

Vermont's Universal PreK (UPK) system has undergone several changes since the last report in 2024. Key developments include the following.

Act 76 of 2023

An act relating to childcare, early education, workers' compensation, and unemployment insurance required the Agency of Education to convene a study committee chaired by AOE and DCF to create an implementation plan for requiring public schools to ensure full-time prekindergarten was available for all 4-year-olds through both school-based and community programs and to maintain the 10 hours PreK educational benefit for 3-year-olds. The Prekindergarten Education Implementation Committee (PEIC) explored these topics in addition to quality and governance over approximately 18 months. The PEIC made four specific recommendations.

- Maintain the 10-hour/week (350 hour/year) benefit for both three-year-olds and four-year-olds.
- Expand prekindergarten, including hours and services, for four-year-olds.
- Commission an analysis of Vermont's pupil weight for prekindergarten.
- Review methodology for establishing prekindergarten payments to non-school-based programs and propose updates.

Significant additional detail on the committee's discussions, research, and considerations for further discussion is available in the full report. Act 76 also required AOE to report on a prekindergarten per pupil weight percentage change for school district funding.

- [Act 76: Prekindergarten Education Implementation Committee: Final Report to the Legislature](#)
- [Act 76: Prekindergarten Pupil Weights Legislative Report](#)

Plans of action for AOE and AHS on elevating the status of early childhood education

In Sections 4 and 21, Act 76 of 2023 requires both AOE and AHS/Department of Children and Families (DCF) to submit plans to elevate the status of early childhood education within their respective agencies. As noted in the executive summary of this report, both AOE and AHS made noted organizational changes and recommendations to prioritize the focus on early childhood education. The agencies collaborated to write a joint report rather than two separate reports.

[Joint Report on Elevating the Status of Early Childhood Education](#)



Agency of Education and Act 73

[Act 73 of 2025](#) established a process for Vermont to transition to a reimagined system of public education featuring larger school districts, a weighted student funding formula, and a statewide tax rate. As noted in the Joint Report on Elevating the Status of Early Childhood Education linked to above, Act 73 will provide a mechanism for updating Vermont's prekindergarten education funding model to better reflect the true cost of high-quality early education and support expansion over time. Among the expansive requirements within Act 73, the Joint Fiscal Office was required to submit a report to the House Committee on Ways and Means, the Senate Committee on Finance, and the House and Senate Committees on Education on the current funding systems for prekindergarten education, the Child Care Financial Assistance Program, or any other early care and learning systems.

- [JFO Review Vermont's Early Care and Learning System](#)

2026 Preschool Development Grant Birth to Five

In December 2025, the Child Development Division (CDD), in partnership with Building Bright Futures (BBF), AOE, the Department of Health, and the Department of Mental Health, was awarded a one-year federal Preschool Development Grant Birth to Five Systems-Building grant to advance a unified, coherent early care and education system across all program settings.

With support from the 2026 PDGB-5 grant, Vermont will develop a streamlined, coherent statewide framework for Universal Pre-K, through a partnership of CDD, AOE and BBF. The grant provides for consultant facilitation of this work. The primary goals are listed below.

- Improve access by ensuring UPK policies and supports work consistently for families in every region and across program types.
- Clarify and align UPK governance and expectations across agencies and settings so public schools, community-based programs, family childcare, and Head Start partners operate within a coherent statewide framework.
- Reduce administrative burden and duplication by identifying and addressing unnecessary differences in oversight, monitoring, and reporting.
- Create the foundation for shared UPK data governance and integration so Vermont can track participation, quality, and outcomes across the mixed-delivery system using consistent definitions and low-burden processes.

An interagency team from CDD, AOE, and BBF will guide the strategy and implementation of this project. A steering committee composed of statewide and local leaders from school districts, community-based and home-based childcare programs, and Head Start partners will contribute, refine, and validate findings and recommendations throughout.



Key Takeaways – PreK Education in the 2024-25 School Year

- **Enrollment:** The number of PreK students in Vermont grew steadily from the establishment of Universal Prekindergarten in Act 166 of 2014 reaching a peak of 9,596 PreK students before declining due to the pandemic. In 2024-25, there were 8,146 PreK students. About 40 percent of PreK students are 3-year-olds and 60 percent are 4-and 5-year-olds. Nationally, in 2024 Vermont ranked second for access to PreK for 3-year-olds and second for access to PreK for 4-year-olds according to the National Institute for Early Education Research. In 2023-24, using census estimates of the population of 3-and 4-year-olds in Vermont, 58 percent of 3-year-olds and 76 percent of 4-year-olds were enrolled in publicly funded PreK programs.
- **Access:** The number of private and public PreK providers that serve publicly funded PreK students slightly increased between 2019-20 and 2024-25. As of the close of school year 2024-25, 387 PreK providers (235 private and 152 public) serve publicly funded PreK students in Vermont through its current mixed delivery model.
- **Quality:** In terms of provider quality, for the most recent year of data available, 52% of private and public PreK providers are rated Level 5 on STARS, Vermont's Quality Recognition and Improvement System (QRIS). Looking then at student performance, in 2024-25 approximately 85% or more of 3- and 4-year-olds were meeting social emotional, literacy and math objectives on the Teaching Strategies GOLD assessment. These percentages have increased since 2017-18, especially for 4-year-olds. When measuring kindergarten readiness through the Ready for Kindergarten! Survey, entering kindergartners who attended a publicly funded PreK performed better, and more consistently, than their peers that did not attend a publicly funded PreK.
- **PreK Expenditures:** Statewide, since FY21 statewide expenditures in SU/SDs for programs and services for PreK-aged children have ranged approximately between \$10,000 and \$12,000 per PreK student (\$11,978 per PreK student in FY25); more than 75% is funded through the Education Fund and taxpayer contributions. Less than 40% of SU/SD expenditures for programs and services for PreK-aged students are for Early Childhood Special Education.

Enrollment

- **Data Sources:** Data for this section included PreK data collection by AOE on a rolling basis; as such it will differ slightly from October 1 enrollment data presented in the State Profile.
- **Definitions:** *PreK enrollment:* publicly funded 3, 4, and 5 year olds enrolled in a licenses and registered PreK provider setting.



Since 2014, Act 166 (Universal Prekindergarten - UPK) has provided access to publicly funded prekindergarten (PreK) education for Vermont students. All universal prekindergarten education programs, including Head Start, center-based childcare programs, family childcare homes (described as “private”), and public school-operated programs (“public”), must meet specific requirements to operate in Vermont. In 2024-25, there were 8,146 publicly funded PreK students enrolled in 387 approved PreK providers.

