



# **AOE Universal Prekindergarten Program Handbook**

**Public, Private and Family Childcare Home Providers**

**November 15, 2023**

Issued by the Vermont Agency of Education Early Education Team

Dear UPK Prequalified Program,

Congratulations on becoming an Act 166 Universal Prekindergarten (UPK) approved education program! Your program is joining 400 plus UPK-approved public schools, private centers (including Head Start), and family childcare home providers who offer high-quality prekindergarten education and care to children in Vermont. This UPK Program Handbook was created to support your program in maintaining your UPK prequalified status through compliance with UPK's eleven requirements, specifically AOE Prekindergarten education requirements. From submitting a program change form to submitting Teaching Strategies GOLD assessment checkpoints, this handbook will be your go-to source for information and resources when you have questions about UPK.

Renewing UPK programs will also benefit from this handbook by refreshing their knowledge of UPK compliance requirements and legislative mandates that have changed in the past few years. One important change is the implementation of the UPK Accountability and Continuous Improvement System known as ACIS. ACIS is a joint monitoring, collaboration, and oversight by the Agency of Education - Early Childhood Education, and the Agency of Human Services - Child Development Division to ensure compliance by all UPK public, private, and family childcare home programs. ACIS shifts the oversight of UPK program prequalification compliance from UPK Coordinators to the state agencies.

UPK education is ever evolving based upon data collections for continuous improvement of Vermont's UPK system. This handbook will be updated as needed based on policy changes and/or revisions as detailed in Act 166. The AOE Early Team is here to support your work as a UPK-prequalified education program so please reach out if you have questions.

Thank you for your commitment to high-quality early childhood education for each and every child in Vermont.

*The Early Childhood Education Team*

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## Mission Statement

What defines Vermont **Universal Prekindergarten Education (UPK)** is the implementation of high-quality, effective instruction by licensed educators who use evidence-based practices within intentionally designed early learning environments. Early educators align curriculum with the Vermont Early Learning Standards while adapting experiences to support the full participation of each and every child to realize their full potential and promote positive outcomes.

## Vermont Early Childhood Guiding Principles

### We believe that each and every child...

- Learns within the context of secure and authentic relationships, play, and interactions within their environments.
- Deserves equitable access to experiences that acknowledge and build on their uniqueness.
- Deserves opportunities to deeply learn and develop to their full potential through joyful interactions in safe, accepting environments.

### For each and every family, we will...

- Respect and support them as experts, partners, and decision makers in the learning and development of their children.
- Pledge to be open, genuine, reflective, and respectful listeners and communication partners.
- Build caring communities that accept differences and foster a sense of belonging.

### For each and every child and their family, we will...

- Promote understanding of the importance of inclusive and effective early childhood experiences.
- Build equitable access to opportunities, support, and services.
- Acknowledge and address biases in ourselves and others and the importance of differences such as race, class, gender, family structure, ability, and sexual orientation.

- Advance policies, procedures, programs, and practices that honor and are supportive of each family’s culture, strengths, structure, expertise, and preferences.
- Provide options, flexibility, and continuity within each community by working collaboratively within and across agencies, programs, and funding sources.
- Expand the number of early childhood professionals who are well prepared and reflect the diversity of the community.
- Draw upon evidence and research for practices that are responsive and appropriate to the child’s culture(s), language(s), abilities, developmental level, identities, and needs.

## **Inclusion Statement**

Inclusion in early childhood programs refers to including children with disabilities in early childhood programs, together with their peers without disabilities; holding high expectations and intentionally promoting full participation across routines and activities across learning environments, facilitated by universal and individualized accommodations; and implementing evidence-based practices to fidelity to foster each and every child’s development (cognitive, language, communication, physical, behavioral, and social emotional), friendships with peers, and sense of belonging.

- Personnel promotes acceptance and appreciation of children's individual differences and their varying abilities, with a focus on children's strengths and contributions to an enjoyable, engaging, and positive learning environment.
- They foster positive and culturally responsive adult-child relationships, establish predictable routines, and intentionally teach a range of social-emotional skills and competencies. When children engage in challenging behavior, a team-based approach will be used to understand what the child is communicating through data collection, examine the environment and universal supports being implemented to fidelity, develop a response plan, and explore what social-emotional skills to teach and/or strengthen competencies.
- Personnel use various strategies to promote interactions between children without disabilities and children with disabilities. This includes organizing the

environment for positive social interaction and teaching specific social skills that promote peer interactions among all children, encourage peer interactions with multiple exchanges, and increase the complexity of peer interactions.

- Personnel develop, modify, and implement teaching plans that utilize and embed the Vermont Early Learning Standards, which optimize each and every child's full access and participation across all routines and activities regardless of disability, across all learning environments. The planned routines and activities consider the specialized equipment, assistive technology (low and high), and materials to benefit children with disabilities.
- Personnel use ongoing observation and authentic assessment practices that span all areas of development and are culturally responsive, non-biased, and in children's primary languages, to understand children's learning and development to identify.... Data-Based Decision Making is utilized to inform instruction, teaching practices, and the use of adaptations or additional support for children.

## **Equity Statement**

Advancing equity in early childhood education requires an understanding of this broader societal context, biases, and how historical and current inequities have shaped the profession. The biases referred to here are based on race, class, culture, gender, sexual orientation, ability and disability, language, national origin, indigenous heritage, religion, and other identities. To ensure equity and high-quality inclusive learning environments, leadership teams must:

- Provide high-quality early education programs that build on each child's unique individual and family strengths, cultural background, language(s), abilities, and experiences.
- Eliminate differences in educational outcomes as a result of who children are, where they live, and what resources their families have.

Personnel who are aware of implicit and explicit biases as they relate to their teaching can better provide learning experiences that are aligned with children's cultural and familial norms. Public and private PreK programs can further promote equitable outcomes for young children by:



- (a) confronting and dispelling implicit and explicit biases.
- (b) improving advocacy for young children and families who are often subject to biases; and
- (c) informing changes in policies, practices, and systems through advocacy.

## **Early Multi-Tiered System of Support (Early MTSS)**

Vermont's Early MTSS is a balanced framework with a two-prong approach designed to support children from birth through age 8. The Early MTSS framework promotes building the capacity of schools and private programs to ensure the implementation of evidence-based practices to fidelity within each classroom. Research supports that the promotion, prevention, and intervention through the implementation of high quality, inclusive, universal, evidence-based practices ultimately reduce the likelihood of struggling learners, challenging behaviors, suspension, or expulsion and increases the competence and confidence of each and every child resulting in positive outcomes and success. This includes social and emotional skills and competencies which are embedded within the Early MTSS components, as well as early literacy and language development, mathematics, creative arts and expression, science, and social studies. Implementing practices to fidelity helps to ensure each and every child has equitable access and can fully participate in their learning environment and ACROSS ALL ENVIRONMENTS. More information is in the Resources section at the end of this handbook.

## **History - Act 166 Universal Prekindergarten (UPK)**

[Act 166 of 2014](#) (Universal Prekindergarten - UPK) provides access to [publicly-funded](#) prekindergarten education for Vermont students. All prekindergarten education programs, including Head Start and public school-operated programs, must meet specific requirements to operate in Vermont. The State Board of Vermont created administrative rules to guide Act 166 implementation by the Agency of Education (AOE) and the Agency of Human Services - Child Development Division (CDD).

## UPK Administrative Rule Series 2600 - Prekindergarten Education

The administrative rules, to establish and maintain a prequalified prekindergarten education program in Vermont, are found in the [Vermont State Board of Education Rule Series 2600 – Prekindergarten Education](#). This handbook drills down to the main components of Act 166 UPK administrative rules to support all programs in maintaining their prequalified status. This handbook is based upon the AOE Early Team's jurisdiction as detailed in the Act 166 law, and the UPK Prekindergarten Rules Series 2600 prekindergarten education.