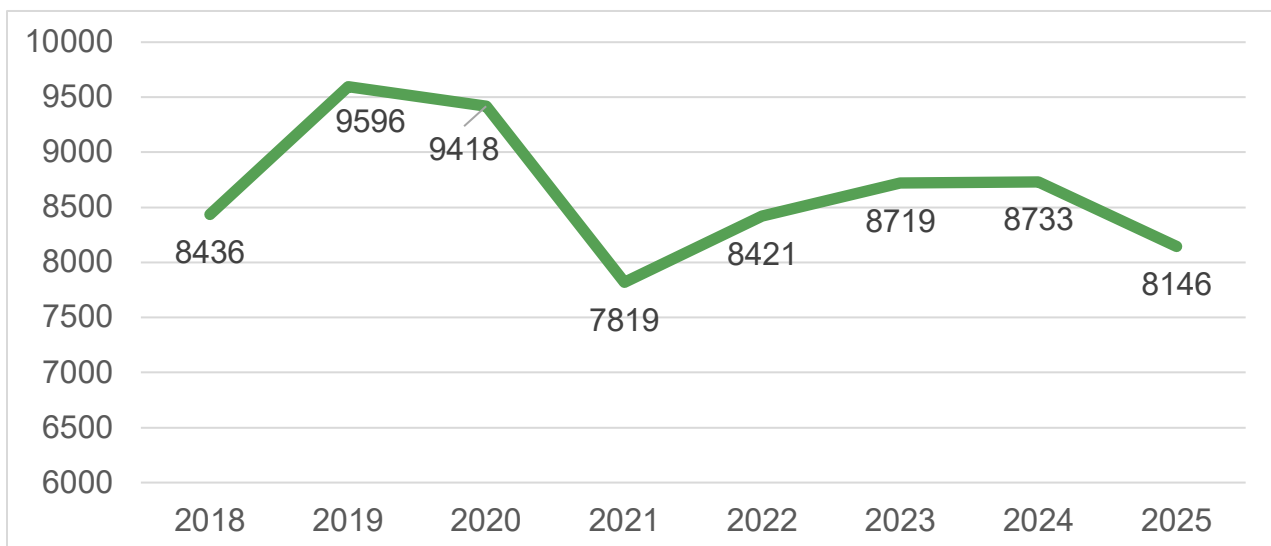
The number of PreK students in Vermont grew steadily from the establishment of Universal Prekindergarten in Act 166 of 2014 until the decline associated with the pandemic. Enrollment reached a pre-pandemic peak of 9,596 PreK students, declining to the lowest enrollment point in 2020-21 (7,819 PreK students). PreK enrollment has increased since then, and in 2024-25, there were 8,146 PreK students. On average, approximately 40% of PreK students are 3-year-olds and 60% are 4- and 5-year-olds (55% and 5% respectively).

Vermont ranks highly nationally for PreK access. Nationally, in 2024 Vermont ranked second for access to PreK for 3-year-olds and second for access to PreK for 4-year-olds according to the National Institute for Early Education Research. In 2023-24, using census estimates of the population of 3- and 4-year-olds in Vermont, 58% of 3-year-olds and 76% of 4-year-olds were enrolled in publicly funded PreK programs.

Between 2018-19 and 2024-25, PreK enrollment fluctuated between 8,000 to 10,000 PreK students. In 2024-25 there were 8,146 PreK students. The reasons for the decline from the 2023-24 school year to the 2024-25 school year need further exploration. Potential reasons may include fewer children of PreK age, fewer UPK offerings due to budget and staffing pressures, and changes in family needs and preference, possibly influenced by the expansion of Child Care Financial Assistance.

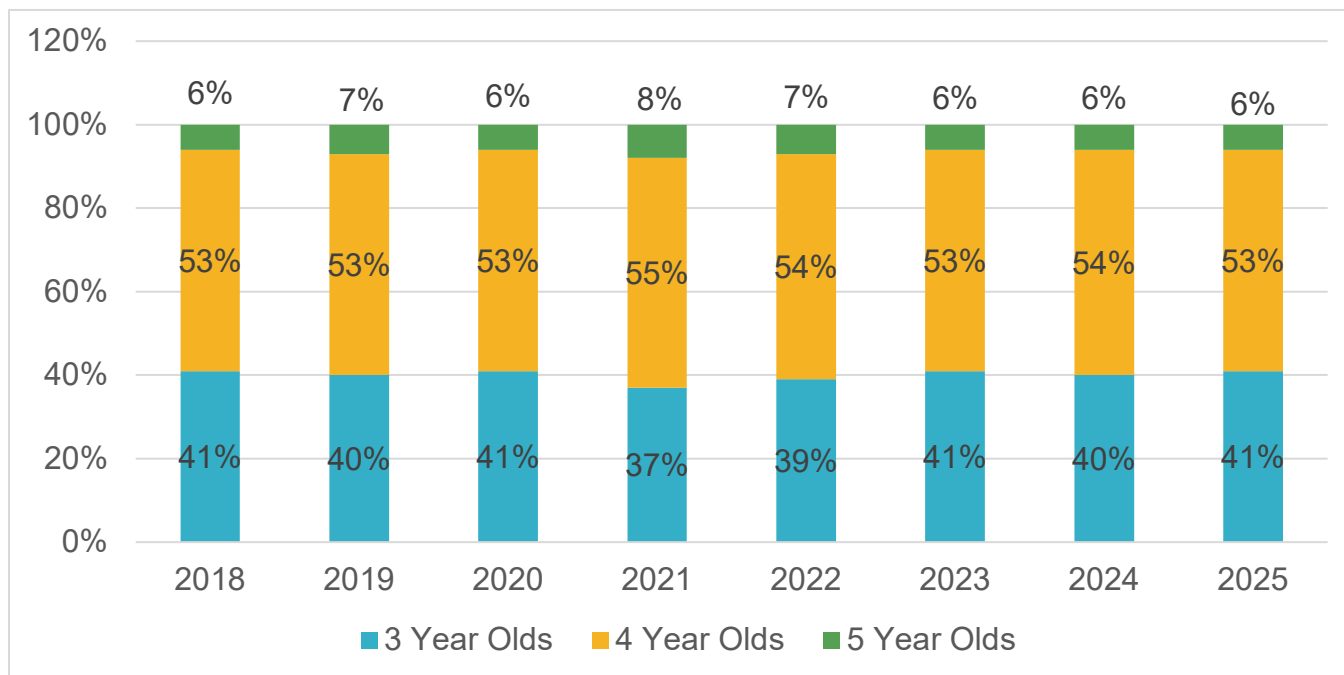
A map showing PreK enrollment by SU/SD is included in [Appendix A](#).

Figure 1: PreK Enrollment 2018-19 to 2024-25



Considerations: Changes in prekindergarten enrollment likely reflect changes in the availability of PreK spots, uptake by families, and a falling birth rate.

Figure 2: PreK Enrollment by Age, 2018-19 to 2024-25



PreK Access

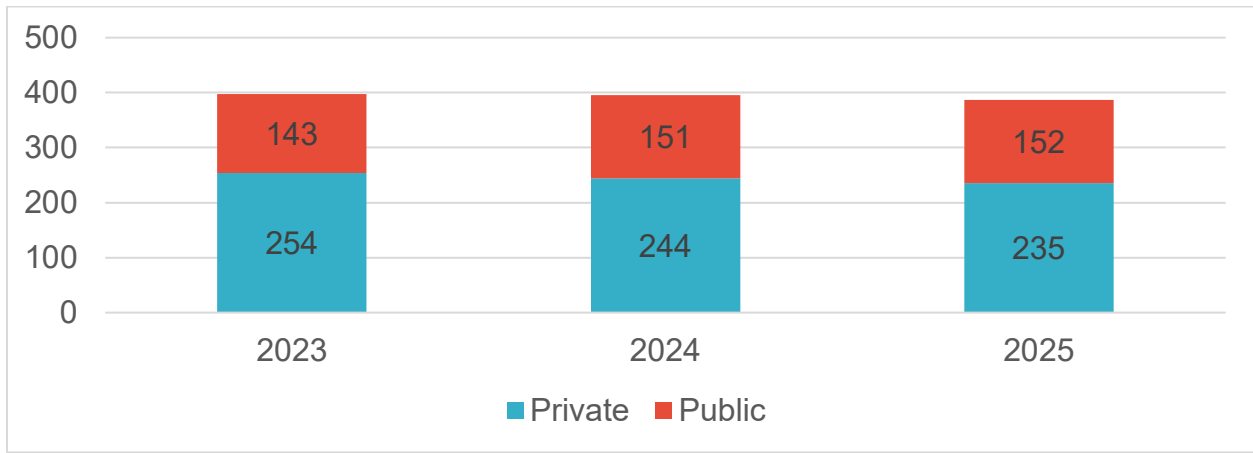
- **Data Sources:** Data presented in this section includes 2019-20 to 2024-25 data collection by AOE on all PreK providers that serve publicly funded PreK students including provider name, address, and designations as a private or public provider. In 2024, AOE and CDD also distributed a survey to districts that included questions regarding capacity to serve more PreK students
- **Definitions:** *Public provider* is a school district that operates a prekindergarten education program. A *private provider* is a community-based provider that operates a prekindergarten education program, including Head Start, center, family, or home-based settings.