### UPK Program Assurances of 11 Requirements

To achieve UPK prequalification approved status, public and private programs affirm assurances that their program meets Act 166 requirements 1-11 by providing evidence through the application process. Approved UPK programs are required to submit a [UPK Prequalified Program Change Form](#) the information reported on an original application has changed. Change forms should be submitted for director and licensed educator changes, including educator license renewal dates. The Agency of Education will use it to verify and update the program's information.

Any time an approved UPK program receives a new childcare license number, for example, a change of location or new ownership, the program needs to reapply for UPK approval status by submitting a new UPK application. This is because the UPK prequalification approved status is tied to the childcare license number through childcare regulations.

#### Requirement 1. Child Care Regulations

The public or private program is currently licensed or registered, as applicable, by the Department for Children and Families, and is in good regulatory standing. [Child Care Licensing Regulations](#). For more information, please contact your Child Care Licensing Specialist.

### **Requirement 2. STARS**

The public or private program receives and maintains at least one of the following quality program recognition standards:

- National Association Education of Young Children accreditation, or
- minimum of 4 stars or
- 3 stars and approved a 2-year plan to reach 4 stars.
- [STARS](#)

For more information, please contact a CDD STARS Specialist.

### **Requirement 3. Vermont Early Learning Standards (VELS)**

The public or private program's curricula are aligned with the Vermont Early Learning Standards (Birth to Grade 3). UPK Administrative Rule 2602. Definitions (8) Prekindergarten Education. Prekindergarten education means services designed for prekindergarten children with developmentally appropriate early learning and developmental experiences based on VELS.

- Developing Self: Approaches to Learning, Social-Emotional Development, Growing, Moving, and Being Healthy (11 possible goals)
- Communication and Expression: Language Development, Literacy Development, Creative Arts and Expression (10 possible goals)
- Learning about the World: Mathematics, Science, Social Studies (13 possible goals)

### **Requirement 4. Early Childhood Educator/Early Childhood Special Educator**

The public or private program staff meets the required professional qualifications (requirement based on the provider type – District operated program; Private, center-based PreK program; Family Child Care Home program). [AOE licensed educator online database for currently licensed educator credentials.](#)

### **Requirement 5. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)**

Adhere to all applicable federal and state laws including, but not limited to, Part B of IDEA, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Rule 4500 Restraint, and

Seclusion, the ADA, and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and, for children receiving ECSE services who are enrolled in the prekindergarten program, allow access to ECSE service providers. The AOE Early Childhood Special Education page contains important links and resources. [AOE Early Childhood Special Education](#).

### **Requirement 6. Minimum 10 Hours of UPK Education Instruction**

Rule 2603. Access to Prekindergarten Education 10 Hours per week for 35 weeks academic year. Each prekindergarten child whose parent or guardian enrolls the child at the child's district of residence is entitled to no less than **ten hours per week for 35 weeks annually** of publicly funded prekindergarten education at an available prequalified prekindergarten education program operated by a public school or private program.

### **Requirement 7. Assessment (Teaching Strategies GOLD - TSG)**

TSG is the Vermont UPK assessment and child developmental progress monitoring tool. Act 166 requires:

- Rule 2606 (d) conducts child development assessments of each child enrolled using the assessment tool approved by the AOE at **least two times a year**, (December 15th and June 15th) and reports the results of those assessments to the AOE by July 31st.
- Rule 2606 (h) completes reports for enrollment, attendance, child assessment, costs of prekindergarten education, finances, and other areas as required by state law and the AOE.

### **Requirement 8. Family Conferences**

Provide parents or guardians with a report of the child's developmental progress at least twice per year and offer parents two opportunities per year to meet with a teacher.

### **Requirement 9. Family Involvement/Engagement**

Provide opportunities for effective parental involvement and participation. UPK Administrative Rule 2602. Definitions (3) Effective Parental Participation. Effective parental participation in a prekindergarten education program means the opportunity for

parents and guardians to be actively involved in the program, and may include involvement in program development, policy work, program evaluation, curriculum development, and helping in the class.

### **Requirement 10. Onsite Monitoring Permit**

On-site monitoring visits announced and unannounced, by representatives from AOE, Department of Children and Families (DCF), CDD, and the School District.

### **Requirement 11. Accountability and Continuous Improvement System (ACIS) Monitoring**

Participate in the state-approved prekindergarten education monitoring system, described in Section 2612 of the Vermont State Board of Education Rules Series 2600 Prekindergarten Education.

## **UPK Program Approval and Renewal Process**

Initial and renewal UPK program applications must be submitted online. Upon receipt of a complete application (including compliance with staff criminal record checks), the AOE and CDD will have thirty business days to process the application. UPK prequalified status begins on the date of approval and expires for three years on June 30th of the year of renewal. Please note that you must complete the application using a Windows operating system. Apple products are not compatible.

IMPORTANT. Before submitting a UPK application, all program staff must be compliant with Child Care Licensing criminal record check that includes fingerprinting and a background clearance check and verified by Child Care Licensing. Please contact your CDD Licensing Technician for a list of staff who may need to submit for a criminal record check.

1. [Application Checklist for Universal PreK Prequalified Education Program Approval](#) - Please review the checklist to make sure you have all the information you need before you apply. There is no save function on the application.
2. [Application to become a Prequalified Prekindergarten Education Program](#) - This application is for first-time applicants and renewals. If you have completed the

application checklist, and all staff are compliant with fingerprinting/background clearances, you may apply. The application should take about 30 minutes to complete.

UPK program renewal application process utilizes the same application used for initial UPK program approval. Renewing programs will receive email notification six months prior to renewal date from the UPK State Coordinator with application instructions and submission timeline. Program’s renewal dates are listed on their UPK certificate and approval letter, as well as Building Bright Futures Information System (BFIS) and the AOE UPK Prequalified Program List. For information about new or renewal applications, please contact the Agency of Education at [AOE.UPK@vermont.gov](mailto:AOE.UPK@vermont.gov).

**List of Prequalified Prekindergarten Providers**

When your program is approved, you will be issued a UPK approval letter and certificate. The AOE will add your program name, town, and your UPK approval renewal date to the [List of Prequalified Prekindergarten Providers List](#) - This list is updated monthly as applications are processed. The Agency of Human Services - Child Development Division will add your UPK approval status and renewal date to your program's profile in [Bright Futures Information Systems](#).

**AOE Important UPK Program Application and Reporting Chart**

The chart on the next page details program requirements, actions, and compliance review timelines.

<b>Program Requirement</b>	<b>Program Action</b>	<b>Compliance Review</b>
UPK prequalified program <b>renewal</b> application submission.	Every three years expiring on June 30th, XXXX.	Online application reviewed and approved by AOE and CDD.
<b>New</b> UPK application submission change of child care license number.	Required when a program changes locations or is sold.	Online application reviewed and approved by AOE and CDD.

<b>Program Requirement</b>	<b>Program Action</b>	<b>Compliance Review</b>
Submit a UPK Program Change Form.	Each time there is a change in a program (program closures or voluntary withdrawal from UPK, director changes, loss of licensed ECE/ECSE, STARS changes etc.).	Reviewed by AOE Early Childhood Education Team.
ACIS Desk Monitoring Reporting	Annually for programs who are not renewing and/or not being monitored through ACIS.	Reviewed by AOE Early Childhood Education Team.
Teaching Strategies Gold	Two check point report out on each child's progress - December 15th and June 15th.	Reviewed by AOE Early Childhood Education Team.
ACIS Suspension and Expulsion Report Forms	Each time a public or private program suspends or expels a child. Public schools report out annually to AOE through the Data Dashboard - Exclusionary Discipline.	Submit forms to partnering school districts and AOE Early Childhood Education Team/AOE Data Team reports out.
Average Daily Membership (ADM) Attendance/ Invoicing	School districts and supervisory union set payments and invoicing schedules per partnership agreement.	School districts and supervisory union local decision with their Business Office.
UPK Tuition Rate	Annually	Set by the AOE.
Partnership Agreements	Annually	Local UPK Coordinators with private UPK programs.

### **Act 166 Administrative Rule 2612. Monitoring**

(1) The Agency of Education and the Child Development Division shall jointly monitor and evaluate all public and private prekindergarten education programs to promote optimal outcomes for children and to collect data to inform future decisions. The state-approved system for monitoring prekindergarten programs shall include, but not be limited to collecting and evaluating information and data regarding:

- The programmatic details, including the number of enrolled children, the number of public and private prekindergarten education programs operated, and the public financial investment made.

- The quality of the public and private prekindergarten education programs and efforts to ensure continuous quality improvements through mentoring, training, technical assistance, and otherwise.
- The outcomes for children enrolled in public and private prekindergarten education programs, including school readiness and proficiency in numeracy and literacy.
- The effects, if any, on equality of opportunities between private and public programs regarding socioeconomic stratification, equality of access, staff qualifications, quality of the program, and other relevant variables.

### **Act 166 Monitoring Requirement**

Act 166 mandates that the state UPK monitoring system be established and implemented to ensure all prequalified UPK public, private, and family childcare home providers maintain compliance with the law. Accountability and Continuous Improvement System (ACIS) is a joint agency (AOE/AHS) oversight, a tiered monitoring system based upon the eleven UPK compliance requirements. ACIS is a balanced data-informed approach to promoting high-quality and equitable access to prekindergarten education for each child by focusing on continuous program improvements. Monitoring of UPK requirements is based on data that come from a variety of sources including:

- Bright Futures Information System (BFIS)
- Vermont STep Ahead Recognition System (STARS)
- Childcare Licensing Violations
- Teaching Strategies (TS) GOLD Checkpoints Data
- Data from the application for recognition as a qualified Prekindergarten Program
- Desk Monitoring Assurances (3-year cycle; not renewal years)
- Reporting by Supervisory Unions, School Districts, parents, and other community stakeholders
- Reported suspension and expulsions
- Reported loss of licensed educator
- ACIS Collaboration with CDD



## **ACIS Collaboration With CDD**

Working in collaboration with the AHS - CDD Childcare Licensing Team, the AOE Early Education team reviews childcare licensing incident reports and/or monitoring data for compliance for UPK-prequalified education programs. If non-compliance with UPK requirements is identified, the AOE ACIS Coordinator will collect additional information to verify the compliance issue. The UPK ACIS Coordinator will inform the UPK ACIS team to determine whether an issue meets the criteria for a violation that will impact the program's prequalification status, and the possible need for investigation, by both agencies, or separately.

## **ACIS Four-Tiered System of Supports**

ACIS Monitoring includes four tiers of potential actions as outlined below.

### **Desk Monitoring Assurance Reporting (Tier 1)**

Desk Monitoring Assurances are reported by UPK prequalified education programs Assurance Surveys are reported tri-annually and/or if a violation is cited. Desk Monitoring collects, reviews, and sends a report to each UPK program.

### **ACIS Monitoring (Tiers 2-4)**

In collaboration with AHS - CDD Child Care Licensing monitoring co-investigations may include on-site visits, in-person or virtual interviews, or other forms of communication (phone, email, letter). Once the investigation is complete the UPK ACIS Coordinator will email the outcomes of the investigation to the program director. The notification will contain information regarding:

- A detailed description of the identified UPK violation(s)
- The monitoring determination
- A suggested corrective action based on UPK compliance
- Timeline for Compliance
- Share notification with partnering school districts/supervisory unions, families, and post visibly (sample parent letter in Index)

Monitoring outcomes may include a plan of action where the UPK program discusses how they will come back into compliance with UPK requirements including childcare regulations.

### **AOE Early Childhood Special Education Services (ECSE)**

Early Childhood Special Education Service (ECSE) supports children ages 3 up to 6 years. ECSES is administered through local school districts to ensure access and participation in early childhood programs for each child who is determined eligible for services by the Local Education Agency (LEA). ECSE enables young children with disabilities to be full participants in everyday routines and activities across a variety of settings (in their homes with their families, in childcare, preschool or school programs, and the community) throughout the early childhood years.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that all public schools locate, identify, and evaluate (at no cost to the parent) all students suspected of having a disability from birth through age 21 who reside in the LEA. Under IDEA Part B 619 (ages 3 through 5), screening may be conducted as part of child find activities in order to determine whether the child should be referred for further evaluation and may be in need of special education and related services. Parents will receive a copy of the Part B Procedural Safeguards at the time of a child's initial referral for special education evaluation under Part B of IDEA or when the parents request a special education evaluation of their child.

There can be some confusion about the difference between screening and assessment in early childhood settings. (34 CFR §§ 303.320, 303.21, 303.421, 303.420(a)(1)/VTSBE 2360.5.3)

Please note that per [Act 166 Administrative Rule 2603](#) access to Prekindergarten Education:

(6) A child receiving ECSE services may receive those services in a prequalified prekindergarten education program. A Local Education Agency (LEA) may but is not required to provide ECSE services outside of the LEA, even if a child is attending an out-of-district prekindergarten program. For technical assistance please contact Katie McCarthy, ECSE Coordinator II/IDEA 619 at [katie.mccarthy@vermont.gov](mailto:katie.mccarthy@vermont.gov).

Further information on Early Childhood Special Education can be found on the Vermont Agency of Education website and within the [State of Vermont Special Education Rules \(2022\)](#).

## Staff Qualifications for All UPK Prequalified Programs

[Act 166 Administrative Rule 2605](#). **Staff Qualifications.**

UPK education is inclusive of three types of settings, public school programs, private childcare centers, and family childcare home providers. Based on each of these settings the licensed ECE/ECSE prekindergarten education instruction is different. The AOE through ACIS tracks and monitors all programs for compliance with UPK requirement #4, a licensed ECE/ECSE for each setting. The AOE Early Education team provides support and advice when any program loses its licensed ECE/ECSE.

### Public School Programs

(1) Teachers in each prekindergarten classroom in a district-operated prekindergarten education program shall hold a valid Vermont educator license with an endorsement in either early childhood education or early childhood special education.

### Center-Based Programs

(2) Private prequalified prekindergarten education program operated in a licensed Center-Based Program shall employ, or contract for the services of, at least one teacher who holds a valid Vermont educator license with an endorsement in either early childhood education or early childhood special education. The ten hours that the licensed teacher is present shall coincide with the hours of prekindergarten education paid for by tuition from districts.

For private UPK programs, the licensed educator must be physically present on-site at the prequalified program during the hours in which that program is providing the 10 hours of publicly funded prekindergarten for every student. "Physically present on-site" means in the same facility or the same classroom as the prekindergarten student receiving their 10 hours of publicly funded prekindergarten education. The licensed educator for the prequalified program cannot be off-site or in a different facility for the prekindergarten student. If a program is operating multiple

prekindergarten sessions a day (e.g., morning and afternoon), a licensed educator must be physically present on-site during each session.

Every student receiving 10 hours of publicly funded prekindergarten education must have a licensed educator physically present on-site during that student's 10 hours of prekindergarten education. The best practice for high-quality prekindergarten instruction, though not required, would be for the licensed educator is leading instruction, facilitate lessons, and engage with students in the student's classroom(s) for their prekindergarten education hours.

### **Family Child Care Home Providers**

- (3) The operator of each registered or licensed Family Child Care Home approved as a prequalified prekindergarten education program shall ensure that one of the following requirements is met:
- (a) The operator holds a valid Vermont educator license with an endorsement in either early childhood education or early childhood special education; or
  - (b) The operator employs or contracts with the services of a teacher who holds a valid Vermont educator license with an endorsement in either early childhood education or early childhood special education for at least ten hours per week for 35 weeks annually. Ten hours that the licensed teacher is present shall coincide with the hours of prekindergarten education paid for by tuition from the district; or
  - (c) The program receives regular, hands-on active training and supervision from a teacher who holds a valid Vermont educator license with an endorsement in either early childhood education or early childhood special education at least three hours per week, during each of the 35 weeks per year in which prekindergarten education is paid for by tuition from districts. The operator shall maintain appropriate written documentation of the supervision on location. This supervision must take place within the 35 weeks that prekindergarten students are receiving publicly funded prekindergarten education. The supervision cannot take place before or after the 35 weeks in which students are receiving their prekindergarten education. Additionally, it is required that the operator maintains appropriate written documentation of the supervision on location.