In 2022-23 there were 397 PreK providers serving publicly funded students (254 private and 143 public). The total number of PreK providers has slightly decreased since then to 387, with 235 private PreK providers and 152 public PreK providers. The reasons for the decline in community-based private PreK providers require additional exploration. Some programs were unable to secure or retain a teacher with an AOE license with an ECE/ECSE endorsement. Through the 2026 PDBG-5 grant, AOE and CDD plan to strengthen pathways for those working to earn that credential. In addition, as explored in the PEIC report, the statewide tuition rate for prekindergarten in community-based private settings needs to be reassessed to ensure it aligns with the costs of providing



prekindergarten education to all students and is considered part of Vermont’s shift to a foundation formula. PreK providers are included in [Appendix A](#).

Figure 3: Public and Private PreK Providers, 2022-23 Compared to 2023-25*



* Note: To ensure consistency in numerical comparisons, provider numbers prior to 2023 are not included in this chart due to changes in data gathering practices.

- **Data Sources:** Data for this section included PreK data collected by AOE on a rolling basis; as such it will differ slightly from October 1 enrollment data presented in the State Profile.
- **Definitions:** *PreK enrollment:* publicly funded 3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds enrolled in a licensed and registered PreK provider setting.

PreK Quality

STARS

- **Data Sources:** STARS provider ratings are awarded by CDD and information is shared with AOE for PreK providers that serve publicly funded PreK students. This section also includes performance of 3- and 4-year-olds on the Teaching Strategies GOLD (TSGOLD) assessment for the Ready for Kindergarten! Survey (R4K!S) for entering kindergarteners as reported to AOE.
- **Definitions:** *Star Rating:* rating of 3, 4, or 5 starts through STARS, Vermont’s Quality Recognition and Improvement System (QRIS) for childcare, preschool, and afterschool programs. *TSGOLD performance figures:* the percentage of 3- and 4-year-olds who met the objectives in three domains: social emotional, literacy, and math. *R4K!S performance figures:* the percentage of entering kindergarteners that are ready for kindergarten, disaggregated by whether a student attended PreK or not.

Each prekindergarten site is required to achieve Level 4 or 5 through STARS, Vermont’s Quality Recognition and Improvement System (QRIS) for childcare, preschool, and afterschool programs. A program recognized at Level 3 may become a

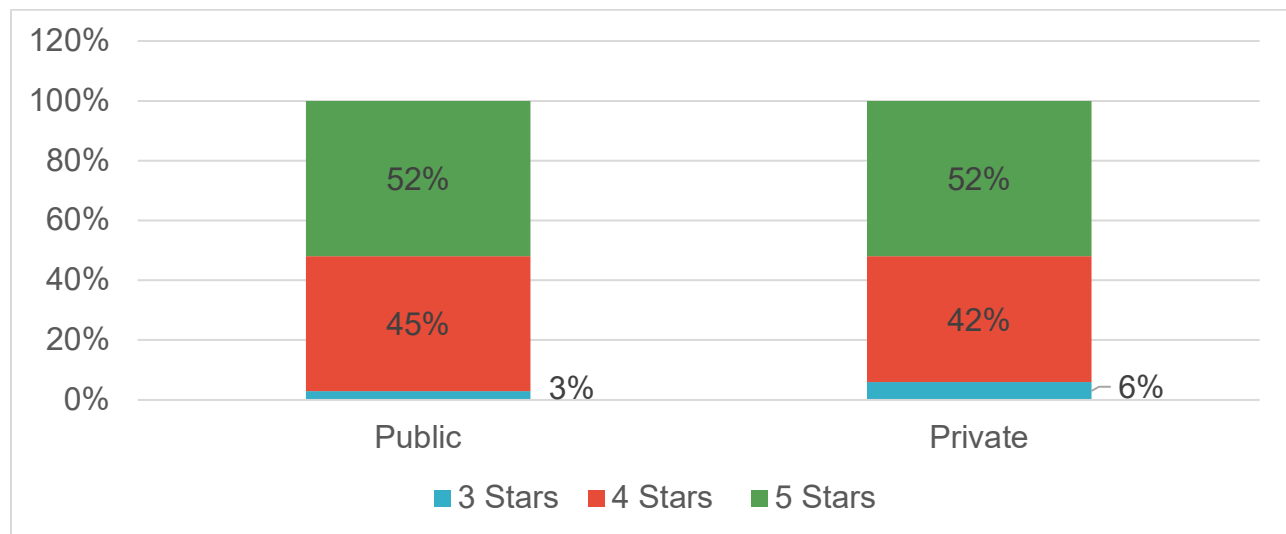


prequalified universal prekindergarten program if it has an approved plan to attain 4 STARS within one year; this typically occurs when a program location is newly opened. Participation in STARS means that a program is striving beyond licensing regulations to meet higher quality standards, uphold professional practices, and commit to continuous quality improvement.

In terms of quality, for the most recent year of data available, 52 percent of private PreK providers and 52 percent of public providers are rated STARS Level 5. The proportion of providers in each star ratings category was similar in prior years.

[Appendix B](#) provides more details about the STARS.

Figure 4: Public and Private PreK Providers - 2025 Ratings



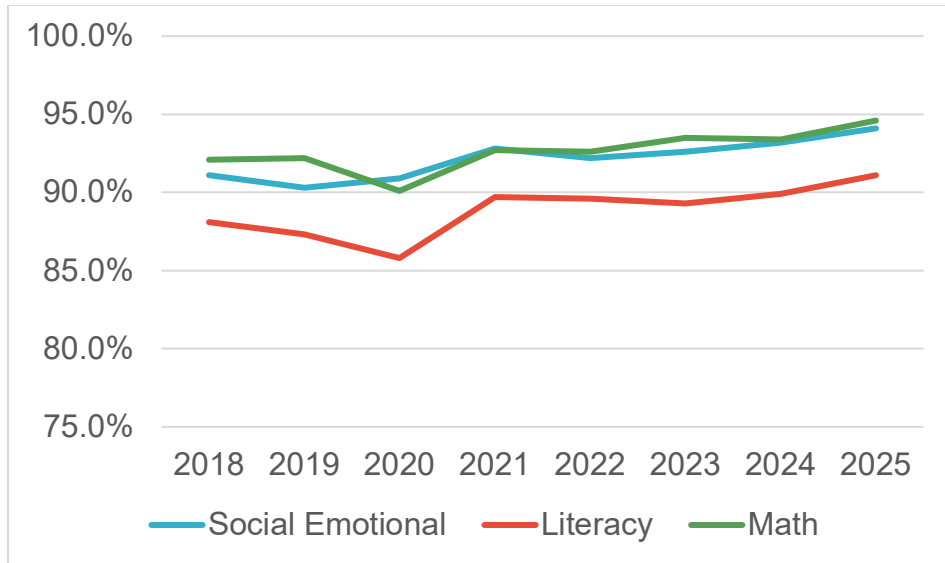
Teaching Strategies GOLD®

Teaching Strategies GOLD (GOLD) is a formative assessment used by universal PreK programs in Vermont to measure ongoing observations linked to 38 research-based objectives that include predictors of school readiness and are aligned with the Common Core State Standards, Vermont Early Learning Standards, and the Head Start Child Early Learning Outcomes Framework. [Appendix C](#) provides more detail on TSGOLD.