**Provisional and Emergency Licenses**

(4) Nothing in these rules shall be construed as restricting the ability of a public or private prequalified prekindergarten education program from filling a staff position with an individual who holds a provisional or emergency license.

UPK Guidance: [Contract Administration and Licensed Educators](#) (issued February 2019)

**Loss of Licensed ECE/ECSE**

In the event of a licensed early childhood educator/early childhood special educator (ECE/ECSE) leaves the employment of a prequalified prekindergarten education program, programs are required to notify the AOE UPK State Coordinator via email at [AOE.UPK@vermont.gov](mailto:AOE.UPK@vermont.gov) or by submitting a UPK Program Change from within five school days. Programs should notify their partnering schools per their UPK partnership agreements. UPK programs that lose their licensed ECE/ECSE are tracked through the UPK ACIS monitoring system. When the AOE receives the notification of a loss of a licensed ECE/ECSE the following steps are implemented:

- AOE Loss of Educator letter sent with a deadline of 30 school days to utilize a substitute and hire a new licensed or provisionally ECE/ECSE. If the official last day of work is within 30 school days of the last day of school for the school district/supervisory union, an educator must be hired or contracted with by the first day of school for the upcoming school year.
- Within this 30 school days substitution period, the program must maintain compliance with all other applicable prequalification requirements to be considered and maintain a program's prequalification status.
- Through ACIS monitoring, programs are offered support for identifying avenues for hiring a licensed or provisionally ECE/ECSE (partnering with a school district, sharing an educator between sites, AOE ECE/ECSE provisional license, or a superintendent provisional license).
- If an educator has been identified as meeting either provisional licenses or if they are applying for initial or adding an endorsement ECE/ECSE licensure, while their application is active (before being issued a license by AOE Educator

Licensing) **the program remains in compliance with UPK**. This may be confirmed through ACIS monitoring and UPK Coordinators should contact the AOE UPK State Coordinator with any questions or concerns.

- At the end of the AOE determined 30 school days substitute period, if a program has hired or contracted with a licensed ECE/ECSE, a UPK Compliance Letter is sent to the program. As stated above, if an educator has been identified as meeting either provisional licenses or if they are applying for initial or adding an endorsement ECE/ECSE licensure when an AOE Educator Licensing issues a license, a UPK Compliance Letter will be sent to the program. Programs are instructed to share the UPK Compliance Letter with their partnering schools.
- If a program is unable to hire or contract with a licensed ECE/ECSE ACIS monitoring revocation notification process will be initiated (45, 30, 15, 10, and 5 days). The UPK State Coordinator monitors and supports programs throughout the revocation process. Programs are instructed to send their revocation letter to the partnering program.
- Schools may consider sharing a licensed ECE/ECSE for the 10 hours of UPK instruction at a partnering private prekindergarten education program per [UPK Administrative Rule 2607](#).

## **Partnership Agreements with Not-Prequalified Prekindergarten Programs**

(2) A school district may create new agreements with or continue existing partnerships with prekindergarten education programs that are not prequalified if the school district provides support that enables the program to fulfill the requirements of Section 2605 (1) and (2). The statewide tuition rate for prekindergarten education does not apply to non-eligible prekindergarten programs; the district and the non-qualified partner shall negotiate tuition amounts.

The extended substitute leave waiver was implemented in response to Covid pandemic guidance for the Universal PreK program. Based upon the needs of both private and public programs, this waiver continued post-pandemic. In the event, a licensed early childhood educator or early childhood special educator needs

extended leave but is not leaving employment from a public or private prequalified education program, a long-term substitute may be used beyond the 30 school days substitute ACIS Loss of Educator. Below are detailed substitute processes for both public and private prequalified education programs.

## **Public UPK Programs Extended Substitute Leave Waiver**

Act 166 requires public school prekindergarten education programs to have a licensed ECE/ECSE per classroom. Public prekindergarten education programs are required to notify the AOE UPK State Coordinator at [AOE.UPK@vermont.gov](mailto:AOE.UPK@vermont.gov) of their need for extended leave (for example, in the case of illness or maternity leave) and their plan for remaining in UPK Compliance during the extended leave. Public prekindergarten education programs extended leave requests will be monitored through ACIS.

Per Vermont Standards Board for Professional Educators (VSBPE) [Licensing Rules for Educators](#):

### **5380 Substitute Educators 5381 Qualifications**

Each local school board shall adopt a policy establishing employment qualifications for persons who substitute for Educators in their absence. Each policy shall require a minimum that the substitute has graduated from high school.

### **5382 Time Limits and Extensions**

An unlicensed person employed as a substitute pursuant to local school board policy may substitute for up to thirty (30) student days in the same assignment. To continue to employ an unlicensed person in this assignment beyond thirty (30) student days, the superintendent shall apply for a Provisional or Emergency License for the person pursuant to Sections 5350 and 5360 of these rules.

Please note: the 30 student days resets if the substitute is employed in a different endorsement area or another substitute is assigned.

Licensed Educators may substitute in a field outside of their endorsement field for thirty student days in the same assignment. Upon application by the superintendent, the Standards Board or the Office may grant one extension for an additional thirty (30)

days. To continue to employ licensed Educators beyond sixty (60) days outside of their endorsement field, the superintendent shall apply for a Provisional License for the person pursuant to Section 5350 of these rules.

### **Private UPK Programs Extended Substitute Leave Waiver**

In the event of a long-term absence of a Licensed Early Childhood Educator/Early Childhood Special Educator in the case of illness or family leave, Universal Prekindergarten (UPK) prequalified private prekindergarten education programs, a substitute may be used for on-site for up to 30 school days. UPK private programs must notify school district partners about the program's plan for continuing high-quality PreK education for children enrolled in UPK AND notify the AOE UPK State Coordinator via email at [AOE.UPK@vermont.gov](mailto:AOE.UPK@vermont.gov).

If a UPK private program requires an extended period beyond 30 school days substitute, the program may request a substitute extension by submitting a written request to [AOE.UPK@vermont.gov](mailto:AOE.UPK@vermont.gov) for an additional 30 school days (60 school days). As part of the UPK Accountability and Continuous Improvement System (ACIS), approval of an additional 30 school days substitute extension period will be tracked by the AOE. Beyond the substitute 60 school days, private prequalified prekindergarten education programs are required to hire or contract with a licensed, or provisionally licensed, Early Childhood Educator or Early Childhood Special Educator. This substitute waiver aligns with the VSBPE substitute policy.

### **AOE ECE/ECSE Provisional License Waiver for Private PreK Programs**

New approved waiver criteria for 2023-2025 and 2024-2026 cohorts: To continue to build and strengthen the ECE/ECSE profession in Vermont, the Vermont Standards Board for Professional Educators (VSBPE) approved additional qualifying criteria for meeting the Agency of Education (AOE) Early Childhood Educator or Early Childhood Special Educator (ECE/ECSE) provisional license specifically for qualifying individuals who are employed or contract with private prekindergarten education programs, and have been denied an ECE/ECSE provisional license from supervisory union (superintendent).



**Qualifying Criteria:**

- **Holds a bachelor's degree** in early childhood OR an AOE-approved relevant major with at least 15-18 credits of coursework in early childhood (can be post-graduate courses). (Official transcripts required)
- **Valid VT Educator license** or another state (any endorsement)
  - Provisional plan to add the ECE/ECSE endorsement through Peer Review, Transcript Review, or an ECE/ECSE licensure program.
- **Expired Educator license** (any endorsement)
  - Provisional plan to reinstate expired license and/or add the ECE/ECSE Endorsement through Peer Review, Transcript Review, or an ECE/ECSE licensure program.
- **If a provisional applicant** who holds a bachelor's degree major **does not meet** the 15-18 credits of early childhood education-related course work.
  - Praxis II #5025 Early Childhood Education (required for instructional levels (0) Birth to Grade 3 or (14) PreK to Grade 3). OR
  - Praxis II #5531 Early Childhood Education (PreK ages 2-5) exam.
  - Provisional plan for initial licensure in ECE/ECSE endorsement through Peer Review, Transcript Review, or an ECE/ECSE initial licensure program.