In 2024-25, approximately 90% or more of 3- and 4-year-olds are meeting TSGOLD social-emotional, literacy, and math objectives by the end of the school year. These percentages have increased since 2017-18, especially for 4-year-olds (5-point gains in the areas of social-emotional and math objectives). These results are similar across program types and STAR levels.

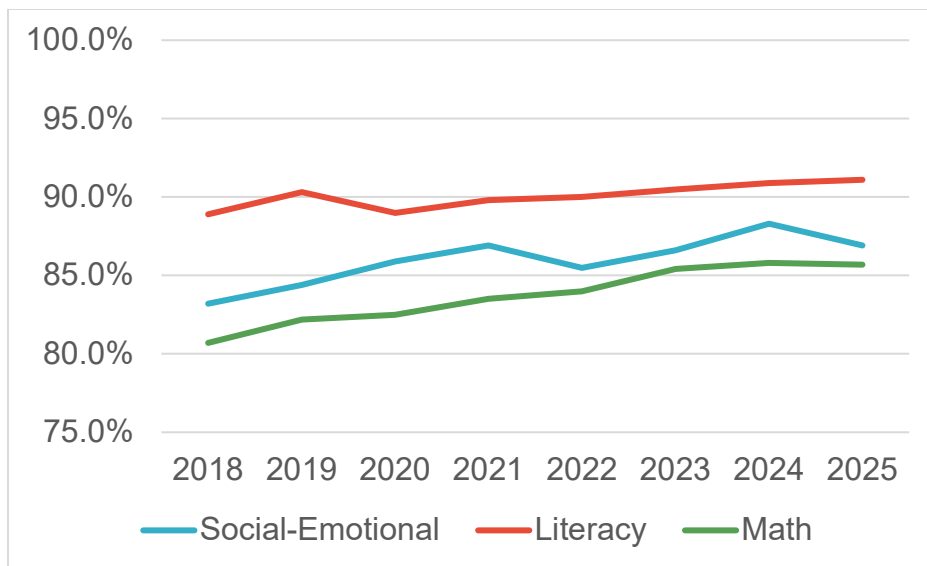


Figure 5: Statewide Percentage of 3-Year-Olds Meeting TSGOLD Objectives, 2017-18 to 2024-25*



**Note: 2020 TSGOLD results are not shown as testing requirements were waived that year and most children were not in school during the spring testing window; as such, these results are excluded for any accountability, analysis, or reporting purposes.*

Figure 6: Statewide Percentage of 4-Year-Olds Meeting TSGOLD Objectives, 2017-18 to 2024-25*



**Note: 2020 TSGOLD results are not shown as testing requirements were waived that year and most children were not in school during the spring testing window; as such, these results are excluded for any accountability, analysis, or reporting purposes.*

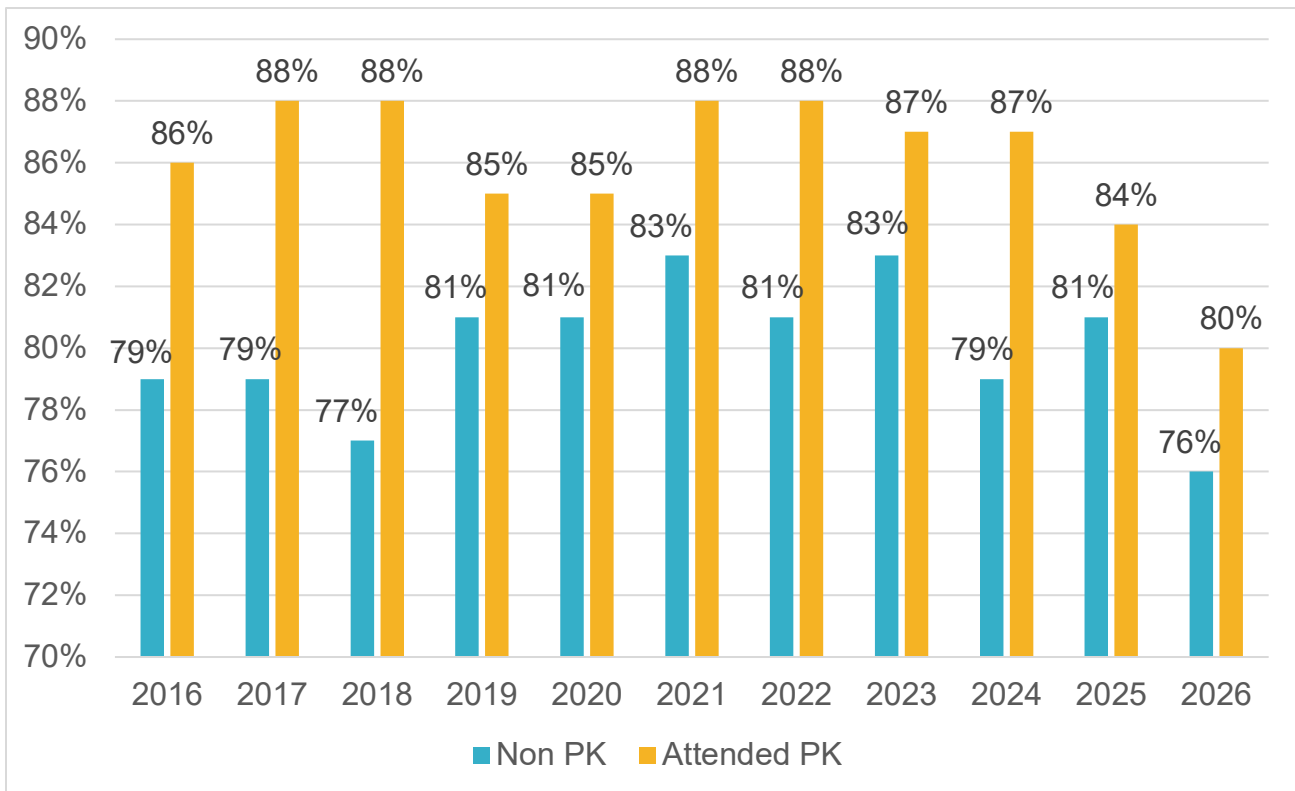


Ready for Kindergarten! Survey

Ready for Kindergarten! Survey (R4K!S) is not a direct assessment of students; instead, it relies on the teacher's accumulated observational knowledge of the child developed during the first few weeks of kindergarten to measure a student's knowledge and skills during the first six to ten weeks of school. Vermont's concept of children's readiness is multidimensional; it includes social and emotional development, communication, and physical health, as well as cognitive development, knowledge, and approaches to learning (e.g., enthusiasm for learning, persistence, and curiosity).

When measuring kindergarten readiness, children entering kindergarten who attended a publicly funded universal PreK performed better and more consistently than their peers who did not participate in publicly funded universal PreK. In examining figure 7, please note that for the 2026 R4K!S collection AOE reduced the time in which teachers could complete the survey. Educators had from September to mid-November to submit their results. Previously, educators had until February to complete it. During the pandemic, educators were given this longer period to submit their survey results. AOE reverted to the previous survey response period since the pandemic was past. Asking educators to respond more quickly ensures the data is more closely aligned with the actual student observations.

Figure 7: Percentage of Entering Kindergarteners that are Kindergarten Ready, 2018-19 to 2025-26



PreK Expenditures Per PreK ADM Trends

PreK is publicly funded by resident school districts, and the cost of PreK is part of a school district's budget as approved by district voters. If a PreK student is enrolled in a PreK program operated by the school district where they live, the cost of the program is paid from the district budget, similar to other grades. If the PreK students are enrolled in a prequalified public or private program other than a program operated by the school district where they live, the law sets a specific amount that a district will pay for 10 hours per week for 35 weeks annually of PreK and this tuition is paid from the voter-approved district budget. The statewide 2024-25 school year PreK Tuition Rate was \$3,884.