**Superintendent Provisional License**

It is the preference of the VSBPE that all applicants for ECE/ECSE provisional licenses work first with the local SU/SD superintendent to build relationships across settings and to support the youth in their shared community. However, circumstances may arise where a Superintendent is unable to endorse a request for a provisional license and an alternative route is necessary.

Superintendents, at their discretion, may approve a provisional license for a private prekindergarten program individual. If a superintendent wishes to submit a provisional application on behalf of a private program individual, the [VSBPE Licensing Rules Governing the Licensing of Educators](#) criteria and procedures for temporary licenses

(Rules 5351-5356) are applicable. A superintendent denial for a provisional license is required evidence for applying for an AOE ECE/ECSE provisional license.

The Vermont Agency of Education - Early Education Team will accept ECE/ECSE provisional license applicant requests on a first-come, first-served basis from candidates that work or contract with private prekindergarten programs. The first step is to review the AOE Early Childhood Educator Provisional License qualifications to determine if you or another individual in your private PreK program may be a possible candidate.

Please contact, Wendy Scott, UPK State Coordinator, [AOE.UPK@vermont.gov](mailto:AOE.UPK@vermont.gov) for more information.

### **UPK Program Compliance Requirements**

The UPK Requirement information listed below may be found on the [AOE UPK Requirements Webpage](#).

#### **Vermont Early Learning Standards**

The [Vermont Early Learning Standards \(VELS\)](#) were developed by a cross section of early childhood development and education stakeholders, and approved by the State Board of Education, to better capture the essential areas of development and learning in the early childhood years from infancy through grade three. VELs is aligned with the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework, Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts and Mathematics as well as Next Generation Science Standards.

#### **UPK Rule 2602. Definitions**

(2) Developmentally Appropriate. Developmentally appropriate describes practices which are based upon principles of how children develop and learn, as articulated by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC); these practices are responsive to each child's strengths, interests, and needs, and are aligned with Vermont's Early Learning Standards.

(8) Prekindergarten Education. Prekindergarten education means services designed for prekindergarten children with developmentally appropriate early

learning and developmental experiences based on Vermont's Early Learning Standards.

(14) Vermont Early Learning Standards (VELS). The Vermont Early Learning Standards are state-recognized performance standards and learning outcomes for children from birth through grade three.

The VELS inform families about the development and capabilities of children from birth through grade 3 and guide educators in the development and selection of program-wide curriculum and educational strategies for children from birth through grade 3. These standards are central to the shared vision of what we want for young children in Vermont and highlight the importance of high-quality early childhood experiences as the foundation for school success and lifelong learning.

### **Student Assessment: Teaching Strategies GOLD**

All publicly-funded prekindergarten programs must use the UPK State approved assessment, [online Teaching Strategies GOLD child assessment](#) to report on the progress of their students on an annual basis.

### **One Portfolio for Each Child**

Each child participating in Act 166 is to have one GOLD® portfolio only. This portfolio should be maintained by the program providing the 10 hours of Universal PreK. If a child attends another program for additional hours, that program may contribute feedback either in written form to the program providing Universal PreK or request to be a contributing member of Team Central.

### **Duplicate Portfolios**

If a child has two portfolios, it is the program administrator's responsibility to determine which portfolio should be maintained and transfer any information needed. The State GOLD® Administrator should then be notified to delete the duplicate portfolio. The duplication of a child in TSG leads to inaccurate data that the AOE collects after each checkpoint date.

## Student Transfers

When a child leaves a program, it would be helpful if the sending program asked the family if they intend to enroll their child in another PreK program. If it is another Prequalified PreK, both sending and receiving providers must complete and sign the necessary [annually updated transfer form](#) and send it to the AOE GOLD® Administrator. The GOLD® Administrator will make changes to ensure the child's portfolio will transfer with the child.

## Teaching Strategies GOLD® Interrater Reliability (IRR)

It is required that based on State rules of Act 166, administrators of prequalified prekindergarten education public and private programs maintain IRR certification records for all staff to ensure the validity and reliability of GOLD® data.

Educators and administrators demonstrate reliability by scoring at least 80% on the GOLD® Interrater Reliability (IRR) online test in their My Teaching Strategies® portal. Each school district and/or program administrator should verify that all designated school district staff and contractual partners achieve interrater reliability and certification by Teaching Strategies™. This verification should occur before the completion of the annual fall and spring GOLD® checkpoints.

**Please note:** There is no cost for IRR certification, and it is valid for three years. IRR certification is different than TSG Professional Development.

For support and/or questions please contact Leslie Freedman at [leslie.freedman@vermont.gov](mailto:leslie.freedman@vermont.gov) ACIS Monitoring and TSG Coordinator.

Helpful Links:

[Adding Children in MyTeachingStrategies](#)

[Editing Children in MyTeachingStrategies](#)

[What is Interrater Reliability Certification?](#)

[How do I complete the Interrater Reliability Certification process in MyTeachingStrategies®?](#)

## Universal PreK Education Desk Monitoring Assurance Report Submission

As a prequalified universal prekindergarten education program, you are required to submit an assurance report to the Vermont AOE to maintain your current prequalification status. This data collection will be required on a three-year cycle for the state to verify that your public/private program remains in compliance with Act 166 requirements of a prequalified prekindergarten education program, The annual [Desk Monitoring Assurance Report](#) is an online form that must be completed by June of a given year. Submission deadlines dates are subject to change. If your program has multiple UPK prequalified sites, you will need to complete separate applications for each program. If you require assistance, please contact via email to Michele Johnson, Early Education Consultant at [michele.johnson@vermont.gov](mailto:michele.johnson@vermont.gov).

### Suspension and Expulsion Reporting

Act 35 of 2021, An act relating to the Task Force on Equitable and Inclusive School Environments prohibits the suspension or expulsion of students under age 8 unless the student poses an imminent threat of harm or danger to others in the school.

This [joint agency memo](#) is intended to inform prequalified public and private Universal Prekindergarten Education (UPK) programs of the updated requirements that must be adhered to, effective June 1, 2022, as required by Act 35 of 2021 and Act 166 of 2022. The new laws disallow suspension and/or expulsion of any child under the age of eight in prequalified public and private UPK programs.

### PreK Suspension and Expulsion Incident Report

Public/Private PreK: To meet obligations related to Universal Prekindergarten Education (PreK) suspension and expulsion data collection, prequalified private and public PreK programs must complete this incident report for each child who is asked to leave PreK or misses PreK for a determined period of time due to behavioral or disciplinary reasons.

**Step 1:** Within 5 school calendar days from the date of the incident, the public or private UPK program must complete and submit the [PreK Suspension and](#)

[Expulsion Incident Report](#) which will be reviewed by the ACIS Monitoring Coordinator.

**Step 2:** Within 5 school calendar days from the date of the incident public or private UPK program must also submit a hard copy PreK Suspension and Expulsion Incident Report this report to the designated contact for the child's school district of residence (PDF emailed upon completion of the incident report).

For questions about the PreK Suspension and Expulsion Report please contact The ACIS Monitoring Coordinator, [leslie.freedman@vermont.gov](mailto:leslie.freedman@vermont.gov).

## **AOE UPK Released Study, Guidance and Memos**

This section highlights the Act 11 UPK study results, guidance and memos that are helpful for understanding, UPK eligibility, UPK tuition, partnership agreements, and the licensed early childhood educator requirement.

### **Act 11 PreK Study Report (July 1, 2019)**

In the spring of 2018, the VT Legislature enacted Act 11 mandating a PreK study and final report be submitted to the House Committees on Education and Human Services and the Senate Committees on Education and Health and Welfare by July 1, 2019. The purpose of the PreK study, as dictated by Act 11, section E.500.7, is to provide Vermont with information regarding how to more effectively and efficiently provide PreK education. View [Act 11 PreK Study Report](#) (July 1, 2019).

### **UPK Memo: Allowable Use of Publicly-funded Prekindergarten Education Dollars**

Act 166 requires school districts to establish contracts with community-based private childcare programs that have been approved by the state as prequalified prekindergarten education (PreK) programs. For each child that is enrolled in a prequalified PreK program, the school district of residence is obligated to pay tuition at the current rate per academic year per child. All tuition received by the private prequalified PreK program is to fully cover the cost of the 10 hours a week for 35 weeks per school district academic year. View UPK Memo: [Allowable Use of Publicly-Funded Prekindergarten Education Dollars](#) (February 2020).

### **UPK Eligibility and Kindergarten**

The Memo clarifies prekindergarten education (PreK) eligibility in the case of a five-year-old whose parent completed the kindergarten registration paperwork process but has decided to send their child to a public or private PreK program rather than kindergarten. this school year. The guidance provides further clarification on what is meant by "enrolled" in kindergarten under 16 V.S.A. §829 and SBE Rule 2602 (7).

Important note for programs and families, children enrolled in UPK, who turn six within the school year are eligible to receive UPK funding up until their sixth birthday. It is at the discretion of the partnering SD/SU as to whether UPK funding will continue past the child's sixth birthday. View UPK Memo: [Prekindergarten and Kindergarten Eligibility and Enrollment](#) (September 2020).

### **UPK Guidance: Additional Costs**

This guidance document provides clarification on Act 166 Universal Prekindergarten allowable and unallowable use of additional fees, costs, and non-refundable deposits at prequalified prekindergarten education programs. View Act 166 UPK Guidance: [Additional Costs](#) (March 2019).

### **UPK Guidance: Contract Administration and Licensed Educators**

This guidance document provides information on 1) contracts with prequalified prekindergarten providers and, 2) licensed educator requirements in regard to Act 166. View Act 166 Guidance: [Contract Administration and Licensed Educators](#) (February 2019).

### **UPK Program Partnership Agreements**

When a program receives UPK prequalification status they should contact local school districts to inform them of the program's UPK status. As the program director, you will need to contact and meet with the school district to establish a PreK partnership agreement (contract). The terms of your agreement with the school district will lay out when your program would receive PreK tuition dollars for each child enrolled in your PreK program. When a program receives UPK prequalification approval they are sent a

certificate and letter signed by the Secretary of Education. On the certificate are the start dates for receiving UPK funding and the program's renewal date.

PreK tuition is public education dollars that are intended to offset tuition costs for families. Your program's invoice to families should be as clear and transparent as possible so families understand that their child is receiving public PreK for 10 hours each week (free of charge). **Tip:** Read the agreement noting the billing process and dates. Each school district does it a little differently. Please contact the school district if you have any questions about their process etc.

Approved UPK Programs may have children who live in other school districts, and programs will have to establish partnership agreements with each of those different school districts. Once a program is UPK approved (start date on certificate) then your partnership agreement with the school district will be activated. All UPK programs renew every three years on June 30<sup>th</sup>, XXXX, and this will be on the UPK approval certificate. **Tip:** Approved UPK programs are listed on a master list on the [AOE UPK website](#) and in [Bright Futures Information System](#).

### **Partnership Agreement (Contract)**

Act 166 Guidance: [Contract Administration and Licensed Educators](#) (February 2019) states that school districts that pay tuition to prequalified prekindergarten education programs shall enter into written agreements which, at a minimum, shall include all the requirements outlined in Section 2606 above and a provision that the prequalified provider shall maintain its status as a prequalified prekindergarten education program in accordance with Sections 2604, 2605 and 2602 of these rules, and report any change in this status, including alleged or proven violations of program licensure or registration requirements, to the school district, within five days of such accusation or finding.

A written agreement as referred to in Rule 2607(1) is a legally binding contract. This contract is between two entities such as a school district and a private prequalified program. This contract can also be referred to as a written agreement or partnership agreement. Additionally, school districts should follow preexisting local procedures for all contract administration.



All public and private UPK programs must adhere to Rule 2606. Requirements of Prequalified Prekindergarten Programs should be included in partnership agreements.

- (1) Any pre-qualified public or private prequalified prekindergarten education program shall:
  - (a) Adhere to all applicable federal and state laws including, but not limited to, Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.
  - (b) Implement a developmentally appropriate curriculum that is aligned with Vermont's Early Learning Standards.
  - (c) Provide prekindergarten education for a minimum of 10 hours per week for thirty-five (35) weeks per academic year.
  - (d) Conduct child development assessments of each child enrolled using the assessment tool approved by the Agency of Education at least two times a year and report the results of those assessments to the Agency of Education by July 31.
  - (e) Provide parents or guardians with a report of their child's developmental progress at least twice per year and offer parents at least two opportunities per year to meet with the teacher.
  - (f) Provide opportunities for effective parental involvement and participation. These opportunities may include involvement in program development, policy work, program evaluation, curriculum development, and helping in the class; and
  - (g) Permit on-site visits, announced and unannounced, by representatives from the Agency of Education, the Department for Children and Families, and School district staff.
  - (h) Complete reports for enrollment, attendance, child assessment, costs of prekindergarten education, finances, and other areas as required by state law and the Agency of Education.

- (i) Participate in training which may be required for fulfilling the program's responsibilities under tuition agreements with districts.
- (j) With respect to children receiving ECSE services who are enrolled in the prekindergarten education program, comply with all requirements of state and federal laws governing IDEA Part B and Early Childhood Special Education, including allowing access to ECSE service providers; and
- (k) Participate in the state-approved prekindergarten education monitoring system described in Section 2612 (Accountability and Continuous Improvement System (ACIS) jointly monitored by the Agency of Education - Early Education and the Agency of Human Services - Child Development Division.

## **UPK Tuition Rate**

UPK Tuition is adjusted each year by the New England Economic Project cumulative price index. Districts paying tuition for prekindergarten education to a prequalified prekindergarten education program (private or public) shall pay at the statewide rate for 10 hours per week for 35 weeks annually.

Prekindergarten education is publicly funded by resident school districts. The cost of prekindergarten is part of a school district's budget as approved by district voters.

- If a parent chooses to enroll their prekindergarten child in the prequalified program operated by the school district where they live, the cost of the program is paid from the voter-approved district budget.
- If a parent chooses to enroll their prekindergarten child 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 the district will pay for the first 10 hours of prekindergarten education. This tuition is paid from the voter-approved district budget.
- (5) e. Be used by the program to fully cover the cost of ten hours per week for 35 weeks annually of prekindergarten education. If the tuition received by the program exceeds the actual cost of ten hours per week for 35 weeks annually of prekindergarten education, then the excess shall be applied to additional hours

the child attends the prekindergarten program. A parent or guardian may only be charged for any hours that exceed ten hours per week for 35 weeks annually and

- that exceed the cost covered by the annual tuition received. **Tuition payments must be applied to a family’s invoice during the 35 weeks (following the school year calendar).**
- (7) Prequalified public or private prekindergarten providers may receive additional payment directly from the parent or guardian for prekindergarten education in excess of the hours paid for by the district or for child care services, or both. Prequalified private programs are not bound by the statewide rate in determining rates they will charge parents or guardians in excess of ten hours per week for 35 weeks annually.

### **UPK Prequalified Program Change Form**

Please complete the [Changes to Prequalified Program Form](#) if you are an approved program and the information reported in your original application has changed (e.g. Director changes, Licensed Educator changes/loss/renewal dates, STARS changes including renewal dates). The Agency of Education will use it to verify and update your information.

All UPK-approved programs are required to notify the AOE and their partnering SD/SU UPK Coordinators of:

- All program closures (illness/staffing issues/weather/CDD prompted etc.) Programs should provide their partnering SD/SU with a plan for making up UPK hours for instructional days due to the closure.
- Loss or change of licensed early childhood educator.
- Change in program director.
- Program expiring childcare license and/or withdrawing from UPK status.
- Request by the AOE Early Education Team for reporting purposes.