Additionally, districts receive funding to provide Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) for 3- to 5-year-olds with individualized education plans (IEPs). While these students are receiving special education services that are publicly funded, they do not have to be enrolled in a universal PreK program. Expenditures are made by SU/SDs to provide programs and services to PreK-aged children in Vermont, including students in universal PreK programs and early childhood special education (ECSE) students. Statewide since FY21, SU/SD expenditures have averaged between approximately \$10,000 and \$12,000 per PreK aged students, just under 40% were for ECSE.

Funding for universal PreK is complicated and relies on braided funding sources. Other than taxpayer contributions, funds also come from sources such as Medicaid reimbursements for special education services. The majority of funds (at least 75%) are through the Education Spending Grant (using SU/SDs' General Funds 1000-1999 as a proxy). Overall, federal funding accounts for approximately 12% of total expenditures. The remainder of expenditures are funded through special revenue funds including state and federal grants such as:

- IDEA, Part B;
- State Census Block Funding for Special Education; and
- State Grants for ECSE.

Within Act 73 is the intent to address the per pupil spending for PreK students. The agency recommends that per pupil spending for PreK be counted as 1.0 ADM. Currently, ADM for PreK is counted at .54 creating a scenario that requires districts to raise additional funds to fully resource their PreK programs. As changes to Vermont's education funding formula are considered, this funding imbalance for PreK should be addressed.

Joint Administration and Oversight of UPK

Vermont's Universal Prekindergarten is designed to leverage strengths, expertise, and systems at both the AOE and the DCF/CDD. Together, the teams work to set policy, support implementation, monitor compliance, and improve practice in service to Vermont's youngest students. The state's approach is deeply informed by the [Vermont](#)



[Early Childhood Guiding Principles](#), which emphasize children’s rights and needs as the core focus of all early childhood efforts. They are consistent with relevant state and national laws and policies. These principles articulate Vermont’s commitment to fully include every child and their family in a continuum of meaningful experiences to ensure their health, mental health, safety, happiness, and success now and into the future.

The Universal Pre-K Systems Alignment contract supports the development of a streamlined and coherent statewide framework for UPK. This framework is intended to expand equitable access to high-quality prekindergarten programs, promote consistency in implementation across regions and program types, improve system efficiency, and reduce duplicative or fragmented efforts across agencies and providers. By strengthening Vermont’s cross-agency coordination and aligning policies, guidance, and resources, the framework will support a more integrated early childhood system that enables communities to deliver UPK more effectively and ensures that young children and families experience more consistent, high-quality services statewide.

Program Approval and Monitoring

AOE and CDD monitor and ensure compliance with Act 166 and other state and federal regulations for 385 public and private UPK programs, reviewing applications and annual assurance submissions and conducting ongoing monitoring. CDD monitors prequalified UPK programs for compliance with childcare licensing regulations and the STARS quality system. AOE monitors the licensed educator through requirements set to earn an Early Childhood Education/Early Childhood Special Education (ECE/ECSE) endorsement. Programs also must demonstrate the application of Vermont Early Learning Standards in instruction and adhere to rules regarding student suspension and expulsions, restraint and seclusion and Act 166 administrative rules. Further quality measures include TSGOLD assessments. Together, the agencies review childcare licensing incident reports and other data for compliance. Co-investigations may include on-site visits, in-person or virtual interviews, and other activities.

Joint administration and oversight of the program includes the following.

- **Programmatic Quality Assurance:** Supports programmatic quality through the implementation of the UPK ACIS monitoring system, STARS, the application process, targeted observations, interviews, file reviews, and feedback to improve child outcomes.
- **Professional Development and Technical Support:** Provide professional development, training, messaging, and technical assistance on educator licensing, Vermont Early Learning Standards (VELS), Teaching Strategies GOLD, ACT 166, suspension and expulsion, restraint and seclusion, Early MTSS, programmatic quality, and desired child outcomes. Support implementation of evidence-based practices and promote desired outcomes via trainings directly offered by AOE or CDD or via sponsored training such as those



offered by Northern Lights at CCV or the Early Childhood Educator Summer Institute.

- **Collaboration and Policy Alignment:** Work closely with supervisory unions, districts, UPK coordinators, educators, community partners and state agencies to align initiatives and strengthen UPK, including representation across state committees and councils.

The Early Education Team is the lead for these key responsibilities under Act 166.

- **Data Collection:** Coordinate collection of multiple required statewide assessments and programmatic details, including Teaching Strategies GOLD, Ready for Kindergarten Survey, Suspension and Expulsion, Rule 4500 – Restraint and Seclusion, National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER), Early Childhood Special Education, loss of licensed educator, Early MTSS, enrollment, access, program quality, and PreK expenditures -- ensuring accurate collection and reporting to inform system-wide improvements.
- **Alignment of Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS):** Supports the scale-up and sustainability of evidence-based frameworks--Vermont's Early Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (Early MTSS) and the Pyramid Model--to enhance outcomes for children and families and ensure alignment of the K-12 education system. Vermont's Early Multi-Tiered System of Supports (Early MTSS) is neutral innovation, and promotes the proactive use of universal, targeted, and individualized best practices that are equitable, inclusive, high-quality, and evidence-based, while addressing system building for sustainability. The Early MTSS framework's prevention approach supports competency and skill development in the areas of social and emotional development, academics, health and mental health enhancing outcomes for children and families and ensuring alignment of the K-12 education system. By investing in evidence-based practices, professional development, and data-driven decision making, Vermont is advancing equity and positive outcomes for children, families, and early childhood educators statewide.
 - [Vermont's Early MTSS / Pyramid Model Impact Report 2024-2025](#)
- **Early Childhood Special Education Services (ECSE):** Ensures effective and compliant implementation of state and federal requirements including IDEA, Americans with Disabilities Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and State of Vermont Special Education Rules for children ages three through five. Collects, analyzes and interprets the data of IDEA indicators, provides support to school districts, and collaborates with the AOE Special Education team to align consistency across the system.

The Child Development Division is the lead for these key responsibilities under Act 166.



-
- **Child Care Licensing:** Outlines and enforces the minimum requirements established to protect the health and safety of children and ensure they are provided developmentally appropriate growth and educational experiences. Includes annual inspections as well as investigations of complaints and concerns which are posted in a public-facing database.
 - **STARS quality improvement and recognition system:** Recognizes childcare, preschool, and afterschool programs that demonstrate quality within three key domains: Adult-Child Interactions, Family & Youth Engagement, and Responsive Practices. Includes external quality assessments using CLASS®, a national research-based evaluation tool conducted by trained, reliable assessors as well as quality coaching through companion SPARQS program. (See Appendix B for more information.)
 - **Head Start collaboration:** Promotes effective collaboration with Head Start programs in Vermont at state and district levels and alignment with federal Head Start standards and practices through the Vermont Head Start Collaboration Office (which is housed within CDD). Aims to ensure robust, coordinated services for children and the caregivers from some of Vermont’s lowest-income families and a strong coordination with and transition to the child’s K-12 public school district.

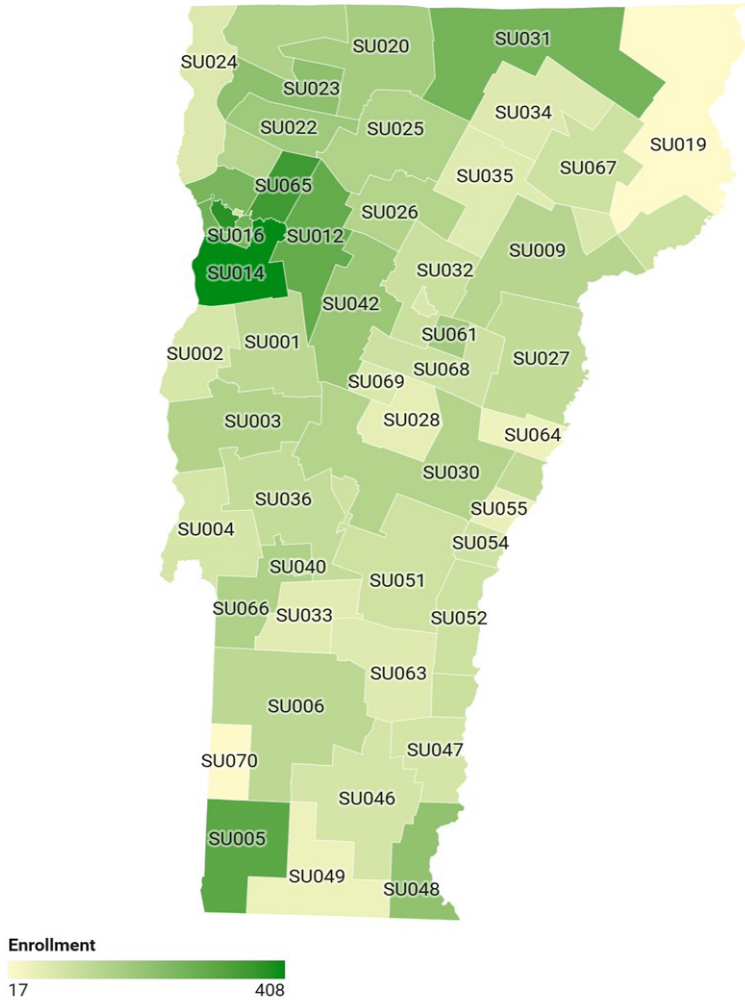
Vermont’s Universal Prekindergarten system benefits from strong joint oversight by AOE and CDD, with comprehensive monitoring structures that integrate licensing, educator requirements, quality standards, data collection, and evidence-based frameworks such as Early MTSS and the Pyramid Model. These coordinated efforts support high-quality, equitable early learning experiences statewide. Moving forward, strengthening the system will require greater coherence and consistency across agencies, clearer alignment between monitoring tools and desired outcomes, and more strategic use of integrated data to guide decision-making and targeted supports, while continuing to invest in professional development and clear communication with the field.



Appendix A: Maps

Licensed and Registered PreK Providers Serving Publicly Funded PreK Students - 2024

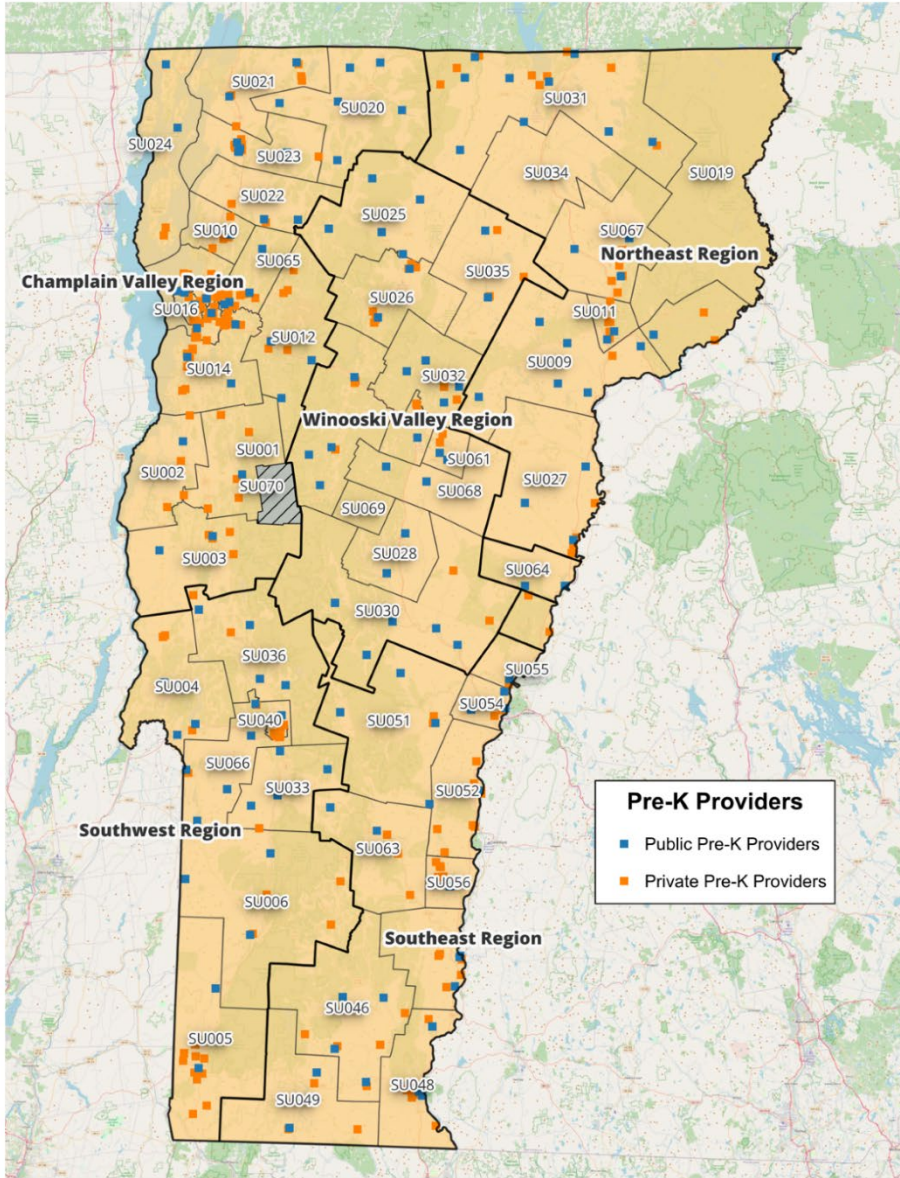
PreK Enrollment by SU (SY25)



SUNION	SU Name	PreK Enrollment SY25
SU001	MT ABRAHAM	143
SU002	ADDISON NORTHWEST	92
SU003	ADDISON CENTRAL	164
SU004	SLATE VALLEY	96
SU005	SOUTHWEST VERMONT	332
SU006	BENNINGTON RUTLAND	142
SU007	COLCHESTER	274
SU009	CALEDONIA CENTRAL	154
SU010	MILTON	156
SU011	ST JOHNSBURY	83
SU012	MT MANSFIELD	301
SU014	CHAMPLAIN VALLEY	429
SU015	BURLINGTON	416
SU016	SOUTH BURLINGTON	292
SU017	WINOOSKI	123
SU019	ESSEX NORTH	17
SU020	FRANKLIN NORTHEAST	196
SU021	MISSISQUOI	168
SU022	FRANKLIN WEST	208
SU023	MAPLE RUN	239
SU024	GRAND ISLE	85
SU025	LAMOILLE NORTH	176
SU026	LAMOILLE SOUTH	162
SU027	ORANGE EAST	145
SU028	ORANGE SOUTHWEST	62
SU030	WHITE RIVER VALLEY	163
SU031	NORTH COUNTRY	274
SU032	WASHINGTON CENTRAL	113
SU033	MILL RIVER	70
SU034	ORLEANS CENTRAL	77
SU035	ORLEANS SOUTHWEST	78
SU036	RUTLAND NORTHEAST	133
SU040	RUTLAND CITY	153
SU042	HARWOOD	201
SU046	WINDHAM CENTRAL	103
SU047	WINDHAM NORTHEAST	95
SU048	WINDHAM SOUTHEAST	254
SU049	WINDHAM SOUTHWEST	50
SU051	MOUNTAIN VIEWS	110
SU052	WINDSOR SOUTHEAST	117
SU054	HARTFORD	107
SU055	SAU 70	52
SU056	SPRINGFIELD	127
SU061	BARRE	205
SU063	TWO RIVERS	82
SU064	RIVENDELL INTERSTATE	48
SU065	ESSEX WESTFORD	363
SU066	GREATER RUTLAND COUNTY	180
SU067	KINGDOM EAST	119
SU068	CENTRAL VERMONT	114
SU069	MONTPELIER ROXBURY	83
SU070	LINCOLN	20