## UPK Family Enrollment

The information in this section is from the [AOE UPK Families of Prekindergarten Students webpage](#). Please share this with your families who enroll for UPK with your program. Enrollment and participation in Universal Prekindergarten (UPK) is a family choice. Attending a high-quality prekindergarten education program prepares children for kindergarten and beyond. In Vermont, school districts must offer prekindergarten for at least 10 hours a week, 35 weeks a year. Please note, families who would like to enroll their child in UPK must contact their school district or supervisory union of residence. Most school districts/supervisory unions have a UPK enrollment section on their main website.

### UPK FAQ for Families

#### How old does my child need to be to qualify for UPK?

Your child must be three, four, or five years old and not enrolled in kindergarten in their district of residence. Contact your school district to find out what date the district uses to determine a child's age for eligibility.

#### Where can I find a UPK program for my child?

Search the [prequalified providers list](#) to find out what programs offer prekindergarten in your area. These programs may be in your local school or a private, community-based program.

#### How do I sign up?

If your child is going to attend a public school's prekindergarten program, the school will process your enrollment. If your child is going to attend a UPK-approved private program in the community, you will need to enroll both with the community provider and with your school district. This will ensure tuition funding for your child's 10 hours is sent to your community provider.

#### What does UPK funding cover?

The funding covers 10 hours a week of prekindergarten education for 35 weeks (school year). If your child attends more than 10 hours/35 weeks, you are responsible to cover

the tuition for the extra time. If you are enrolling your child in a community-based program, it is important to ask for your tuition responsibilities in writing.

## **Family Engagement**

Meaningful family engagement is essential in promoting healthy physical, cognitive, and social-emotional developmental learning experiences for children from PreK through Grade 12. When families are meaningfully engaged in their children’s learning, they can positively impact their child’s health, development, education, and well-being. Strong family engagement happens when family members share a primary and meaningful role in all decision-making that impacts their child. Meaningful family engagement is about improving outcomes for all children and their families and happens at both the system and practice level.

Families are a child’s first and most important teachers. Therefore, early educators should recognize the power of meaningful family engagement and the positive childhood outcomes associated with building relationships based on family strengths. Partnerships with families grow from a place of:

- mutual respect and shared responsibility
- bi-directional communication
- appreciation, and support of cultural and linguistic diversity; identity, abilities, needs, beliefs, and circumstances, free from bias and judgment
- commitment to a common vision and shared goals

Effective family engagement, as defined by the Vermont Agency of Education (AOE), requires a collaborative effort on the part of teachers, administrators, leadership, and families to support the success of each and every child both in and out of the classroom/program.

We use the term “family engagement” purposefully. Family engagement and family involvement are sometimes used interchangeably but vary greatly in intent. For example, family engagement:

- focuses on doing things with families rather than with families.

- requires that schools listen to families in order to develop a shared understanding of needs and opportunities.
- believes that families make valuable contributions to both their child's education and to the school/program as a whole.
- views families as partners with valuable information to contribute.

### Family Engagement Resources

The [Backpack Series Resource Library](#) was created by TACSEI to provide a way for teachers and parents/caregivers to work together to help young children develop social emotional skills and reduce challenging behavior.

The Early Childhood Training and Technical Assistance System (ECTA): [Strategies for Family Engagement: Attitudes and Practices](#) - This resource explores the importance of family engagement and practice strategies for building relationships with families.

Head Start/Early Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC) [Engaging with Families in Conversations About Sensitive Topics](#) Explore this resource to find tips and approaches staff can use to engage families in conversations about sensitive topics. These topics may include housing situations, personal finances, health or mental health, and safety. When you make intentional choices about language during these interactions, you help build trusting, respectful relationships with families. These relationships can support families in reaching their goals for themselves and their children.

National Association Education of Young Children – [NAEYC - Family Engagement](#)  
Ages and Stages Questionnaire [ASQ - Power of Family Engagement](#)

### AOE Early Education Resource Links

#### AOE Early Education

The [Early Education](#) webpage may be found under Student Support on the AOE website. This website includes the Vermont Guiding Principles developed as a vision statement for individuals, organizations, and communities to realize the promise of each and every young Vermont child. Act 166/UPK education intent is to ensure equitable access for each and every young preschool age child and their family.

### **AOE Early Education Resource Center Hub**

In 2022, the AOE Communications team created a [Resource Center](#) for easy access to resources specific to early childhood education. Articles and other early education resources.

### **Equity for Each and Every Child and Their Family**

The following resources promote research-based policies and practices to elevate equity, diversity, and the full inclusion and participation of each and every young child and their family in early education environments.

- [Anti-Bias Education and Leadership in Early Childhood Resources \(6/11/2020\)](#)
- [Building Resilience Resources \(6/11/2020\)](#)
- [Culture Diversity and Equity Resources \(6/11/20\)](#)
- [Equity and Inclusion \(6/11/20\)](#)
- [Supporting the Learning and Development of Young Children Who are Dual Language Learners \(6/11/20\)](#)

### **Learning Modules**

The following links and resources include Early Education and Early Childhood Special Education topics. They explain the responsibilities public and private programs have to follow state rules and federal laws. The material is suitable for providers, administrators, stakeholders, and families.

- [Creating High-Quality Inclusive Environments \(3/2/22\)](#)
- [Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 \(2/23/18\)](#)
- [The Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\) \(2/23/18\)](#)

### **Act 166: Universal Prekindergarten**

The [Act 166 Universal Prekindergarten Education \(UPK\) webpage](#) can be found under Early Education/Student Support Services on the AOE website. Universal Prekindergarten webpage is for prekindergarten education programs and the families of prekindergarten students. It contains information needed to operate, apply or access UPK in Vermont.

- [Act 166 of 2014](#)
- [Universal Prekindergarten: Funding](#)
- [Act 11 PreK Study Report \(July 1, 2019\)](#)
- [Supplemental Section 504 Guidance for Universal Prekindergarten \(7/18/22\)](#)
- [Ban on Suspension and Expulsion of Students Under Eight \(9/10/21\)](#)
- [Memo: Ban on Suspension and Expulsion of Students Under Age Eight Enrolled in Prequalified Private UPK Programs \(9/2/22\)](#)
- [Memo: Allowable Use of Publicly-Funded Education Dollars \(2/20/20\)](#)
- [Memo: Prekindergarten Eligibility \(5/10/19\)](#)
- [UPK Guidance: Additional Costs \(3/15/19\)](#)
- [UPK Guidance: Contract Administration and Licensed Educators \(3/7/19\)](#)
- [Memo: Prekindergarten and Kindergarten Eligibility and Enrollment \(9/11/20\)](#)

### **Application, Application Checklist, and Renewals**

[Initial and renewal UPK program applications](#) must be submitted online. The Agency of Education and the Department for Children and Families will review applications, determine eligibility, and notify applicants within 30 business days. UPK prequalified status begins on the date of approval and expires three years on June 30th of the year of renewal.

### **UPK Program Requirements**

[Program requirements](#) webpage contains a list of prequalified prekindergarten providers, as well as the requirements, rules, and resources needed to maintain compliance as a prekindergarten education program in Vermont including the UPK Prequalified Program Change Form.

- [UPK Vermont State Board of Education Administrative Rules](#)
- [AOE UPK List of Current Public and Private Programs](#)
- [UPK Program Change Form](#)
- [Student Assessment: Teaching Strategies GOLD](#)
- [UPK Desk Monitoring Assurance Report Checklist](#)
- [UPK Desk Monitoring Assurance Report Submission](#)
- [PreK Suspension and Expulsion Incident Report](#)



### **Early Childhood Education Assessment**

The following assessments may be found on the AOE Early Childhood Education Assessment webpage.