Pre-K Providers by SU



SUNION	SU Name
SU001	Mt.Abraham
SU002	Addison NW
SU003	Addison Central
SU004	Slate Valley
SU005	SW Vermont
SU006	Bennington-Rutland
SU007	Colchester
SU009	Caledonia Central
SU010	Milton Town
SU011	St.Johnsbury
SU012	Mt.Mansfield
SU014	Champlain Valley
SU015	Burlington
SU016	S Burlington
SU017	Winooski
SU019	Essex N
SU020	Franklin NE
SU021	Missisquoi Valley
SU022	Franklin W
SU023	Maple Run
SU024	Grand Isle
SU025	Lamoille N
SU026	Lamoille S
SU027	Orange E
SU028	Orange SW
SU030	White River Valley
SU031	North Country
SU032	Washington Central
SU033	Mill River
SU034	Orleans Central
SU035	Orleans SW
SU036	Rutland NE
SU040	Rutland City
SU042	Harwood
SU046	Windham Central
SU047	Windham NE
SU048	Windham SE
SU049	Windham SW
SU051	Mountain Views
SU052	Windsor SE
SU054	Hartford
SU055	SAU #70
SU056	Springfield SD
SU061	Barre
SU063	Two Rivers
SU064	Rivendell Interstate
SU065	Essex Westford
SU066	Greater Rutland County
SU067	Kingdom East
SU068	Central Vermont
SU069	Montpelier Roxbury



Appendix B: Step Ahead Recognition System (STARS)

This document provides an overview of STARS as the state's quality recognition and improvement system (QRIS).

Introduction to STep Ahead Recognition System (STARS)

The STep Ahead Recognition System (STARS) is the State of Vermont's Quality Recognition and Improvement System (QRIS) for childcare, preschool, and afterschool programs. Participation in STARS means that a program is striving beyond licensing regulations to meet higher quality standards, uphold professional practices, and commit to continuous quality improvement.

The Child Development Division (CDD) launched a revised STARS mode in July, 2023 with increased focus on positive outcomes for children, engagement of families, equitable opportunities for programs and providers to participate, and support for continuous quality improvement. STARS recognizes program's practices within three elements of quality: Adult-Child Interactions, Family & Youth Engagement, and Responsive Practices.

There are five levels in STARS. All registered and licensed childcare programs in good standing with Vermont childcare licensing are considered STARS level 1, and engagement at the consecutive levels is voluntary. All Universal Prekindergarten Education programs must be recognized at the 4 or 5 STARS levels (or, in some instances, 3 STARS with a plan to increase to 4 within one year). Programs renew on a three-year basis, providing annual updates on their non-renewal years.

1. Elements of Quality in STARS

Adult-Child Interactions

This element focuses on nurturing, supportive and reciprocal adult-child interactions that occur between adults and children in the classroom. These relationships are foundational to the learning process and overall development of youth. Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) is an evidence-based tool used in 23 states, Head Start, and the U.S. Army and Child Youth Services (CYS). CLASS is utilized to assess this Element of Quality within the Early Childhood Education field. CDD funds external assessors to complete the assessments to ensure validity and reliability of results. Programs that the AOE has identified as Early Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) Implementation sites currently have the option to submit their TPOT scores, which must be scored by their own external assessors, and an AOE-issued Early MTSS Certificate in place of CLASS for their STARS application.

Family & Youth Engagement

This element focuses on practices that programs use to engage and increase family strengths, which help enhance the child's development. The framework used to support this Element of Quality is the Center for the Study for Social Policy's research-informed



Strengthening Families Approach. Strengthening Families is based on engaging families, programs, and communities in building five key Protective Factors. These factors include parental resilience, social connections, knowledge of parenting and child development, concrete supports in times of need, and social and emotional competence of children. Beginning at STARS Level 2, programs complete the Strengthening Families Self-Assessment, which provides feedback on current family engagement practices and opportunities for further engaging families and youth. At levels 4 and 5, programs are integrating at least three of the five Strengthening Families protective factors into their program.

Responsive Practices

This element focuses on utilizing practices in the classroom that are responsive to individual children and youth's interests, needs and developmental level, and their family culture, race & ethnicity, language, and gender identity. Approaches and standards used within this element include programs required to reference and utilize Vermont Early Learning Standards, the National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC) Developmentally Appropriate Practices, and child observations to inform curriculum planning. Programs that the Agency of Education (AOE) has identified as fully implemented Early Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) automatically meet this requirement.

2. System for Program Access to Resources for Quality Supports

As part of the revised STARS model, CDD also launched the System for Program Access to Resources for Quality Supports (SPARQS) as a hub of direct resources and supports for educators across the state. SPARQS is funded through Vermont's Child Development Division and administered through the Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children. SPARQS supports a system of quality through providing direct supports, including the CLASS observation, mentoring, coaching and technical assistance and professional development opportunities at no charge to programs.

3. Avenues for Streamlined Applications

There are multiple avenues that a program may be able to either fully or partially streamline its STARS application. Head Start recipients or Programs that are NAEYC accredited are automatically streamlined to STARS level 5 at all elements of quality. Programs that are Early MTSS Implementation sites, Head Start Partner sites, and National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC) accredited programs are partially streamlined, meaning they automatically meet requirements for some elements of quality at specific STARS levels.

4. Resources and References

Resources for STARS

- **System for Program Access to Quality Supports (SPARQS)**



-
- Offers assessments, coaching, mentoring and professional development
 - Link: [System for Program Access to Quality Supports](#)
 - **Classroom Assessment Scoring System Website:**
 - CLASS is an evidence-based continuous quality improvement system centered on interactions. This is achieved by focusing on effective adult-child interactions, followed by measuring the quality of interactions and then improving teaching quality driven by data captured in the CLASS observation.
 - Domains assessed include Emotional Support, Classroom Organization, and Instructional Support.
 - Link: [Classroom Assessment Scoring System](#)
 - **Center for the Study of Social Policy- Strengthening Families:**
 - The Strengthening Families Framework is a research-informed approach, with five protective factors identified to support children and families to thrive: Parental Resilience, Social Connections, Knowledge of Parenting & Child Development, Concrete Supports in Times of Need, and Social and Emotional Competence of Children.
 - Link: [Strengthening Families](#)



Appendix C: Teaching Strategies GOLD (GOLD)

This document provides an overview of GOLD's role in Vermont's UPK program, emphasizing its use in tracking critical developmental domains while providing key resources for educators.

Introduction to Teaching Strategies GOLD (GOLD)

Teaching Strategies GOLD is an authentic, observation-based assessment system designed to monitor children's growth and development from birth through kindergarten. In Vermont, GOLD is a key component of the state's Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) program and the state-approved developmental child assessment for all UPK prequalified programs. It is used to assess developmental progress and ensure alignment with Vermont's Early Learning Standards (VELS). This measure provides educators with actionable insights to support individualized learning and growth for children across diverse developmental domains.