### **Vermont Early Childhood Comprehensive Assessment System (VECCAS)**

The purpose of the [Vermont Early Childhood Comprehensive Assessment System \(VECCAS\)](#) is to provide a framework of currently utilized assessments and current initiatives that support child assessment and screening, as well as an initial plan for implementation of a statewide early childhood comprehensive assessment system for Vermont. The VECCAS framework is intended to be referenced and used over an extended period for reflection, self-evaluation, and improvement in early childhood (birth - grade 3) efforts. This framework helps to address key questions facing those who are developing birth - grade 3 assessment approaches in their schools, districts, and communities. The VECCAS includes:

### **Teaching Strategies Gold (TSG)**

TSG has been adopted as the progress monitoring tool. UPK public and private prequalified programs.

- [My Teaching Strategies GOLD 20XX-20XX Vermont Requirements and Guidelines \(updated August of each year\)](#)
- [Teaching Strategies GOLD Transfer Request 20XX-20XX School Year \(updated August of each year\)](#)
- [VELS Alignment with TSG - Birth - Grade 3 \(10/22/18\)](#)

### **Classroom Assessment Scoring System**

[CLASS](#) is an observation tool developed to assess the adult-child interactions which impact learning and development from infant care through grade 12. CLASS observations are completed by Teachstone certified Observers who assign scores to specific teacher behaviors and responses.

### **Ready for Kindergarten! Survey (R4K!)**

R4K! is a requirement of public-school kindergarten teachers who through observation during the first 10 weeks of the school year determine school readiness assessment for children entering kindergarten. R4K! consists of 34 items across the following developmental domains: physical, social, and emotional, approaches to learning, communication and cognitive. This [webpage](#) shares archived R4K! reports by school year and Kindergarten educators training modules. R4K! is an indicator of UPK education effectiveness in preparing children for school readiness.

### **Early Childhood Special Education Service**

The purpose of the Division for Early Education of the Council for Exceptional Children ([DEC Recommended Practices](#)) is to highlight those practices specifically known to promote the outcomes of young children who have or are at risk for developmental delays/disabilities and to support their families in accordance with the DEC/NAEYC (2009) position statement on early childhood inclusion. The DEC Recommended Practices are divided into eight topic areas: Leadership, Assessment, Environment, Family, Instruction, Interaction, Teaming and Collaboration, and Transition. An online edition - including a Spanish version can be accessed on the [ECTA website](#).

[Early Childhood Special Education Services](#) (ECSE) supports children ages 3 up to 6 years. ECSE is administered through local school districts to ensure access and participation in early childhood programs for each and every child who is determined eligible for services by the Local Education Agency (LEA). ECSE enables young children with disabilities to be full participants in everyday routines and activities across a variety of settings (in their homes with their families, in childcare, preschool or school programs, and the community) throughout the early childhood years.

[Early Childhood Special Education Orientation: ECSE 101](#) - This training webinar is an overview of the individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and other federal and state special education laws and regulations focusing on Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) for children ages 3 through 5.

[Creating High Quality Inclusive Environments](#) - Early childhood inclusion embodies the values, policies, and high-quality practices that support the right of each and every

young child and their family in Vermont. The purpose of this webinar is to assist LEAs, administrators, educators, special educators, service providers, and early childhood and community partners identifying, developing, and sustaining high-quality inclusive opportunities and environments for each and every child with and without disabilities.

### **Child Find**

Child Find is a continuous process of public awareness activities which may include screening, designed to identify, locate, and evaluate all children with disabilities who may be in need of early intervention programs or special education as soon as possible. Under 34CFR 300.11; VT Rule 2360.3 LEAs are responsible for implementing a comprehensive child find system for children birth through age 21, all children with disabilities in need of special education and related services shall be identified, located, and evaluated. This includes children who are not attending public schools.

### **Moving On Up - Transition to Kindergarten Booklet**

As family members of a young child with a disability, you play a key role in your child's planning from Children's Integrated Services/Early Intervention (CIS-EI) to Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) at age three. Moving On will help provide information and guidance about this transition process for your family. Whether your child is moving on to a Universal Prekindergarten (UPK) program in your local school district, private center, or family home, a family-based childcare, private childcare program, or another community setting, the intent of Moving On is to provide information to your family so that you are confident, knowledgeable, and active members of your child's transition team.

For information about transitioning to kindergarten, please refer to the booklet [Family Resource - Moving On: Planning Your Child's Transition Children's Integrated Services \(CIS\) - Early Intervention \(IE\) to Early Childhood Special Education \(ECSE\) \(8/29/2023\)](#).

Moving On Up explains what to expect when your child enters kindergarten and also contains information, resources, and frequently asked questions that family members often have.

### Early Multi-Tiered System of Support (Early MTSS)

[Vermont's Early Multi-Tiered System of Support](#) is found under Initiatives/Early Education/Student Support Services. Early MTSS is a tiered framework of universal promotion, prevention and intervention is the model for delivering a comprehensive range of evidence-based practices, strategies and resources to families and early childhood practitioners with the goal of improving early learning, social and emotional well-being, and competence for Vermont's young children birth thru age 8. Early MTSS also aligns the extensive research, materials and practices developed by the Center for Early Literacy Learning to support early learning.

### Early MTSS System Inventory

The [Vermont Early MTSS System Inventory](#) is to be used by Early Education programs and their Leadership Team to:

- Assess readiness, and identify strengths and gaps, to promote program-wide adoption of key components of Early MTSS and the stages of implementation.
- Develop and implementation and action plan so that Early MTSS components and evidence-based practices are implemented to fidelity and are sustainable over time.
- Benefit and promote positive outcomes for each and every child and their families.

The Early MTSS System Inventory is grounded in the science of implementation, which bridges the gap between evidence-based practice (EBP) and high-fidelity implementation of that practice. Activities related to sustainability are embedded throughout the System Inventory to ensure the implementation of evidence-based practices at the classroom level and program-wide level.

### The Preliminary Pyramid Assessment

As a tool used within an Early Multi-Tiered System of Supports (Early MTSS) framework, the [Preliminary Pyramid Assessment \(PPA\)](#) was developed to guide teams in thoughtful and systematic decision-making process prior to referring a child who demonstrates challenging behaviors to referral sources such as school district Early

Childhood Special Education, behavioral interventionist, Children’s Integrated Services/Early Intervention, and/or Early Childhood Mental Health, etc. The PPA will also help teams consider when it is appropriate to apply for specialized support through the Child Development Division’s Special Accommodations Grant.

### **Action Planning Tool**

The [Action Planning Tool](#) is an Early MTSS continuous improvement and planning tool, that prompts Leadership Teams to examine their systemic priorities through the lens of the Implementation Drivers. This tool is used after Leadership Teams complete the System Inventory, which helps to identify systemic strengths and gaps, and determine systemic priorities.

For more information and current trainings, please contact Amy Murphy, Inclusion Coordinator at [amy.murphy@vermont.gov](mailto:amy.murphy@vermont.gov).

### **Families of Prekindergarten Students**

[UPK enrollment information for families.](#) Enrollment and participation in Universal Prekindergarten (UPK) is a family choice. Attending a high-quality prekindergarten education program prepares your child for kindergarten and beyond. In Vermont, school districts must offer prekindergarten for at least 10 hours a week, 35 weeks a year.

This section includes an FAQ for families on how to enroll their child in a UPK prekindergarten education program.

### **Universal Prekindergarten Café**

[UPK Café](#) is the Agency of Education Early Education Team’s electronic newsletter that covers a variety of research and evidence-based resources, hot topics, news items and professional articles relevant to your daily work and practice as an Early Childhood Educator and Early Childhood Special Educator. This webpage contains archived newsletters with a brief topics overview per issue.

**Vermont Early Learning Standards (VELS)**

[VELS](#) are strength based upon the understanding that each and every young child and their family are diverse in culture, language, geography, values, beliefs, and circumstances. To support individual growth, development, and continuous learning over their lifetime, the AOE is committed to fully including each and every child in a continuum of high-quality, evidence-based early learning experiences, from birth through grade 3.

This handbook will be updated as warranted. If there is information that you cannot find an answer to within the handbook, please contact the Early Education Team at [AOE.UPK@vermont.gov](mailto:AOE.UPK@vermont.gov).