1. What is GOLD and how was it developed?

GOLD was developed by Teaching Strategies, LLC, and is grounded in extensive research on child development. Its development included rigorous psychometric testing to ensure reliability and validity. It incorporates evidence-based practices to measure children's progress across multiple domains of learning. The system was designed to be developmentally appropriate, culturally sensitive, and applicable for diverse learning contexts. GOLD aligns with widely accepted early childhood standards, including the Common Core State Standards and the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework.

The tool's emphasis is on formative assessment, allowing educators to gather ongoing data through observation, documentation, and interaction. The data obtained should be used as part of a broader data-collection system for evidence-based decision-making.

[The Only Connected Ecosystem in Early Childhood Education with Proven Results-](#) Connect curriculum, assessment, and professional development to promote higher growth and teacher retention.

2. Administration of GOLD in Vermont UPK Programs

How the Measure is Administered

Teaching Strategies GOLD is the state-approved developmental child assessment for all UPK prequalified programs. GOLD is primarily administered by teachers in Vermont's UPK programs, which serve children aged 3 to 5. Educators use the platform to observe and document children's developmental milestones during routine classroom activities. Data collection occurs in natural settings that provide authentic insights into children's skills and behaviors.



To Whom it is Administered

The measure is used for all students enrolled in Vermont's UPK programs, including children from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, English Language Learners (ELL), and children with special needs. This inclusive approach ensures that assessments capture the needs and strengths of all learners.

Assessment Windows

In Vermont, GOLD assessments occur three times during the academic year.

1. **Fall Window** (September–December): Establishes baseline data for individual and group growth plans.
2. **Winter** (December-February) Applicable for Head Start UPK programs.
3. **Spring Window** (December to June): Summarizes year-end outcomes for state reporting and transitions to kindergarten.

These cyclical assessment periods provide educators with timely data to guide teaching strategies and communicate progress to families.

3. Domains Measured by GOLD

GOLD evaluates children's progress across **10 developmental domains**, which include Language, Mathematics, and Social-Emotional Learning (SEL). These three domains are particularly emphasized in Vermont's UPK reporting requirements.

Language

- Focus: Oral language, phonological awareness, vocabulary development, and emergent literacy skills.
- Example Objective: Demonstrates understanding of spoken language through conversation and story retelling.

Mathematics

Focus: Number sense, pattern recognition, spatial awareness, and problem-solving.

Example Objective: Recognizes and counts numbers sequentially and identifies shapes in the environment.

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)

- Focus: Interpersonal skills, self-regulation, and emotional awareness.
- Example Objective: Demonstrates the ability to engage in cooperative play and manage emotions effectively.

Educators in Vermont use the data collected in these domains to ensure children are on track for kindergarten readiness and to report required outcomes to the state.

4. Resources and References



Training Resources for GOLD

- **Vermont Agency of Education:**
 - Offers guidance and technical assistance on implementing GOLD for UPK programs and hosts professional development opportunities for educators and administrators.
 - Link: [Vermont Agency of Education - Early Education](#)
- **Teaching Strategies Official Website:**
 - Provides online modules, tutorials, and educator resources for mastering GOLD.

[Support Webinars](#)

[SmartTeach® Support Portal](#)

[Administrative Videos](#)

[Onboarding Resources](#)

- **Local Support Networks:**

The Vermont Early Childhood Professional Development System is a hub for professional development for early childhood educators, offering training, career advising, and resources to help professionals track credentials and advance their careers with [Northern Lights at the Community College of Vermont \(CCV\)](#).

References on GOLD Development and Norming

- Teaching Strategies (2017). "Teaching Strategies GOLD®: Research and Validation." A comprehensive report on reliability, validity, and research base for GOLD.
- Snow, C. E., & Van Hemel, S. B. (Eds.). (2008). *Early Childhood Assessment: Why, What, and How*. National Academies Press. Provides foundational insights into formative assessment in early childhood.
- Vermont Early Learning Standards (VELS): Aligns with the developmental objectives of GOLD.
 - Link: [VELS Website](#)



Appendix D: Ready for Kindergarten Survey in Vermont Early Learning

This appendix outlines the role of the Ready for Kindergarten Survey (R4K!S) in Vermont's early education system, emphasizing its developmental domains and its capacity to evaluate the impact of Pre-K education.

Introduction to Ready for Kindergarten

[The Ready for Kindergarten Survey \(R4K!S\)](#) measure is an assessment tool designed to evaluate children's readiness for kindergarten. It provides a comprehensive understanding of children's developmental progress across multiple domains. In Vermont, the R4K!S is integrated into the state's early learning system to align with Vermont Early Learning Standards (VELS) and to support transitions from Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) to kindergarten. The measure helps educators, families, and policymakers understand the impact of early education and identify areas where additional support may be needed.

1. What is the R4K!S Measure, and How Was It Developed?

Background on R4K!S

The R4K!S builds on the foundations of previous readiness measures, integrating advances in child development research and incorporating feedback from educators. Its focus is on aligning early learning assessments with broader educational standards while maintaining a child-centered approach.

Re-norming by AIR

The American Institutes for Research (AIR) played a critical role in re-norming Ready for Kindergarten in 2017, ensuring that the measure accurately reflects developmental milestones across diverse populations. This process involved extensive field testing, statistical validation, and updates to domains based on emerging research. The revised R4K!S emphasizes equity and inclusivity, accounting for variations in cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

2. Administration of the Ready for Kindergarten Survey in Vermont UPK Programs

How the Measure is Administered

R4K!S is administered through direct child assessments, teacher observations, and parent surveys. Teachers use a blend of structured tasks and naturalistic observations to document children's developmental progress.

To Whom It is Administered

The measure targets children transitioning from Vermont's UPK programs to kindergarten, encompassing those with diverse educational and cultural experiences. It



is particularly useful for identifying developmental differences between children who have attended Pre-K and those who have not.

Assessment Windows

R4K!S assessments are conducted at the beginning of the kindergarten year, providing baseline data on children’s readiness. Vermont mandates a fall assessment window, typically spanning September through October, to align with school entry timelines and to inform instructional planning early in the academic year.

3. Domains Measured by R4K!S

Key Domains

R4K!S assesses five major domains of development, with an emphasis on the following.

- **English Language Arts (ELA):** Measures literacy, vocabulary, and language comprehension.
- **Mathematics:** Focuses on foundational numeracy, pattern recognition, and problem-solving.
- **Social-Emotional Learning (SEL):** Evaluates self-regulation, interpersonal skills, and emotional well-being.

Relationship to Teaching Strategies GOLD

The domains of R4K!S overlap significantly with those measured by Teaching Strategies GOLD (GOLD), particularly in ELA, Math, and SEL. However, while GOLD provides ongoing formative data, R4K!S offers a summative snapshot of kindergarten readiness. Together, these tools allow Vermont to evaluate the longitudinal impact of early childhood education.

Comparison of Pre-K Attendance

One of R4K!S’s strengths is its ability to compare outcomes for children who have participated in UPK with those who have not. By examining developmental disparities, the measure helps identify gaps and informs decisions about resource allocation and program enhancements.

4. Resources and References

Training Resources for R4K!S

- **Ready for Kindergarten Official Portal**
Provides user guides, webinars, and interactive training modules for educators and administrators.
 - Link: [R4K!S Resources](#)

References on R4K!S Development and Norming



-
- American Institutes for Research (2017). Re-norming and Validation of the R4K Measure.
 - This document outlines the methodologies used to ensure accuracy and reliability.
 - Snow, C. E., & Van Hemel, S. B. (Eds.). (2008). *Early Childhood Assessment: Why, What, and How*. National Academies Press.
 - Vermont Early Learning Standards (VELS)
 - Aligns closely with R4K!S developmental domains.
 - Link: [VELS Website](#)

